GOD’S ANGEL

Centurion celebrates life

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Walk into Lumina Newchurch’s apartment and one is immediately mesmerized by thousands of angels, each inviting a visitor to sit for a spell.

The angels are in all shapes and sizes, can be seen on a clock, towels, napkins and even a shower curtain. But spend just a few minutes with Newchurch, affectionately known as “Aunt Mina,” and one immediately realizes that perhaps the real angel is the lady sitting in her favorite chair, her prayer book and rosary always by her side.

“She is faithful to her prayers,” said Father Paul Yi, chancellor for the Diocese of Baton Rouge who as a newly ordained priest at St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge several years ago was first introduced to Newchurch. “She believes in angels and their wonderful intercessory vocation for all of us.”

To understand Newchurch’s love of angels, see CENTURION PAGE 19.

Diocese promoting racial harmony

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Hoping to bring peace to a community that has seen its share of racial unrest the past few months, the Diocese of Baton Rouge has formed a Commission of Racial Harmony that reflects the cultural diversity of the area.

The 13-member commission, all appointed by Bishop Robert W. Muench, consists of six African-Americans and seven white individuals. It includes four priests, two deacons, two women religious and four laypersons.

Father Tom Clark, pastor at Immaculate Conception Church in Baton Rouge and commission co-chair along with Father Josh Johnson, parochial vicar at St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge and the lone African-American priest in the diocese, said the members are all Catholic but the commission plans to “reach out to and collaborate with other members of the faith community in Baton Rouge.”

The commission, Father Clark said, was born out of the events surrounding the shooting death of Alton Sterling by a Baton Rouge police officer and two weeks later the heinous action by a lone out-of-state gunman who shot six law enforcement officials, three of whom died. Father Clark said Bishop Muench gathered a group of priests and laypersons to advise him on a diocesan response.

SEE HARMONY PAGE 7.
Bonfires rooted in Catholicism

Long before “Papa Noel” pilots his reindeers and goodie-filled sleigh toward the river parishes, families are scrambling to put the final touches on a tradition that began more than 100 years ago in southeast Louisiana.

The lighting of the bonfires along the Mississippi River is a ritual deeply rooted in the civil parishes of St. James, Ascension and St. John the Baptist. Through the years, the bonfires have morphed into a tourist attraction, forcing traffic jams miles long as visitors line up to see the simple as well as elaborate designs.

According to some, the Christmas Eve bonfires are actually rooted in Catholicism, with the original purpose being to help guide families crossing the Mississippi River to the nearest Catholic church for midnight Mass.

Some believe the practice dates to the late 1800s and started in St. James civil parish by French Marist priests who came to Louisiana after the Civil War to teach at the old Jefferson College in Convent, which is now Manresa House of Retreats.

Some attribute the bonfires to the Cajuns who originally settled along the river, although that is rebuffed by others because the tradition has not recently stated in his homily that if we are centered on Christ during the worse moment of life we will have courage because we know God is near. We will have the voice to speak and ability to move without the fear of harm.

Even for St. Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, it was darkest before dawn. He faced an insurmountable fear when Mary was with child through the Holy Spirit. Yet, by being open to the message of an angel of the Lord, St. Joseph was assured that by taking Mary into his home, he was following God’s will. All fear vanished as he did what was commanded, for he knew “God is with us.” Trust in God’s plan for salvation.

Be Patient

Our world has been pushing the “instant gratification” button for decades: fast food, internet, cars, shipping, money, results, sales, speed dating (really?)… etc. And for what: just to be ready for the next moment to quickly pass by? The next thing you know we will be speeding up God. “Lord, can you hurry up and answer my prayer?” Patience is, indeed, a virtue. St. Paul uses a farmer to show the gentleness of patience. He writes, “See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient with it until it receives its early and the late rains. You too must be patient.”

There are numerous obstacles which weaken our patience: illness, people, unexpected changes, traffic, mistakes and our pride to name a few. We must remember that all trials pass, yet during these we are to pray for the patience to endure, trusting God will answer, in his time, of course. Trust in his promise.

Be Prepared

Are we prepared for the coming of the Lord? Better still, have we told others to be prepared for the coming of the Lord? We are heralds of Jesus, same as John the Baptist. How can we prepare the way for Jesus? First of all, we set our hearts and minds on him in quiet prayer and contemplation. Secondly, we turn inward to assess our interior space by using a good examination of conscience in order to understand exactly what is holding us back. Next, we open our hearts to God’s healing by a good Act of Contrition, or for more serious offenses we seek the sacrament of reconciliation. Finally, we vow to renew and turn back to God, who is mercifully with us every step of the way. Pray, reconcile, renew. Trust in his love. Be prepared for what is to come because he is about to become incarnate.

Dow is director of Evangelization & Catechesis for the Diocese of Baton Rouge

DID YOU KNOW

Darkest before the dawn

By Dina DePaula Dow

The liturgical readings for the final weeks of Advent turn our hearts towards God’s ultimate promise. His plan of salvation will soon culminate. The night is darkest before the dawn, yet we wait in “joyful hope of the coming of our Savior,” Emmmanuel. We are told to fear not, be patient, and be prepared.

Fear Not

As the dawn of Christmas draws near we are fortified by the words of the prophet Isaiah to “Be strong, fear not…” Fear creates a type of paralysis which inhibits our daily walk with God. What thoughts are racing in our minds which cause such trembling? Who are the people or what are circumstances that evoke a sense potential danger? What are we afraid of? A priest recently stated in his homily that if we are centered on Christ during the worse moment of life we will have courage because we know God is near. We will have the voice to speak and ability to move without the fear of harm.

Be Prepared

Are we prepared for the coming of the Lord? Better still, have we told others to be prepared for the coming of the Lord? We are heralds of Jesus, same as John the Baptist. How can we prepare the way for Jesus? First of all, we set our hearts and minds on him in quiet prayer and contemplation. Secondly, we turn inward to assess our interior space by using a good examination of conscience in order to understand exactly what is holding us back. Next, we open our hearts to God’s healing by a good Act of Contrition, or for more serious offenses we seek the sacrament of reconciliation. Finally, we vow to renew and turn back to God, who is mercifully with us every step of the way. Pray, reconcile, renew. Trust in his love. Be prepared for what is to come because he is about to become incarnate.

Dow is director of Evangelization & Catechesis for the Diocese of Baton Rouge

PicturRES FROM THE PAST

Bishop Robert E. Tracy and Baton Rouge Mayor Jack Christian leave Ryan Airport in Baton Rouge in a convertible after the bishop was returning home from Vatican II in 1962. Shortly after Bishop Tracy departed the plane, a man came up and kissed his ring. Photo provided by the Archives | Diocese of Baton Rouge
Faith helping teen, family cope with shooting

By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

A bronze-colored statue of the Madonna and Child sits by the hospital bed of Daniel Wesley, a Baton Rouge 17-year-old who captured the attention of the nation when he was shot and run over by a car while trying to do the right thing two weeks ago.

The statue, which once belonged to his great grandmother, was brought to the hospital by Wesley’s uncle and has become a gentle reminder of the strong Catholic faith that not only binds this family together but also gives each member strength and hope for the future.

“Our faith is so important. It’s everything,” said Wesley’s mom and St. Alphonsus Church in Greenwell Springs parishioner, Kathy Wesley.

Kathy Wesley said in addition to an extended hospital stay following at least two surgeries, Daniel, who is a member of the youth board at St. Alphonsus, will have to endure an untold number of months of physical therapy. Yet, his mom said Daniel’s spirits are high and his competitive nature has already surfaced as he is determined to beat his doctor’s expectations for his progress.

Kathy Wesley expressed appreciation for all of the many prayers being said for her son and her family, especially the prayer requests that began immediately on Facebook led by his godmother, Shannon Achord, and by members of the youth group at St. Alphonsus.

She said the prayers have helped and her family’s strong belief system has already surfaced.

“For one, it was instrumental in Daniel being able to forgive his shooter,” she added.

That shooter, 48-year-old Terrell Walker, was killed by police Nov. 27, but not before he reportedly shot Daniel Wesley twice and intentionally hit him with a vehicle for trying to render first aid to 30-year-old April Peck, Walker’s girlfriend.

According to police, Peck was shot and tossed onto the road by Walker. Despite receiving care from bystanders, including Wesley, and first responders who quickly arrived on the scene, Peck later died that night.

For stopping to help a stranger in need, Daniel Wesley has been called a “Good Samaritan.” However, his mom said Daniel was just doing what he knows.

She explained that having parents who understand the harsh realities of being a first responder (his dad is a retired EMS official), Daniel doesn’t allow a situation to affect his emotions. He just acts, so it’s understandable that when he saw a stranger hurt on the side of the road, and knowing that he could help (he had advanced first aid training from a youth course), it was just second nature for him to stop and offer assistance.

His concern for others, of course, also extends to his family. Instead of dwelling on his pain, Daniel is encouraging those around him and helping to keep their spirits high.

“When I first saw him at the hospital, the first thing he told me was, ‘No tears, Mom.’ Luckily, I had already cried as much as I could driving there,” she said.

Kyle Cutrer, who helps with many youth activities at St. Alphonsus Church, said he is not surprised that Daniel stopped to help someone in need.

“He’s a great kid. Daniel is that kind of kid that can be really harsh when you first meet him, but immediately you also see he has a heart of gold,” he said.

Cutrer, who in addition to his role as confirmation coordinator at St. Alphonsus, also serves on the leadership team with the diocesan youth board. He noted Daniel has a natural penchant toward service, something that can be easily seen in his work as a senior mentor for the St. Alphonsus Youth Board.

“Many young people have been inspired by Wesley’s selfless actions and hope their words encourage him as he recovers. Photo provided by MacKenzie Whittington

As part of the board, he helps plan our youth nights, prayer services and retreats and then leads them, he said.

Since the incident, Cutrer said many youth group members have rallied to Daniel’s side, visiting him in the hospital and offering support.

This weekend, Dec. 11-12, a bake sale will be held after all Masses at St. Alphonsus Church to help the family with medical expenses as well as provide them with some extra funds for some flooding repairs needed since the August downpour.

In addition to selling baked goods, Cutrer said plastic bracelets inscribed with a message recognizing Wesley’s decision to help others would also be available.

Conceptualized by three Central High School students, Madeelynn Wootan, Hannah Moses and MacKenzie Whittington, the bracelets say, “Good people bring out the good in others #Wesley.”

Whittington said that Daniel, who is a senior at Central High, is someone who helps others.

“He’s very involved and started fundraisers at school to help others, so we just thought we would do something to help him since we know his medical bills are going to be high,” she said.

See Teen Page 9

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Father Fuss remembered for his love of the river parishes

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Perhaps it was fitting that during the funeral Mass for Father Edward Fuss SM on Nov. 28 a power outage caused the lights to dim at St. Joseph Church in Paulina.

For although Father Fuss’s light has dimmed, it will never be extinguished, as evidenced by the strong outpouring of support by friends and family who braved threatening weather to pay their final respects for a Chicago native who found peace in the river parishes.

“The River Road became Father Ed’s home; it is here he finally found fulfillment in his life,” said Father Bill Rowland SM, who celebrated the Mass and previously served in Convent, said in a tribute to Father Fuss. “Here is where he found his vocation, his life calling. He was meant to do this here and no place else.”

Born Feb. 17, 1926 in Chicago, Father Fuss was a late in life vocation, ordained as a Marist priest at the age of 63 on Dec. 10, 1989. Father Fuss, who wondered aloud “What is a Cajun” when informed of his assignment by his superiors shortly after ordination, for the next 27 years embraced the people, the culture and certainly the food of Cajun country.

He served as parochial vicar at St. Joseph in Paulina from 1989-91, pastor at Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Gramercy from 1991-97 and as parochial vicar at the parishes of Most Sacred Heart, St. Joseph and St. Michael the Archangel until his retirement in 2002.

Even in retirement, he remained active in ministry, was a member of the VFW and several other organizations and still found time to tend to the sick.

“Amazingly, even though he spent almost every day of his priestly life here on St. James River Road, this is a place he never dreamed he would be,” said Father Vincent Dufresne, pastor at St. Joseph, St. Michael and Most Sacred Heart. “He learned to love this place, even more than his St. Louis Cardinals.”

“All because God’s spirit prepared him for all of this.”

Father Fuss’s circular path to River Road included a stint in the U.S. Army from 1944-46 where he participated in the Battle of the Bulge during World War II. Following the war he entered the Alexian Brothers and studied at the order’s school of nursing. In 1957 he left the Alexains and went on to earn his nursing degree at DePaul University and his master’s in health care administration at UCLA.

He served as administrator at hospitals in Kokomo, Indiana, Lubbock, Texas and Beaumont, Texas, always loyal to his ministry of serving the sick and the elderly.

“Father Ed had a love of serving others,” longtime parishioner L.J. St. Pierre said in comments before the funeral Mass. “His mother made the Gospel a reality.”

The desire to reenter the vocational life first began to stir in Father Fuss during a dinner conversation in Texas when a priest asked, “What are you waiting for?”

He sent letters to several orders but was rejected because of his age. A chance meeting with a Marist priest led him on an unlikely spiritual journey that would ultimately land him along the banks of the Mississippi River.

“Father Ed’s efforts have always been to conform his life to God’s plan and will,” said Father Dufresne, who delivered the homily. “Everyone here knows the truth that God anointed Father Fuss to be his minister to us, the embodiment of Jesus in comfort, compassion and instruction.”

Bishop Robert W. Muench, in his closing remarks, said, “You know how much Father Ed was devoted to you.

“Father Ed also knows how devoted you were to him. Your presence here is a tribute to that.”

“Father Fuss never gave up,” the bishop added. “As long as God gave him life and breath he was serving me, he was serving you. Each of us benefited by his love, by his service, by his life, by his teaching. For that we praise God.”

Bishop Muench noted that the death of Father Fuss marks the end of an era spanning 154 years, when the first Marist priests landed in Convent. He thanked the Marists for their service and bringing so much “enrichment to the faith of our people.”

Even as health problems began to weaken his body, Father Dufresne noted that Father Fuss’s spirit remained strong.

“Father Ed ministered until his body told him to stop,” he said.

“It was time for his final act of obedience to God. He served God’s people until God said, ‘Enough, come to your rest and reward.’”

Father Rowland said, “As Marists, we saved the best for last. When remembering the Marists, many of you will remember him first, who was the best of all.”

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This position serves as facilities manager; primary responsibilities include the maintenance of the grounds, buildings and equipment on the St. Jean Vianney campus comprised of the parish, school and preschool and the off-site rectory. Plans, directs and coordinates all maintenance related tasks; supervises maintenance and custodial staff; maintains contracts for new construction and maintenance services and oversees the work of all contractors. This position is a member of the parish staff, interacting with the staff to accomplish the mission of St. Jean Vianney Parish.

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• Must respect and support the Catholic identity of the parish.

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• Ability to exercise good organizational and time management skills, ability to manage projects and multiple priorities.
• Must have the ability to speak effectively to the staff, supervise and work within a team, effectively resolve conflict, work well with other employees and the general public.
• Must be on emergency call and be available to work evenings, weekends, and some holidays as necessary.
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Members from the Lutcher VFW post salute Father Fuss and serve as pallbearers at his funeral on Nov. 28 at St. Joseph Church in Paulina. Photo by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator
Golden jubilarian Father Mascarella’s life an inspiration to many

By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

Recalling the past 50 years of his vocation as a priest, Father Pat Mascarella easily shifts from lighthearted banter to thoughtful reflection.

Since his ordination on Dec. 15, 1966, Father Mascarella has shepherded many church parishes in the diocese, and as a regular homilist at St. Joseph Cathedral in Baton Rouge and proxy to priests in many local church parishes today, he continues to pastor the community through his deep knowledge of faith and love of liturgy.

Yet, Father Mascarella has also been able to do more.

Since losing his eyesight to multiple eye conditions (problems that began when he was a young boy) and ultimately retiring in 2000 at the age of 68, he has been an inspiration to many simply by his daily walk, acceptance and trust in God’s will.

Surprisingly, for all he has accomplished as a priest, which includes his year of spiritual service, especially in developing key programs of stewardship on the parish level, directing continuing formation for priests and helping to create and adopt new ways of evangelization through faith-based classes, retreat leadership and increased liturgical participation, Father Mascarella actually didn’t start out wanting to be a priest.

“I was probably around 7- or 8-years-old, and I wanted to be a missionary. I guess from studying and talking about missions at school, I had developed this romantic idea of doing that work,” said Father Mascarella.

In the seventh grade, he began corresponding with a Marianist mission in Omaha, Nebraska. He applied and was soon accepted; however, as he was preparing to leave shortly before the start of his eighth-grade year, he knew his mother was upset. She was not happy about the youngest of her 10 children going so far away.

Father Mascarella said his mother and father were good faith role-models, and in particular, he remembers his mother always walking around the family home carrying her rosary.

Though it’s not clear if his mother had anything to do with what happened next, what is known is that before he was set to leave, a priest from St. Agnes Church in Baton Rouge, his home parish, convinced him to “just visit” St. Joseph Seminary College in St. Benedict.

“I instantly didn’t like it,” Father Mascarella said, laughing.

“But then I interviewed with some of the priests, and I interviewed with Archbishop Joseph F. Rummel,” he added, offering a convincing nod with his head.

Ultimately, Father Mascarella decided to enroll in the seminary, explaining that he had always looked up to Archbishop Rummel who served the Archdiocese of New Orleans from 1935-1964. The Diocese of Baton Rouge was created from the archdiocese in 1961.

As a seminarian, Father Mascarella said he was taught the joy of learning, something he still deeply enjoys to this day, and he credits his faith formation and foundation to these early years.

Once ordained by Bishop Robert E. Tracy, Father Mascarella served in many church parishes, including St. Theresa of Avila in Gonzales, St. John the Baptist in Brusly, St. Isidore the Farmer in Baker, Immaculate Conception in Denham Springs, St. Michael in Convent, St. Joseph in Paulina, Most Sacred Heart in Gramercy, Our Lady of Mercy, St. George, Christ the King and St. Charles Borromeo (now supressed) in Baton Rouge.

Through the years, Father Mascarella said he has experienced many inspiring and faith-enriching moments; however, there is one that continues to resonate.

It was Christmas Day during one of his first Masses as a young pastor at St. Isidore.

“I can remember thinking at that moment as I was celebrating Mass that I was right where God wanted me to be,” he said.

While not many people can say they ever shared that feeling, Father Mascarella actually had it again. This time, he said, he was working as an associate pastor at Christ the King. It was his introduction to college ministry, and he “just fell in love with it.”

It’s that love and enjoyment in helping others connect with their faith that continues to keep Father Mascarella active in ministry.

But after retiring, he has found other passions, too, including one that involves his guide dog, Pace.

Since receiving his yellow labador retriever from the Guide Dogs for the Blind, Father Mascarella and Pace have become a team.

Pace, who clearly enjoys relaxing on his own ottoman and looking out the window for squirrels and birds when off duty, provides assistance to Father Mascarella, helping him to stay independent.

Father Mascarella describes Pace as a compassionate dog, who is especially attuned to the feelings of others. He said one of their favorite places to visit is LSU because when he takes off Pace’s harness (meaning he is no longer working as a guide dog), the students enjoy playing with him, and Father Mascarella believes it helps ease any anxiety the students may have about upcoming tests or missing their own pets at home.

Pace’s compassion and good temperament are also why they volunteer and help patients with pet therapy at Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center.

But Father Mascarella also added that Pace can be “a big flirt,” too.

“Doesn’t matter if the room has five men and just one woman. He will find the woman first,” he said, laughing.

Pace, who his owner proudly revealed was awarded the Louisiana Governor’s Golden Deeds Award in 2011, has also inspired Father Mascarella’s creative side.

Before graduating with a master’s degree in liberal arts from LSU in May, Father Mascarella decided to take a course in art. At first, this seemed improbable since he would be unable to see flat color on a surface. But with the help of his art instructor, who developed teaching techniques, such as texture, to better accommodate his blindness, Father Mascarella has discovered a hidden talent.

“I hadn’t painted anything since I was child, and at that point, I was just using crayons,” he confided.

While painting remains one of his favorite art activities (he uses Braille to label each paint tube when it is purchased and then either envisions the colors together or gets advice from others), Father Mascarella also enjoys working with ceramics and clay. He has used the latter to immortalize Pace, but in this portrayal, his four-legged companion is sitting, like a human, and is using his “hands” to help him think.

“I call him Dr. Pace there,” said Father Mascarella, smiling, in obvious reference to that special relationship any pet owner understands.

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A Holy Family Institute Apostolate
Q When did the church stop asking for money for indulgences? And why did they ask for money in the first place? (Wichita, Kansas)

A I am almost reluctant to answer your question because, as asked, a simple response would imply a serious admission. Though it has been accused for centuries of having “sold” indulgences, the Catholic Church never approved such a practice.

Undeniably, individual Catholics were guilty of selling indulgences, but the practice was never countenanced by the church. Coupled with these abuses, though, was the fact (and this gave a basis to Martin Luther’s challenge) that indulgences could be gained for giving alms to one of the church’s charitable endeavors.

All of this came to an end with the Council of Trent, which decreed that the church “ordains in a general way by the present decree that all evil traffic in them (indulgences), which has been a most prolific source of abuses among the Christian people, be absolutely abolished.” According to The Catholic Encyclopedia, soon after, in 1567, Pope Pius V canceled all grants of indulgences.

Paying for indulgences/God and masculine pronoun

Q I would very much like to know the church’s official position on whether God should be referred to as “Father” (that is, in masculine terms) or as a genderless being. I find it troubling when the words in traditional hymns are changed to remove any references to “his” or “him.” Recently I was singing from memory the refrain, “Lift up your hearts to the Lord in praise of his mercy,” only to hear myself “out of sync” with many others in the congregation who were singing from the hymnal, “Praise God’s gracious mercy.”

In a similar way, I often hear during the Liturgy of the Eucharist many people responding, “May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of God’s name, for our good and the good of God’s holy church.” And yet, when I look up that response in the Roman Missal itself, I find “his name” and “his holy church.” What is next? I fear the day when some people will start the Lord’s Prayer with, “Our God who art in heaven.” I feel that we are pandering to a minority of overly sensitive feminists who have difficulty comprehending God’s identity as a male being, as our Father — and yet that is exactly how Jesus referred to God and taught us to pray to him. He is not some generic, abstract and neutered being. (City of origin withheld)

Question Corner
Father Kenneth Doyle

A It is the clear teaching of the church that God is neither male nor female. As the divine being, God transcends gender. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says: “In no way is God in man’s image. He is neither man nor woman. God is pure spirit in which there is no place for the difference between the sexes. But the respective ‘perfections’ of man and woman reflect something of the infinite perfection of God: those of a mother and those of a father” (No. 370).

The traditional use, then, of the masculine pronoun does not equate to a belief in the masculinity of God. Having said that, I would make the argument that for the sake of uniformity within a congregation and across the wider church it is best to stick with the responses given in the Roman Missal and hope that the liturgical translators eventually catch up with the church’s theology.

As for the Our Father, that of course has a special sacredness because it was the prayer taught directly by Jesus. In order to convey the ready accessibility to us of the Lord, Jesus called his Father by the Aramaic word “Abba” which, some scholars say, really translates to our warm and familiar word, “Daddy.”

That word must have shocked Christ’s Jewish listeners, who felt that God was so far above them that they ought not even pronounce his name. Since Jesus used these very words, this prayer ought never to change. (Can you imagine if Jesus had invited us instead to pray to “Our divine and genderless being”?)

FATHER DOYLE is chancellor for public information and a pastor in the Diocese of Albany, New York. Questions may be sent to Father Kenneth Doyle at askfatherd Doyle@gmail.com and 40 Hopewell St., Albany, N.Y. 12208.

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- Southside Produce, Baton Rouge
- Tony’s Seafood, Baton Rouge
- UPS Store, Coursey Blvd., Baton Rouge
- Whole Foods Market, Baton Rouge
- Winn Dixie in Hammond, New Roads and Ponchatoula

as well as your local church parish!
Once sleepwalkers awaken after stumbling in the darkness and see the need for light and sincerely confess their sins, a spark of light ignites, said Dina DePaula Dow, director of the office of Evangelization and Catechesis of the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Dow said the seed of light is planted in the people. Then comes the incubation period in which they patiently nurture those seeds while they germinate. This is similar to the period of pregnancy for women.

“The Blessed Mother is a perfect example of bringing light into the darkness when she gave her fiat to becoming the mother of the savior of the world,” said Dow. She said it’s also worth noting that the feast day of Mary’s own sinless Immaculate Conception is celebrated during this period of Advent on Dec. 8.

Similar to the way a mother must take care of her unborn child to have a successful pregnancy, people must prepare for the savior’s arrival at the end of Advent.

This means people can enjoy, but not overindulge in the “busy” details of shopping, parties, etc. It’s good to take in “good nutrients” during Advent by praying, reading Scripture and doing charitable works, Dow said.

There may be trials, which the Blessed Mother experienced throughout her pregnancy up until her journey with Joseph that ended at Bethlehem and she gave birth to Jesus in a manger. Perseverance is required.

But how long?

“Patience” Dow advised, noting that God’s timing is much different from the world.

While time may seem at a standstill, it is moving on. The darkness begins to illuminate, such as when night turns into dawn.

As the light increases, so does hope, stated Dow.

Father Clark said the commission has composed a prayer for racial harmony and designed a prayer card that is being distributed to churches. Pastors are being asked to use the prayer at the conclusion of Mass on Sundays.

Father Johnson said the commission asked a minority printing business to print the 40,000 cards because “we feel that it is important to empower minority businesses in our city as a part of breaking down the barriers of racism.”

Father Clark said the prayerful support of everyone in the diocese is paramount to the commission’s success and ultimately bringing racial harmony and cultural understanding to Baton Rouge.

“God has everything to do with this project,” he said. “Left to our own devices, we human beings are always prone to division, hatred and misunderstanding. But, with the grace of God we can overcome this.

“The achievement of racial harmony requires conversion, a complete change of heart, a metanoia. That kind of heart-change is at the core of our relationship with God.”

Father Johnson said the work of commission touches the heart of what it means to be a Christian.

“Racism, prejudice, hatred and prejudice oppose God’s plan for us and are sinful,” he said. “It is part of our Christian vocation to work to eliminate divisions among us and foster unity.”

“We are blessed to have the leadership of Bishop Muench, who has supported all of our initiatives,” he added. “He really desires to be an instrument of healing for all of the people in our diocese and the commission is committed to working in the vineyard with our shepherd to do what we can to build bridges.”

In addition to Father Clark, Father Johnson and Father Andrus, the commission includes vicar general Father Tom Ranzino, St. Francis Xavier in Baton Rouge pastor Father Ed Chiffriller SSJ, Deacon Dan Borne, Deacon Alfred Adams, Sister Marie de Montfort Breaux SSF, Sister Adele Lambert CSJ, Goldie Domingue, Walter Morales, Jennifer Monette and Dr. John Pierre.

Father Clark said the commission’s goal was $1.5 million. Collectively, nearly 7,000 gifts were received for 300 Catholic parishes, schools and ministries across Louisiana.

Abshire said the statewide goal was $1.5 million.

“We are proud of the parishes, schools and ministries that worked with us to make this year’s Catholic crowd-funding a success,” Abshire said.

“The Baton Rouge Catholic community has been extremely generous, especially in light of the recent flooding disaster we experienced in August. Every gift makes a difference and we are tremendously grateful for the support of our Catholic community.”

In the Diocese of Baton

#iGive Catholic successful

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

A unique online charitable giving campaign that was making its debut in the Diocese of Baton Rouge shattered organizers’ expectations, even doubling up a similar secular campaign in the community, according to Tammy Abshire, diocesan director of stewardship.

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In the Diocese of Baton

HARMONY ▼

From page 1

A statement that called for a week of fasting and prayer and that also encouraged everyone to reflect on the multiplicity of life experiences that causes individuals to view a single event differently was crafted.

“We need to build bridges across those differences,” Father Clark said. “The shooting of the police officers increased the pain of the city.”

Soon after the shooting, historic flooding crippled the area but after the waters receded and the recovery process was underway, Father Clark said Bishop Muench expressed his desire to establish a permanent commission that would address the racial divide as well as promote racial harmony.

“It is very significant that the bishop established a permanent commission of the diocese,” Father Clark said. “This is not just a reaction to the events of last summer but a commitment to a long term, dedicated and persistent effort to promote understanding, empathy and respect for all people in the diocese regardless of race.”

Father Johnson, who called the opportunity to co-chair the commission a “gift that I will be forever grateful,” said the mission is to build bridges in the diocese by “fostering racial harmony through prayer, dialogue and action, which are rooted in respect for others and in love of neighbor as commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Many people in our diocese have experienced so much pain and suffering because of the sin of racism and our task as a commission is to enter into the messiness of a broken society just as Jesus entered into the messiness of our world 2,000 years ago,” Father Johnson said. “By immersion in the heart of the culture we have the capacity to bring healing and renewal from within through the power of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ today just as he brought healing and renewal to the world in his incarnation.”

Since originally formed in 2015, the commission has been active, meeting on several occasions, including attending a workshop on racial sobriety.

Father Johnson said the workshop empowered the participants to get in touch with their experiences, thoughts and feelings about the topic of race, to share them and to listen to others.

Father Clark added that the commission is exploring the racial sobriety workshop as a resource for the diocese to promote dialogue across racial lines.

Commission member Father Rick Andrus SVD, pastor at St. Paul Church in Baton Rouge and an active community supporter in fostering better racial relations, hosted an education workshop in Baton Rouge for those who were impacted by the flood. The workshop was open to all and Father Johnson said the effort in North Baton Rouge “brought together men and women of all different racial backgrounds and economic statuses.”

“We see this during Gaudete Sunday, the third Sunday of Advent, with its color rose. There’s a sense of joy – Christ is coming. But he’s not here yet,” she said with a smile.

So don’t put that baby Jesus in the crèche just yet, advised Dow.

Instead of grumpily waiting, start a celebration countdown by marking the time with Advent calendars, attending daily Mass during Advent missions at church parishes. Parents can engage their children with projects, such as creating a Jesse tree or having children prepare a soft bed for Jesus by allowing them to place pieces of straw when they do good deeds, etc.

As with preparing for any birthday party, people must send out invitations, which is evangelization, said Dow.

This means explaining through words and actions that they are fasting from such things as anxiety, acquisitiveness and restlessness and feasting on joy of anticipating Christ’s birth.

“Invite others to come along,” said Dow, who said it makes the journey much lighter.

Next: “Christ, the light of the world is here!”
NEW ORLEANS – The International Pilgrim Virgin Statue of Fatima has been venerated around the United States and the world since 1947, and this month is in the Archdiocese of New Orleans, accompanied by stories of conversion, peace and healing.

“It’s been great, not only in the numbers of people who are coming but also hearing from the individuals who are so excited and joyful and have told me they have gone back to confession after so many years,” said Patrick L. Sabat, the principal statue custodian who is taking the 3 1/2-foot mahogany image of the Blessed Mother, carved by artist José Thedim, on a tour of more than 100 U.S. Catholic dioceses to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the 1917 apparitions of Mary in Fatima, Portugal.

“People ask me, ‘Look, does the statue make everybody cry?’” Sabat said. “Many people are moved to tears.”

In honor of the Fatima centennial, Sabat began traversing the United States in a figure-8 pattern in March, traveling with the statue in an RV festooned with images of the “Fatima Centennial: U.S. Tour for Peace.”

When he must fly internationally with the statue, Sabat always buys Mary a ticket and rests her in the seat next to him, which naturally has led both to stares and moments of evangelization.

Recently in Chicago, which has been beset by gun violence, a church held a candlelight procession in the neighborhood, and a man who was drinking heavily in a bar came out to see the commotion.

“He was ready to drink his life away, and he walked out of the bar because he thought it was another uprising,” Sabat said. “He was moved to tears when he saw the people with the candles and saying the rosary. The next day he went to confession. How do I know this? The priest who heard his confession related what had happened.”

In Ohio, a parishioner who had invited him to stay in her home during the statue’s visit expressed her sadness about being estranged from two of her five children. During the meal, the woman’s phone rang, and she excused herself to answer it.

“She had been praying for Our Lady to heal the parish during the time window of when the statue was there,” Sabat said. “She came back and told me, ‘That was my son. He’s never called me in a year.’”

The next morning, the woman told Sabat about another phone call she had received at 2 a.m.

“She said, ‘My daughter called and told me she would have ended her life if I had not answered the phone,’” Sabat said.

Here is a list of the parishes in the Archdiocese of New Orleans that will host a visit:

- Dec. 12, St. Edward the Confessor, 4921 W. Metairie, Metairie: 8:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.
- Dec. 13, St. Stephen (Good Shepherd) 1025 Napoleon Ave., New Orleans, 8:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.
- Dec. 14, St. Andrew the Apostle, 3101 Eton St., New Orleans, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- Dec. 15, St. Angela Merici, 901 Beverly arden Drive, Metairie, 8 a.m. to 6:45 p.m.
- Dec. 16, Most Holy Trinity, 501 Holy Trinity Drive, Covington, 8:30 a.m. to 8:15 p.m. Dec. 17, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, 1908 Short St., Kenner, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.
- Dec. 18, Our Lady of Lourdes, 400 Westchester Blvd., Slidell, 8:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

“Be faithful to your prayer life and have a sense of humor,” says Sister Rita Polchin (foreground), 87, a member of the Sisters of Saints Cyril and Methodius. This philosophy has served her well during nearly 70 years of religious life, especially as a teacher and principal in Catholic schools. Like Sister Rita, the senior sisters, brothers, and religious order priests shown here—and nearly 33,000 more across the nation—have offered their lives in service and prayer. Your gift to the Retirement Fund for Religious helps provide nursing care, medications, and other necessities.

Please be generous.

To donate:
National Religious Retirement Office/BRL
3211 Fourth Street NE
Washington DC 20017-1194
Make your check payable to Retirement Fund for Religious.
Or give at your local parish December 10–11.
Card ministry allows inmates to share Christmas joy with others

By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

Shortly before Thanksgiving, a package arrived for volunteers and staff working with prison ministries in the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

As anticipated, the package contained unused Christmas cards intended for the prison ministry’s annual collection.

But this wasn’t just a simple donation of cards. According to Laverne Klier, a Joseph Homes case manager who assists with the program through Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge’s prison ministry, the package also represented the positive impact this ministry has had in the community.

“It was from Napoleonville and had $7 in postage paid on it. The postage cost more than the cards inside, but it shows how much the sender wanted to make sure we received them,” she said.

Klier explained the Christmas card collection, which has been ongoing for some 15 years, allows an inmate to send holiday greetings through the mail to family and friends.

“Often family members do not live near the facility where an inmate is assigned or the family doesn’t have the funds to visit often, so when you receive a card from someone incarcerated, just imagine how uplifting that must be,” she said.

Linda Fjeldsjo, the diocese’s coordinator of prison ministry and Joseph Homes, added that some prisoners, especially those without a family, may elect to send Christmas cards to other inmates, prison volunteers or guards, helping to spread the true meaning of the holiday within the prison itself.

Deacon Nat Garofalo at Mater Dolorosa Church in Independence said the Christmas card ministry is well received by the prisoners. Garofalo, who has helped extensively during the past eight years with card collection in the northeast deanery, called it an “attitude of gratitude.”

“The inmates look forward to this every year and are very grateful they can send cards,” he said, adding each prisoner typically receives about three to five cards each year to send to others.

Depending on donations and what each jail allows, some cards may already have a stamp affixed, but if not, an inmate only has to purchase one from the prison commissary.

“All they have to do is sign it and address it. Of course, prison officials do check all of their correspondence, but this program makes it easy,” Garofalo said.

Working closely with local sheriffs, Garofalo said he is mindful about following protocols for bringing items into a prison. Typically, he and his wife, Jeanette, along with students from St. Thomas Aquinas High School in Hammond, have a workday where all donated cards are reviewed and properly prepared for distribution to inmates.

Garofalo estimates he receives from 5,000 to 6,000 cards annually, mostly from parishioners attending churches in the northeast deanery.

“Never less than 4,000,” he said, adding that through the years, he has become known throughout the parish for working with the card collection, and it has created many spontaneous conversations in some rather unexpected places.

“I was at the Strawberry Festival one time, and someone came up to me and said, ‘Dan, I have some cards for you,’” he said. Just for the record, Garofalo is okay with these unsolicited gatherings as it means more opportunities for the ministry. He also offered an explanation to the generosity of so many.

“To receive such a high number of cards tells you that people support this program, and it means a lot to the general Catholic population in this area,” he said.

Garofalo noted that Christmas cards and stamps are collected year round. If you would like to participate, simply drop off your donation at CCDBR offices, located on the campus of the Catholic Life Center.
Several pictures in wood frames were imported from abroad. One theory as to how the beetles first arrived at St. Elizabeth goes back at least 70 years or more when several pictures in wood frames were imported from abroad.

Tracey LeBlanc
St. Elizabeth parochioner

Workers spent nearly two days covering the tent, using large sections of tarp, left. The tarp was held in place by clips, ensuring that none of the poisonous gas to be sprayed could escape the church.

As workers put the final touches on covering the church, workers were inside making preparations to begin the spraying. After the spraying was complete, the church had to be vacant for at least 24 to 36 hours.

Workers spent nearly two days covering the tent, using large sections of tarp, left. The tarp was held in place by clips, ensuring that none of the poisonous gas to be sprayed could escape the church.

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

St. Elizabeth calls in exterminator to eliminate pesky pest problem at historic church

For the better part of Thanksgiving week St. Elizabeth Church in Paincourtville, decided out in grains and white tarps, resembled more of an unresolved Christmas present than an historic structure dating to 1855. All that seemed to be lacking was a bright red bow. Hopefully the tent has served its purpose in help- ing eliminate a pesky pest problem that has plagued St. Elizabeth Church for more than 70 years. During the week of Thanksgiving, a termite control company sprayed the entire church with a gas designed to rid the church of an infestation of powder post beetles, which have been eating away at the historic structures in the church since at least the 1850’s, perhaps earlier. The procedure accomplished cele- brating all Sunday Masses for one weekend at St. John Church in Belle Rose.

“It needed to be done,” said Father Matthew Graham, pastor at St. Elizabeth and St. John. “This is the only way to guarantee we will not have this problem again. This is supposed to kill the larvae.” The origin as to how the beetles infiltrated St. Elizabeth remains a mystery. But the damage they have inflicted is not. The two side alters show the most carnage, as the structures are marked by tiny holes bored by the beetles. St. Elizabeth’s historic ambo, the last of its kind in the Diocese of Baton Rouge, has also been ravaged by the pesky beetles. “Certain areas you can see more prominent than others,” Father Graham said. “It could have eventually damaged the ambo and made it unsafe, the side alters, maybe even the pews.”

Longtime parishioner Tracey LeBlanc said the parish originally discovered the beetles in 1950 and an exterminating company was hired to spray the church. Accord- ing to LeBlanc, the parish was told at the time the bugs had been there a long while, perhaps 30 years. “That is their wood of choice.”

LeBlanc said at that time the parish did not investi- gate the thing a whole lot. “I would say they are now about in times some things when we found them. They drill a perfect little hole and lay their larvae. It even ate through the alter cloths.”

According to experts, pow- der post beetles breed in dead and dried hardwoods, such as the side alters and ambo, and in limbs of trees. Detect- ing their presence is difficult until they have damaged the hardwood.

LeBlanc said one theory as to how the beetles first arrived at St. Elizabeth goes back at least 70 years or more when several pictures in wood frames were imported from abroad. Part of the reasoning is based on the fact that powder post beetles usually travel in from foreign countries in a hardwood product. He pointed out there were no signs of the beetles until after the pictures arrived. “My understanding is the side alters were there a long time and these matched the original altar (which was changed many years ago),” LeBlanc said. “The feeling is that was not the way they came in. You can’t be dor- ming for 60 years. They can be dormant for five to six years but not this.”

After waiting about a year to assure all of the larvae is gone, LeBlanc said the next step will be to fill in the holes, perhaps using epoxy.

Thanksgiving week was actually the second time the church had been tested for the procedure. Originally, the testing process had begun in July and was nearly in place before bad weather, espe- cially wind, forced workers to remove the tent and resched- ule another time when school would be out.

According to the termite company, wind plays a criti- cal role in being able to spray the gas without a guarantee none will leak out.

Father Graham said the parish used money from the parish building fund, and was able to secure emergency assistance from the Bishop’s Annual Appeal.
By Rachele Smith

The Catholic Commentator

Need to get the attention of some 400 kindergarten through third-grade students? Trying to explain why it’s good to help others? Want to make an impact on why faith through service matters?

Then just ask Kim Naquin, principal of St. John Primary School in Prairieville, for advice.

But don’t be surprised if her answer is, well, simple.

Actually, it’s probably just one word: “bikes.”

Yes, bikes. You know, the quintessential Christmas item that Santa has been logging down the chimneys of good little boys and girls for ages.

For Naquin, however, bikes are more than just an off-road adventure.

“They are a visual connection for the kids and show how much of a difference their giving and their good deeds can make for others,” said Naquin.

So, just imagine the reaction of her student charges when two Roadmaster steel mountain bikes featuring front suspension forks, 18-speed twist shifters, three-piece mountain cranks and alloy wheels showed up after a prayer service on Nov. 30.

“I could see they were listening when we talked about being able to purchase these bikes for two children on the (St. John the Evangelist Church) Angel Tree with their Warrior Bucks,” said Naquin.

The Warrior Buck program has been in existence at St. John Primary for several years and is designed to award children for positive behaviors. It is not an academic program. Rather, students receive a “dollar” for doing desirable actions such as making good choices, being kind to each other and proper behavior.

Recently, teachers and school leaders began encouraging students to “give back” by placing some of their “money” in the church’s offertory basket.

It’s a unique way to gently introduce the idea of tithing, and Kim Lacinak, coordinator of religious education at St. John Primary and St. Theresa Middle School, said it also demonstrates a real sacrifice for the children because they are giving up something they could buy for themselves.

“It is so impressive to think of the sacrifices these young children are making,” said Lacinak, adding, “They could use this money to buy something they want, but they choose to give it to others.”

Naquin explained that once a quarter, students (using their math skills) count the money they have earned before deciding which reward they would use their own fundraising money to purchase the bikes and make the link between sacrifice and love for others complete.

“Just seeing their faces this morning, you could see they made the connection. They were so excited to see the bikes,” said Naquin, adding that these lessons go beyond the classroom, helping to embed the ideals of service and faith, something the school strives to do on a daily basis.

“We are planting the seeds,” said Lacinak, noting that one day these same children will grow up and hopefully reach out to make their communities a better place.

In the meantime, Lacinak and Naquin plan to continue adding visual connections for the young students at St. John Primary and already have plans for an Easter giving project that uses Warrior Bucks.
New name reflects special education department’s broader mission

By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

The special education program of the Catholic Schools Office is getting a new name.

Bethany Robicheaux, director of the special education program for the Diocese of Baton Rouge, said the program, which provides religious and academic education to children with learning exceptions, has been renamed the Blessed Margaret of Costello REACH program.

“REACH stands for religious education and academic achievement,” said Robicheaux as she announced the program’s name change at a prayer breakfast on Nov. 18.

According to Robicheaux, the new name intuitively reflects the desire of the program to help all families in Catholic schools.

“Just like Blessed Margaret of Costello, who was cared for by her entire community and was truly a child of the community, our students are not just students at one school, they belong to the entire diocese,” said Robicheaux, noting how REACH students represent 13 Catholic schools throughout the diocese.

“We expect that number to grow,” she added.

Dr. Melanie Verges, superintendent of the Catholic Schools Office, said the program provides valuable services to families in Catholic schools.

Since special education began in the diocese in 1962, she explained, so many people have helped the program grow.

“We are standing on the shoulders of giants,” Verges said, while also expressing appreciation for the constant support of Bishop Robert W. Muench and others who continue to see the importance of special education.

Currently, 63 students are enrolled in REACH, which provides services for intellectual disabilities, autism, dyslexia and instructional support through seven schools, including Holy Ghost School in Hammond and Most Blessed Sacrament, St. George, St. Louis King of France, Our Lady of Mercy, Redemptorist St. Gerard, and St. Michael the Archangel High schools in Baton Rouge.
In this World War II romantic drama from director Robert Zemeckis and screenwriter Steven Knight, a Canadian wing commander (Brad Pitt) and a French resistance fighter (Marion Cotillard) with a murky past pretend to be husband and wife as part of an espionage operation before falling in love for real and making a hasty marriage. Their union flourishes until the officer is suddenly informed by the film. The book and film are a fictionalized account of the persecution of Christians in 17th-century Japan; the central figures are Jesuit missionaries. Pope Francis spoke to Scorsese, his wife and two daughters about the early Jesuit missions to Japan.

During the 15-minute audience Nov. 30, Pope Francis told Scorsese that he had read Japanese author Shusaku Endo's historical novel, "Silence," which inspired the film. The book and film are a fictionalized account of the persecution of Christians in 17th-century Japan; the central figures are Jesuit missionaries.

Pope Francis spoke to Scorsese, his wife and two daughters about the early Jesuit missions to Japan.

In an interview taped after he met the pope, Scorsese said the pope had told him that he hopes the film "bears fruit."
Thank You

When no one was there, you were there for me
When nobody cared, you still cared for me
If everyone leave you, be here with me
I hope that you’re hearing me
You keep me humble, keep me focused every day
You know how to put a smile on my face.

When I think about you, all my worries fade
You say you’ll love ‘til forever and that’ll never change
I wanna, I wanna, I wanna thank you
I wanna, I wanna, I wanna thank you
No one knows how to love me like you do (like you do)
I could bring your dream to life, oh, all because of you (hey)
You help me when I’m feeling low (feeling low)
You let me know I’m not alone (I’m not alone)
You say you’ll love me ‘til forever, so I’mma love you, too (love you, too)

(Repeat refrain.)

Me haffa thank you for the times you stick around now
All the times you had me back and held me down, down
Pick me up from off the floor and off the ground then
Keep it much when I’m 100, you 1,000
You more than me lover, you more than me friend
Ah, you number one and me just can’t pretend
Tell ’em already, but here me again
You me be friends, ah
(Repeat refrain.)

I wanna, I wanna, I wanna thank you
I wanna, I wanna, I wanna thank you
I wanna, I wanna, I wanna thank you

Sung by: Meghan Trainor, featuring Rock City | Copyright © 2016, Epic, Sony

ACROSS
1  ___ box
5  An enthusiast
9  Midwest hub
14 Summit of white
15 Mountain range
16 Went white
17 Cut of meat
18 Architect’s abbreviation
19 Literary device
20 Time of choosing representation
21 One of the 12 tribes of Israel
22 Story in installments
24 Lou
26 “…he suffered, ___ and was buried.”
28 Link
32 Tuscan-like vestment
35 Moses, for one
37 OT historical book
38 “The intention of the human heart is ___ water (Prv 20:5)
40 Underline order letters
41 202, in ancient Rome
42 Purim month
43 Spanish fleet
46 Name of the Rose author
47 Renaissance Marian art title
49 “…the greatest of these is ___” (I Cor 13:13)
51 Rubes
53 Seft
57 First step in religious orders
60 Certain angels
62 Sun-dried brick
63 ___ of the Lord
64 Bank contents
65 Start to have an effect
66 Single entity
67 Large flightless birds
68 Mountain ridge
69 Depend
70 Morse element

DOWN
1 Countrymen of John Paul II
2 “Mio”
3 Willow
4 Offensive
5 ___ Year
6 Book containing calendar of Masses
7 Ride runner
8 Dutch airline
9 ___ for the poor
10 Concordant
11 ___ vera
12 Bank takeback
13 First place
21 Hindmost part of an animal
22 The old lady lived in one
25 Type of sin
27 Catholic composer of the “New World Symphony”
29 “… homo”
30 Stylish
31 Musical group
32 He was an original
33 Castor’s mother
34 Prayer counter
36 Catholic ending
39 Forbidden
43 An end to repent?___
44 Catholic convert and author of Poustinia
45 Affirm with confidence
48 ___ Creed
50 Dodged
52 View
54 2009 Nobel winner
55 Along with Timothy, he was a disciple of Paul
56 Shatter
57 Apollo creator
58 River in central Europe
59 20A action
61 “… Mary”
63 PETA target

Solution on page 18

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**EDITORIAL**

**Politicking Christmas**

Make no mistake, this day was inevitable.

The state of Oregon, or at least several public school districts in the state, are requesting that Christ be eliminated from Christmas. Even jolly old St. Nick, he of the white beard who delivers toys to boys and girls everywhere, is being kicked to the curb.

In western Portland, staff members of a local high school received a note saying they were allowed to decorate their offices or doors with the caveat they “refrain” from using religious-themed decorations or images like “Santa Claus.” In other words, crosses, nativity sets and old, fat men in red suits were to be stowed with yesterday’s garbage.

The memo goes on to say that many students do not feel comfortable or perhaps not even allowed to participate in “holiday-based or religious” activities and that such offensive symbols depicting Christ or Santa Claus might be considered an “affront to them.”

The action by the Oregon schools is another sign of a society that has lost its moral compass ...

**PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PRAY FOR US**

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

- **Dec. 14** Rev. J. Clifton Hill CSSP  
  Dcn. Stephen Paul Ourso  
  Br. Clement Furo CnsR  
- **Dec. 15** Rev. Gordian O. Iwuji MSP  
  Dcn. Ricky A. Patterson  
  Sr. Mary John Hotard CSJ  
- **Dec. 16** Rev. Charbel Jamhoury  
  Dcn. Curles P. Reeson Jr.  
  Br. Harold Harris SC  
- **Dec. 17** Rev. Joshua D. Johnson  
  Dcn. Frank W. Rhodes Jr.  
  Sr. Esther Hulin CSJ  
- **Dec. 18** Rev. Raphael Juanitorene  
  Dcn. Alfred J. Ricard Jr.  
  Br. Virgil Harris SC  
- **Dec. 19** Rev. Juel Kandulina  
  Dcn. Thomas M. Robinson  
  Sr. Anjia Jacob CMC  
- **Dec. 20** Rev. Jon C. Keoher  
  Dcn. Mauricio Salazar  
  Br. Ronald Hingle SC  
- **Dec. 21** Rev. Leonard Kraus SJ  
  Dcn. Elizar Salinas Jr.  
  Sr. M. Janita MC  
- **Dec. 22** Rev. Sanjay Kunnasseri IMS  
  Dcn. Mario (Sam) Sammartino  
  Br. Noel Lemmon SC  
- **Dec. 23** Rev. Johnson Kurippally  
  Dcn. Milton J. Schanzbach  
  Sr. Jerome MC  
- **Dec. 24** Rev. Joel Labauve  
  Dcn. Peter Schlette  
  Br. Roger Lemoyne SC  
- **Dec. 25** Rev. Kenneth W. Laird  
  Dcn. Joseph M. Scimcna  
  Sr. Julie Kraemer CSJ  
- **Dec. 26** Rev. Charles R. Landry  
  Dcn. Rudolph W. Stahl  
  Br. Malcolm Melcher SC  
- **Dec. 27** Rev. Keun-Soo Lee  
  Dcn. Michael F. Thompson  
  Sr. Adele Lambert CSJ

**VIEWPOINT**

**Advent: waiting for what?**

We all outgrow the child’s Christmas, the waiting for Santa Claus. Unfortunately, Advent, the church’s season of waiting for Christmas can seem artificial too. The baby Jesus was born 2,000 years ago. What is the point of waiting for that event again?

Advent is not an exercise in “Let’s pretend.” It is a journey, year after year, into the deeper reality of our lives. While the “Word became flesh, and lived among us” 2,000 plus years ago, the entry of God into our personal lives is still unfinished. As long as we breathe, there is more of our life to open, to that which is always more of us that we might let God enter. God wants us to take on our flesh, to act through us. Like his son, we have a mission in this world.

At Mass, in response to the proclamation, “The mystery of faith” after the consecration of the bread and wine, one of the responses after his birth we can make is: “Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again.” Advent is the time for us to pay special attention to that “coming again.” Christ will come again – at the end of the world, at the end of our life, and now at this time in our life if we are prepared to receive him. As Isaiah wrote, “You, O Lord are our Father, we are the clay and you are the potter: we are all the work of your hands.”

When the world will end, none of us knows. There is not much we can do to extend the time of our own lives except exercise, listen to our doctor and practice clean living. But then, Bishop Ott did all of that and died at 65 of liver cancer. When he was diagnosed, a classmate said, “Stanley, you just set back clean living twenty years!” Advent tells us in the words of Jesus, “Be on your guard!” It is time to stop procrastinating, to be on our guard against letting our life slip away without doing the things we should be doing.

Spirituality is a genuine concern of many people today. There is one writer I have read, John Shea, who writes about how we can ground our “spirit formation” in the feast of Advent. John Shea, who writes about how we can ground our “spirit formation” in the feast of Advent. John Shea captures this beautifully, quoting Phyllis McGinley’s poetic rewrite of the Italian folktale of Befana. (Befana was a grumpy old Jewish woman, a precursor to Santa Claus, who sold charcoal. She chased away the three wise men seeking the location of the Christ child. Upon hearing the shepherds’ story, she repented and began looking for him but never found him. To this day she gives Christmas gifts to good Italian children and charcoal to those not-so-good.) McGinley, one of our better American poets, updated Befana, making her a humilite and perfect in Jesus.

“Befana, the Housewife, scrubbing her pane/Saw three old sages ride down the lane,/Saw three grey travellers pass her door—/Gaspar, Balthazar, Melchior. “Where journey you, sirs?” she asked of them./Balthazar answered, “To Bethlehem,/For we have news of a marvelous thing/Born in a stable is Christ the King.”/“Give Him my welcome!” Then Gaspar smiled, “Come with us, mistress, to greet the child.”/“Oh, happily, happily would I fare,/Were my dusting through and I’d polished the stair./Old Melchior leaned on his saddle horn—/Then send but a gift to the small Newborn.”/“Oh, gladly, gladly I’d send Him one,/Were the heart-stone swept and my weaving done./As soon as ever I’ve baked my bread,/I’ll fetch Him a pillow for His head,/And a coverlet too,” Befana said, “/When the rooms are aired and the linen dry,/I’ll look at the Babe.”/But the Three rode by./She worked for a day and a night and a day./Then, gifts in her hands, took up her way./But she never found where the Christ child lay./And still she wanders at Christmas./Houseless, whose house was all her pride./Whose heart was tardy, whose gifts were late;/Wanders, and knocks at every gate./Crying, “Good people, the bells begin!/Put off your toiling and let love in.”

That is why we spend Advent longing and waiting and praying that when Christmas arrives, we will be prepared to let it into our hearts God’s perfect expression of his love for us.

** Another Perspective **

Father John Carville

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 johnycarville@gmail.com.
The end of the world

Father Ron Rolheiser

After 56 years of the priesthood, at age 85, I want to say a word of thanks to my brother priests, who have sacrificed so much to bring the good news of God’s love to our troubled world.

Years ago, the priests of my diocese elected me to be their clergy personnel director, a job which helps the bishop in the assignment and placement of priests. Eventually, it led to my becoming president of the National Association of Church Personnel Administrators.

My respect for priests is therefore based on years of experience working with them and for them. They have all chosen a life of altruism, based on a deep reverence for their vocation. And so they lived with this expectation, believing that the world, at least as they knew it, would end before their deaths. Not surprisingly this led to all kinds of apocalyptic musings: What signs would signal the end? Would there be massive alterations in the sun and the moon? Would there be great earthquakes and wars across the world that would help precipitate the end? Generally though the early Christians took Jesus’ advice and believed that it was useless and counterproductive to speculate about the end of the world and about what signs would accompany the end. The lesson rather, they believed, was to live in vigilance, in high alert, ready, so that the end, whenever it would come, would not catch them asleep, unprepared, carousing and drunk.

However, as the years moved on and Jesus did not return their understanding began to evolve so that by the time John’s Gospel is written, probably about 70 years after Jesus’ death, they had begun to understand things differently. They now understood Jesus’ promise that some of his contemporaries would not taste death until they had seen the kingdom of God. Initially this was interpreted to mean that some of them would not die before Jesus returned and the world ended.

And so they lived with this expectation, believing that the world, at least as they knew it, would end before their deaths. Not surprisingly this led to all kinds of apocalyptic musings: What signs would signal the end? Would there be massive alterations in the sun and the moon? Would there be great earthquakes and wars across the world that would help precipitate the end? Generally though the early Christians took Jesus’ advice and believed that it was useless and counterproductive to speculate about the end of the world and about what signs would accompany the end. The lesson rather, they believed, was to live in vigilance, in high alert, ready, so that the end, whenever it would come, would not catch them asleep, unprepared, carousing and drunk.

But that didn’t change their emphasis on vigilance, on staying awake and on being ready for the end. But now that invitation to stay awake and live in vigilance was related more to not knowing the hour of one’s own death. As well, more deeply, the invitation to live in vigilance began to be understood as code for God’s invitation to enter into the fullness of life right now and not be lulled asleep by the pressures of ordinary life, wherein we are consumed with eating and drinking, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage. All of these ordinary things, while good in themselves, can lull us to sleep by keeping us from being truly attentive and grateful within our own lives. And that’s the challenge that comes down to us: Our real worry should not be that the world might suddenly end or that we might unexpectedly die, but that we might live and then die, asleep, that is, without really loving, without properly expressing our love and without tasting deeply the real joy of living because we are so consumed by the business and busy pressures of living that we never quite get around to fully living.

Hence being alert, awake and vigilant in the biblical sense is not a matter of living in fear of the world ending or of our lives ending. Rather it is a question of having love and reconciliation as our chief concerns, of thanking, appreciating, affirming, forgiving, apologizing and being more mindful of the joys of living in human community and within the sure embrace of God.

Buddha warned against something he called, “slouching.” We slouch physically when we let our posture break down and become slothful. Any combination of tiredness, laziness, depression, anxiety, tension, over-extension or excessive pressure can bring down our guard and make our bodies slouch. But that can also happen to us psychologically and morally. We can let a combination of busyness, pressure, anxiety, laziness, depression, tension and weariness break down our spiritual posture so that, in biblical terms, we “fall asleep,” we cease being vigilant, we are no longer alert.

We need to be awake spiritually, not slouching. But the end of the world shouldn’t concern us, nor should we worry excessively about when we will die. What we should worry about is in what state our dying will find us. As Kathleen Dowling Singh puts it in her book, The Grace in Aging: “What a waste it would be to enter the time of dying with the same old petty and weakly thoughts and reactions running through our mind.” But, still, what about the question of when the world will end?

Perhaps, given the infinity of God, it will never end. Because when do infinite creativity and love reach their limit? When do they say: “Enough! That’s all! These are the limits of our creativity and love!”

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

To my brother priests

After 56 years of the priesthood, at age 85, I want to say a word of thanks to my brother priests, who have sacrificed so much to bring the good news of God’s love to our troubled world.

Years ago, the priests of my diocese elected me to be their clergy personnel director, a job which helps the bishop in the assignment and placement of priests. Eventually, it led to my becoming president of the National Association of Church Personnel Administrators.

My respect for priests is therefore based on years of experience working with them and for them. They have all chosen a life of altruism, based on a deep faith in God’s love, and so it is fitting to offer them this tribute of gratitude:

Dear Father, please know that you have the heartfelt thanks of millions of Catholics for all you do, and have done
Retirement for Religious Fund – An appeal for the Retirement Fund for Religious will be held in church parishes in the Diocese of Baton Rouge Saturday, Dec. 10 and Sunday, Dec. 11 at all Masses.

Christmas Pageant – The children of the school of religion of Mater Dolorosa Church in Independence and St. Dominic Church in Husser will perform their first Christmas pageant on Sunday, Dec. 11, 4 p.m. in St. Dominic Hall. For more information, call 985-878-9639.

Nativity Carol – St. John the Baptist Church, 402 S. Kirkland Dr., Brusly, will host an evening of Advent and Christmas songs, “Nativity Carol,” Tuesday, Dec. 13, 7 p.m. Attendees are asked to bring canned food donations to benefit the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank. For more information, call 225-749-2189.

Day of Prayer – The Archdiocese of New Orleans Retreat Center, 5500 St. Mary St., Metairie, will host a day of prayer: “With God, Nothing is Impossible,” with Sister Judith Gomila, Tuesday, Dec. 13. Cost is $35, day of prayer: “With God, Nothing is Impossible,” with Father Nile Gross will present a mission Monday, Dec. 12 – Wednesday, Dec. 14, at Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church, 119 Hwy. 308, Plaquemine. Monday’s session will begin with a Mass at 6 p.m. followed by adoration and talk. Tuesday’s session will begin at 6:30 p.m. Thursday’s session will begin with Mass at 6 p.m. and will have a penance service at 7 p.m. For more information, call 985-366-6656.

St. Lucy Mass – In honor of the feast day of St. Lucy, patron saint of the diseases of the eye, Our Lady of Mercy Church, 445 Marquette Ave., Baton Rouge will host a Mass Tuesday, Dec. 13, 6 p.m. All eye care professionals and anyone experiencing illness or diseases of the eye are encouraged to attend to receive a special blessing. Traditional Italian St. Lucy bread will be distributed. For more information, call 225-926-1883.

St. Mark Christmas Concert – The choir of St. Mark Church, 42021 Hwy. 621, Gonzales, will present a Christmas concert Tuesday, Dec. 13, 7 – 8 p.m. A reception will follow in the Father Demaria Activity Center. For more information call Robin Richardson at 225-647-8460.

The Christmas Story – St. George School first-graders will present The Christmas Story Thursday, Dec. 15, 6 p.m., at St. George Church, 7808 St. George Drive, Baton Rouge, 6 – 7 p.m. For more information, call 225-293-1298.

Senior Citizens/Handicapped Christmas Luncheon – Our Lady of Prompt Succor Church, 32615 Bowie St., White Castle, will serve a Christmas luncheon to senior citizens and handicapped residents Thursday, Dec. 15. Mass will be celebrated at 11 a.m., followed by the luncheon at noon. For more information, call 225-545-3352.

Nativity Scene – St. John the Evangelist Church, 57805 Main St., Plaquemine, will have a nativity scene on display in the church Saturday, Dec. 17 – Monday, Jan. 16. The life-size Fontanini Creche spans the entire right aisle of the church. The scene can be viewed 8:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. Monday – Thursday and 8:30 a.m. – noon on Friday. The display of Christ’s nativity features representative figures of the era. For more information, call 225-687-2402.

Living Nativity – St. Elizabeth Church and School, 119 Hwy. 403, Paincourtville will present a living nativity Thursday, Dec. 22, following the 7:40 a.m. Mass. The eighth-grade class will perform the living nativity and the student body will serve as the choir. For more information, call the St. Elizabeth School office at 985-369-7402.

Classifieds

For help placing your classified ad, call 225-387-0983. All classified ads are prepaid. Credit cards are now accepted.
Ice came in large blocks, delivered by the “ice man” every other day. Meat also came via a deliveryman on a horse and buggy.

Lumina Newchurch

was never officially informed of the reason, Newchurch believes it was because of health reasons since she had endured a health scare that included double pneumonia as a young child.

“Daddy wasn’t thrilled about me going to the convent,” she said. “When I left (home) he told me, ‘I’m not coming to see you unless to get you out.’ I called him (when she was not accepted) and said, ‘Come get me.’”

“The Lord has led me through many roads,” she said, flashing an infection smile that is as warm as it is genuine. “My whole life has been wonderful. I feel so blessed.”

After graduating from Loyola University in New Orleans in 1937 with a Bachelor of Science degree, Newchurch spent five years teaching in Donaldsonville, Belle Rose and back in Missouri before landing a job at a defense plant in Lake Charles, where she would spend two years and even help in managing a local CYO. In 1944, she embarked on a 38-year career with the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

Shortly after landing the job she was able to purchase a black and white television for her dad, which she financed for $20 a month.

Eventually, she moved from her downtown apartment to a house in St. Aloysius Church Parish in 1957. For many years, she attended daily Mass at Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Baton Rouge.

It was by happenstance early in her 38-year career at Exxon when she developed a passion for collecting angels. She recalls sharing coffee with co-workers one night and “everybody asked me what did I collect?”

“I thought in my durness that I had to collect something to live in Baton Rouge.”

At that point she remembered that a secretary “for one of the big shots at LSU” had being collecting angels for several years and “a light went on in my brain.”

“I went home that night and decided I was going to collect angels,” said Newchurch, adding that her mother’s middle name was Angele, which is French for angel.

It was also during that time she first met Msgr. William D. Borders, who became her spiritual director. That relationship lasted until Msgr. Borders was appointed as the founding bishop for the Diocese of Orlando, Florida.

However, before leaving, he recommended Newchurch contact Msgr. Leo Guillott about becoming her spiritual director, which spawned a relationship that lasted 47 years.

“I’ve had marvelous spiritual directors,” she said. “I tell you I have been blessed. My whole life has been wonderful. The church is my life.”

Newchurch has served in various ministries at St. Joseph Cathedral, Holy Family Church in Port Allen, Sacred Heart, St. Aloysius, and St. James Place, a retirement community in Baton Rouge where she has been living since 2001. She helped coordinate and assist with weekly Catholic services at St. James until 2010.

Turning 100, which she celebrated with a birthday party that attracted more than 80 family members, has now slowed Newchurch, who never married. She continues to put out a family bulletin, is involved with two prayer lists and provides notary services at St. James Place at no charge to residents.

But her biggest passion is praying for priests, and she has a select few clergy members for whom she dedicates rosaries. Newchurch prays two rosaries a week for Father Yi and Father Randy Cuebas, current pastor at St. Aloysius who Newchurch remembers as an altar boy at the church. She-prays three rosaries a week for Father Josh Johnson, parochial vicar at St. Aloysius.

Some priests also receive birthday cards, anniversary cards and even Father’s Day cards.

“It’s very humbling and supportive to know that the ‘Head Angel’ is sending me thousands of angels to protect this poor priest,” said Father Yi, who has been the recipient of Newchurch’s cards. “Her love and devotion to the Blessed Mother also touches me, reminding me that I should have that same fervor, devotion and generosity.

“This was the only way she knew to get through the stress of working so hard,” Father Jeff Bayhi said of his aunt, who passed away Dec. 1, 2016. “The Lord has been good to her.”

Newchurch had obviously witnessed many changes throughout her life, from her early years without electricity to the autumn of her life where she has become computer savvy. Besides electricity, she said the biggest change she has seen is Vatican II.

“I think (Vatican II) has been wonderful,” she said. “I think the Mass in English should have been a blessing to everybody.”

Newchurch spends much of her day in prayer, including praying the Angel Prayer daily, or putting the final touches on the family bulletin. In between, she’ll watch a little television, including, Wheel of Fortune, Father Jeff Bayhi and of course, LSU games. She can also be found playing solitaire on the computer.

“Father (Guillott) said it was okay,” she said. “When you don’t have anything else to do and you are trying to please the Lord, you need someone to say it’s okay.”

Newchurch has no answer for her longevity other than to say the Lord “isn’t ready for me yet.”

But however long she lives, she knows her faith will never waver, although she admits to her own struggles. She said the roots of her faith are to surrender to God, but quickly added her new prayer at night is to learn patience.

“Oh yeah, man I have lived,” she said. “The poor Lord, he thinks I’m crazy.”
From page 7

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ter, which operates centers in Baton Rouge and New Orleans, received a combined 21 gifts for $41,500, which is included in the $89,000 figure.

Abshire said the gifts will support a variety of projects, including technology updates for Catholic schools, travel for youth groups to attend conferences, scholarships for seminarians, post-flood infrastructure renovations and “other worthy initiatives.”

#GiveCatholic was held Nov. 29 on #GivingTuesday, a global day of giving fueled by the power of social media and collaboration. The day is celebrated on the Tuesday following Thanksgiving and widely recognized shopping events such as Black Friday and Cyber Monday.

#GivingTuesday is considered the kickoff of the charitable giving season.

The Baton Rouge community held its inaugural #GiveBr, which raised about half of what the diocese raised through #GiveCatholic, a result Abshire called amazing.

“This speaks volumes of the deep generosity of Catholic donors,” she said.

Locally, St. Louis King of France Church had the greatest number of participants with 63 donors contributing a combined $5,670. Among parishes and schools, St. Jean Vianney Parish and School in Baton Rouge led the way with $6,405 from 47 donors.

Abshire said 25 church parishes, schools, ministries and nonprofits in the Diocese of Baton Rouge participated. She added #GiveCatholic is important because it brings the Catholic community together to give thanks on #GivingTuesday.

A listing of participating organizations and the amounts each raised through #GiveCatholic is available on the “Leaderboard” at http://igivecatholic.org.

For advertising questions, call 225-387-0983.

CHRISTMAS GIFTS NEEDED!

Help us share the Christmas spirit! Bishop Robert Muench will be at the St. Vincent de Paul Dining Room again this year to distribute Christmas gifts to homeless and needy children. TOYS ARE NEEDED! The children served at this event are some of the most vulnerable in our community: children from our homeless shelter that won’t have a chance to sit on Santa’s lap at the Mall of Louisiana; kids that eat at our Dining Room and depend on our food services for their health and well being; boys and girls that won’t receive a Christmas present if we aren’t there for them.

We are collecting new toys for children ages infant to 12. You can drop off your toy donation to us at 220 St. Vincent de Paul Place or the Baton Rouge Clinic. We encourage you to support this year’s effort and also ask you to share this information with family, friends and co-workers who might want to contribute.

You can make a financial gift by sending your contribution to St. Vincent de Paul - Toy Drive, P. O. Box 127, Baton Rouge, LA 70821. If you are interested in donating a toy, call (225) 383-7837, ext. 0, or email macaldo@svdpbr.com, for more information.

A Christmas to Remember

For thousands of people in our community, this will be a Christmas they will always remember. Home may be a trailer, a friend’s guest room, or a damaged residence that is still unfinished. For some, like Ella – the little girl in the photo – home is our Sweet Dreams Shelter. Even though they may have little else in common, they all share one emotion this Christmas: heartfelt gratitude for home, no matter how humble or temporary it may be.

At our Bishop Ott Shelters, we provide a home to thousands of men, women, and children each year (over 26,000 guest nights of shelter in 2016). Through your support, you are reaching out to strangers in need, and we are so grateful that people like you enable us to provide this service. We never forget that it was through the kindness of others that Mary and Joseph were given shelter when they had nowhere else to turn.

As our community continues its long journey toward recovery from the floods, we know that there will be a growing need to provide shelter to the most vulnerable. We are seeing more men, single women, families, and elderly who need basic necessities like food, clothing, shelter and medicine.

We are on pace to fill well over 20,000 prescriptions in 2016. Many of the patients we serve are older individuals suffering from chronic illnesses, but we serve people of all ages, including children like Ella, the little girl in the photo. For many people, Christmas wish lists will include necessities, not luxuries. They all need a helping hand-up.

People are fighting a daily battle to survive in a complicated world, and they need your help. We have included our Christmas Prayer, and that’s our first request to you – to use this prayer and join us in praying for the poor and homeless during this holiday season. If you are able to help financially, we also ask you to consider making a gift. Give online at: www.svdbr.org or mail your gift to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, P.O. Box 127, Baton Rouge, LA 70821.

Cut out and send in with your financial gift.

| Name: ____________________________ |
| Address: ____________________________ |
| City, State, Zip: ____________________ |

A Christmas Prayer

On this day, joy was born into the world,
-may we share the joy of Christ with everyone.

On this day, hope was born into the world,
-may we bring the hope of Christ to those most in need.

On this day, peace was born into the world,
-may we bring the peace of Christ to our family and our world. Amen