**‘THIS IS MY BABY’**

Mother, son reunite after nine long years

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Tears flow easily for Catherine Clarke these days, not those of sorrow she shed for so long over the loss of her husband and a decade-long separation from her youngest son. Today, Catherine’s cheriey face is radiant with joy, the joy that can only come from a mother who has finally reunited with the young man she still refers to as her “baby boy.”

Catherine and her 25-year-old son, Benjamin, were recently reunited in an emotionally-charged scene at Baton Rouge Metropolitan Airport. Shortly before the plane carrying her son landed from Houston, the final leg of a flight from Liberia that took nine years to complete, Catherine suddenly burst into tears and broke out into a dance, singing, “My baby is coming home! My baby is coming home.”

Moments later, Benjamin walked through the terminal and back into his mother’s life, a mother he had last seen in 2006 when she immigrated to America from a refugee camp in Ghana. But in a heartbreaking twist of fate bureaucratic challenges forced her to leave Benjamin behind in Ghana.

“We were so happy to see each other,” Benjamin said. “I recognized her and went straight to her. She had some tears of joy.”

“Tears of joy” is an understatement. Catherine melted into her son’s welcoming arms overwhelmed by the moment. Weeks later, in the comfortable surroundings of Catherine’s Baton Rouge apartment, the tears still flow.

Father Cayet Mangiaracina OP surveys the flood waters approaching the rectory of Holy Ghost Church in Hammond as heavy rains saturated Tangipahoa Civil Parish on March 11. Photo provided by Father Robert Merced OP

‘Projected expansion’ planned for special ed

By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

When he was 4-years-old, Tyler Patton received a set of drums as a gift. While some parents may opt for a few more years of, well, quiet time, Jeffery and Sherry Patton knew they were doing more than just encouraging a love of music in their young son. They were helping him reach his potential.

Tyler was born with Williams Syndrome, a genetic condition that causes medical and developmental problems. Despite the challenges, there are also strengths, including a great affinity for music, something that was not lost on Sherry Patton.

“We could tell early on that he just loved music,” she said.

After receiving his drum set, Tyler started taking private lessons, and for a long time, his music was shared with only a few people. Today, however, all of that has changed.

Since the beginning of the current school year, Tyler has been a member of the Warrior Band at St. Michael the Archangel High School. During the football season, he played the crash cymbols in the “pit” or stationery percussion section in front of the marching band. He also had a part in getting the student body fired up at a pep rally by playing the drum set for “Sweet Child O’ Mine” by the rock band Guns N’Roses, and he had a solo on the triangle during the recent District Large Ensemble Assessment Festival with the concert band.

For Sherry Patton, watching her son perform in the band is only part of the reason she is thankful her family discovered the special

SEE YEARS PAGE 23

SEE EXPANSION PAGE 24
DID YOU KNOW

**A Good Friday treat**

Good Friday is indeed a day of solemnity and fasting, but at least we can indulge in the frosted delicacy of hot cross buns without feeling the pains of guilt.

The Good Friday tradition of baking hot cross buns dates to medieval England and Ireland. Legend says the buns originated in St. Alban’s Abbey in the mid-14th century when monks began baking and distributing the buns, which are marked with a frosted cross, to the poor on Good Friday. The hot cross buns replaced the regular buns distributed to the poor by the monks.

The legend grew and according to English folklore, the buns baked and served on Good Friday will not spoil or even become moldy during the year. They have also been used for medicinal purposes or to ward off disease and inclement weather, which may be of interest to those of us in southeast Louisiana, especially given the recent spate of violent storms.

Tradition also held that when taken on a sea voyage, the buns would help protect against shipwreck. And if hung in the kitchen, the rolls allegedly protect against fires and ensure that all breads baked throughout the year turn out evenly. But the bun must be replaced annually.

Some even believe that those who give hot cross buns to friends will remain friends for life.

There are many culinary variations of hot cross buns, but basically it is a spiced sweet bun, often with currants or raisins, with the frosted cross on top. The cross represents the crucifixion of Christ, thus the reason it is traditionally baked on Good Friday. A chocolate version of the bun has been developed and not surprisingly has become a popular item, especially in Australia and New Zealand.

The spices inside the bun are said to represent the spices put on the body of Christ before his crucifixion.

The tradition continues in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, India and South Africa. In Australia the buns may go on sale shortly after Christmas, and in some areas, they are available year round.

No word yet about a hot cross bun shrimp po’boy for Good Friday.

**Behind the Collar**

... with FATHER PHIL SPANO, pastor, Most Blessed Sacrament Church, Baton Rouge

You grew up in Donaldsonville, in a family store called Philip Ferris Grocery. What was it like and were you expected to work?

It was a grocery store, but an “old-timey” one, in a sense. All under one roof and there were groceries, fruits/vegetables, some meats and cold-cuts, deli with homemade sandwiches and po-boys, hand-dipped ice cream, a soda fountain and bar. In those days a child could be having a banana split or ice cream, a soda sitting next to someone having a beer or highball. We had about 7-8 tables with chairs, a bar/ice cream counter with stools, and another bar with standing footrests. Before many places were integrated under law, whites and blacks had free access to relax, eat, drink and shop together in this store founded by my mother’s parents, Philip and Adele Ferris. My grandfather died a year before I was born and so I was named Philip Ferris Spano. We were expected to work even as children and adolescents in all areas of the business. Even though it’s against the law over the last several decades and maybe even then (I don’t know), I often helped my father and uncle work the bar as an older child and teenager. In fact, when I was assigned as pastor of the Ascension of Our Lord/St. Francis of Assisi cluster in my home town in 2004, I was interviewed in a Chamber of Commerce magazine about my feelings of returning to Donaldsonville as a priest. I said that I had been received much better than Jesus was in his home town and that it was good to come back to the place where I trained for the priesthood working that bar and grocery store. Yes, I went to Notre Dame Seminary from 1978-1982 but my training started way before that. In fact, rumor has it I worked weekends there – my family needed the help as advanced age and sickness took my grandmother and godfather/uncle away from working.

You have a reputation of being a good cook. Any comments about that?

Well, in all honesty, my reputation is better than the reality. When you’re overweight and have a beard people think you’re either a good cook or an opera singer. I have been mistaken for both. I have four brothers and three of them are much better cooks than me (Gregory, Victor, Tommy). Thank God for Mike who handles business and taxes for us. Being Lebanese and Italian in Cajun/Creole south Louisiana means what? – some heavy duty food cultures – who take much pride in their cuisine. Luciano Pavarotti and Paul Prudhomme are both deceased now so I’m not mistaken for them nearly as much as I used to be. Now I have to be worried about being mistaken for me.

You use your sense of humor in your homilies and in talking to...
State's investment in scholarship students paying off in classroom

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

As state lawmakers grapple with identifying avenues to balance the budget, the Louisiana Scholarship Program, which allows thousands of students who would otherwise be forced to attend underperforming public schools the opportunity to receive a private school education, is increasingly coming under attack.

Some are even suggesting the academic performances of voucher students have declined once enrolled in private schools.

However, figures released by the Louisiana Department of Education as well as statistics obtained by The Catholic Commentator from the Catholic Schools Office for the Diocese of Baton Rouge fail to back up those claims.

For example, in 2010-11 figures released by the Department of Education on Feb. 19 show that 34 percent of scholarship students performed at basic and above in state testing. Four years later, that number has risen to 47 percent.

Meanwhile, the statewide average for basic and above in that same time period dipped from 66 percent to 65 percent.

"You have to be doing a good job to be able to serve these kids," said Dr. Melanie Verges, superintendent of Catholic schools for the diocese. "These children come in very often behind on their grade level. We are able to work with them and catch them up."

Overall, according to the state report, participation in the scholarship program has increased by 300 percent since 2011, from 2,005 students to 8,228. The report revealed that the percentage of scholarship students in grades 3-8 achieving "mastery" on state assessments increased four percentage points, compared to a 3-point increase for all students nationwide.

Perhaps more telling is that the percentage of scholarship students achieving at least "basic" increased three percent, compared to a four percent drop statewide in public schools.

Dianne Talbot, instruction specialist for Catholic schools, said the increase in mastery among students shows they are performing well above their grade level.

"When you are talking about value added, you are talking about the effectiveness of your teachers," she said. "And the fact that you have that increase speaks volumes about the effectiveness of the teachers in those schools where those students are making those gains."

The diocesan statistics parallel those of the numbers released by the state. Scholarship students in the Diocese of Baton Rouge have increased from 405 in 2012 to 1,017 for the current school year. Half of those students are in grades K-2.

In 2012, 147 students in grades 3-8 were given the Terra Nova test in the fall and again in the spring for comparative purposes. Students showed an eight percent increase in scores in reading, a 30 percent increase in language arts and a 32 percent increase in math.

Results were similar for students tested in 2014 and 2015. In language arts, students in grades 6-7 showed a 13-point increase in national percentile scores in the Terra Nova tests. In reading, students in grades 7-8 showed a six percent increase, students in grades 5-6 showed a five point increase and students in grades 6-7 showed a three-point increase. In math, students in grades 4-7 showed a two percent increase.

"I am absolutely encouraged," Verges said. "We feel like we are helping students," said Dr. Melanie Verges, superintendent of Catholic Schools for the diocese. The Catholic Commentator file photo

Despite claims from some, students in the Louisiana Scholarship Program are making academic strides in private schools, especially Catholic schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge. "We feel like we are helping students," said Dr. Melanie Verges, superintendent of Catholic Schools for the diocese.

Elimination of the scholarship program could create an additional $22 million drain on state coffers, according to diocesan officials.

It should be noted that a private school cannot charge the state more than the school's standard tuition and fees.

"It would be penny wise and pound foolish," Verges said of attempts to eliminate the program. "It's half the amount (the state) is spending in a public school and they are getting better results."

Verges conceded Gov. John Bel Edwards' proposal of raising the age of students eligible for the program to first grade, thus eliminating kindergarten, appears it will be enacted. Also, Edwards has proposed eliminating the eligibility of students attending public schools rated at C and below, dropping the average to D and below.

"That's unfortunate because parents who want to choose the rigor that we offer in our schools are not going to be able to do that until first grade," she said. "The children will have a year that they've lost some ground but we'll do our best to catch them up."

"The bottom line is parents want a choice," Verges added. "Not allowing citizens to say I want my child to have a good education so they can have a good life, to me, it's sad."

“We want to help make sure our priests are able to have a comfortable retirement.”

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VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The number of baptized Catholics worldwide has grown at a faster rate than that of the world’s population, according to Vatican statistics.

Although the number of priests has increased globally, the number has decreased slightly in Europe and Oceania, according to the Vatican’s Central Office for Church Statistics.

The figures are presented in the “Annuario Pontificio 2016,” the Vatican yearbook, and will appear in the Statistical Yearbook of the Church, which gives detailed figures on the church’s workforce, sacramental life, dioceses and parishes as of Dec. 31, 2014.

The number of baptized Catholics reached 1.27 billion or 17.8 percent of the global population, the statistics office reported March 5.

Despite the increase of Catholics worldwide, the yearbook noted a “less dynamic” growth of only two percent in Europe. While the continent is home to almost 40 percent of the Catholic global population, the percent of the world’s Catholics living in Europe has slowly decreased during the past nine years, it said.

However, with the exception of Oceania, the number of baptized Catholics has grown faster than the general population growth on every continent. “The African continent remains without a doubt the one with the highest growth,” the report said; the number of Catholics in Africa increased by 41 percent, while the number of Catholics in Asia grew by 20 percent.

The percentage of baptized Catholics as part of the general population remains highest in North and South America where they “make up almost half” of the world’s Catholics, it said.

The number of bishops of the world continued to increase, reaching 5,237 worldwide compared to 4,841 a year earlier.

The total number of priests, diocesan and religious order, around the world was 415,792, which the report said was statistically stable.” There was a steady increase of diocesan priests in Africa, Asia and Central and South America, while numbers in North America, Europe and Oceania continued to decrease.

The number of permanent deacons reported 44,566 was an increase of more than 1,000 over the previous year.

The number of religious brothers was down slightly, going from a total of 55,253 at the end of 2013 to a total of 54,359 at the end of 2014.

The number of women in religious orders continued to decrease, dropping by 10,846 in 2014. The biggest decreases were seen in North and South America, Europe and Oceania while numbers in Africa and Asia continue to rise.

The number of candidates for the priesthood both diocesan seminarians and members of religious orders who had reached the level of philosophy and theology studies showed a slight downturn. The number of candidates fell to 116,939 men at the end of 2014 compared to 118,251 men at the end of 2013.

The variation in the number of men training to become priests varies by continent, the report said. There is an “evident decline” in the numbers from Europe and North America, while “Africa and Asia show great vitality,” it said.

“God can heal, Fr. Phil, HANG ON!”

Tell us something people may not know about you.

Q

A

I hope people understand this paradox — I value humor because I’m a very serious person. Often humor and crying are off the same emotion — responses and reactions to the human dilemma that life sometimes doesn’t make sense, is not fair, that there are discrepancies in life, etc. One can cry and/or laugh as a way of release towards these realities. Things can be sad/funny because they just are — but sometimes I don’t know whether to laugh or cry (or both) depending on the circumstances. I use humor in homilies and teaching, whether personal/family stories, jokes, observations, funny human foibles in and outside of Scriptures and so on. I usually never just go for a laugh when preaching unless it fits the spiritual message I’m sharing depending on the sacred Scriptures for that Mass. I know most people will never remember what most priests actually preach about specifically. Planting some illustrations whether humorous or serious can help us make associations with things spiritual in our human lives. I’ve shared a funny, bittersweet story about my mother Doris concerning Sweet-N-Low packets at her funeral and at a few churches since then. I have a number of people tell me they can’t see a Sweet-N-Low packet without thinking of Doris, me spinning the story ... in church ... having something to do with God ... thinking about God. A Sweet-N-Low packet maybe leading to God? The “sweetness” that is life ... the “lows” and “lowliness” that are life ... her life, my life, your lives, maybe ... where God is.

For breaking news and to keep up with the latest happenings in the Baton Rouge Diocese, visit The Catholic Commentator Online thecatholiccommentator.org
Flapjacks serve as spiritual entree for St. Jean Vianney family

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

The Nicole Stanley family of St. Jean Vianney Church in Baton Rouge savor the sweet meaning of Psalm 34:38, “Taste and see that the Lord is good,” by plunging into a stack of pancakes. The family cooked the griddle cakes together, then gathered around the table to talk about and compose their own blessings as participants in the St. Jean Vianney religious education program’s take home evangelization project, “Nourishing Our Bodies and Souls.”

Take Home Evangelization is St. Jean Vianney’s tool to incorporate families into doing things that immerse them in faith, according to Denise Louviere, religious education director.

“Parents are the primary educators of their children and with all the distractions in society today, many families are finding it difficult to take time to informally bring up their Catholic faith and discuss various traditions, share family stories and talk about how their faith carries them through each day, especially when we face challenges,” Louviere said.

“I know how important this was to me in my upbringing. I enjoyed my parents sharing their faith with me,” she said. “We talked about the rosary. They normally don’t talk about that … we talked about the rosary. They taught them the importance of togetherness, rather than individualism.

“It brings us together because we cooked pancakes together. We put the ingredients in together.”

“I learned that we have to do things together,” said Nalysa. “We don’t just separate. It increased my faith because we need to work as a group to accomplish something rather than just as one person.”

Because it takes more time to cook a meal rather than going through a drive-through at a restaurant or heating something in the microwave, Natalyn said the project taught her to be in tune to the present moment and to be bold in her faith.

“It makes me more conscious of what we do. We build on our family relationships more. I’m more involved in our youth group,” Natalyn said. “We are very engaged in the church. It made me realize that it’s a blessing to serve.”

Nayden said he has learned through “Nourishing Our Body and Soul” to be thankful for everything we have.

“I really like food. I pray for people who don’t have it,” Nayden said.

Nathan said the project has been a treasured memory maker of spending time together in the kitchen. “We were able to make our pancake breakfast as a team and share our morning together laughing and spending time together,” he said.

Nicole Stanley said Take Home Evangelization helps families talk about things they normally don’t talk about.

“As a parent, I never really shared with my children information about the different saints, why we pray to the saints and who they are,” she said. “We talked about that … we talked about the rosary.

“Gathering and cooking things means we have to share and discuss. We share the blessings … let’s talk about why we do it. This actually gets you to think about the ‘why.’”

She also said reflecting on their blessings moves people to make sacrifices, which is perfect for Lent.

“During Lent we focus on prayer and being thankful for everything we have. You also return almsgiving for all you receive. The time it takes to prepare, cook and eat meals together takes some sacrifices. I feel that as a mom it helps me to sacrifice for my family.”

For which Nicole Stanley is grateful to St. Jean Vianney for their support of her family.

“I’m mom and dad. If it weren’t for the church, we wouldn’t be where we are,” said Stanley.

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Papal titles/Status of last rites

A few years ago, we lost a son who was 50 years old. We had called his parish priest to administer last rites. When the priest arrived at the hospital, our son had already passed. When we asked about the last rites, he told us that they don’t do the last rites anymore. Did I miss something, or am I misinformed? (Cumming, Georgia)

The last rites have not been eliminated. What many Catholics do not understand, though, is that the “last rites” encompass several sacraments, including penance (confession of sins), viaticum (Holy Communion given as food for the journey to eternal life) and the anointing of the sick. Ideally, those sacraments should be administered when the recipient is aware and able to benefit most.

What the priest was probably trying to explain was that, like all the sacraments, anointing is given only to the living. The word “sacrament” means “sign,” a sign of Christ’s presence, but after death, the person is already meeting Christ face to face.

As Canon No. 1005 in the Code of Canon Law indicates, though, the sacrament of anointing may still be administered if there is doubt as to whether death has occurred.

If the person has already died, the priest instead chooses from the prayers for the deceased in his ritual book (“Pastoral Care of the Sick”).

One especially beautiful prayer is this: “Loving and merciful God, we entrust our brother/sister to your mercy. You loved him/her greatly in this life; now that he/she is freed from all its cares, give him/her happiness and peace forever. ... Welcome him/her now into paradise, where there will be no more sorrow, no more weeping or pain, but only peace and joy with Jesus, your son.”

What is particularly troublesome to parish priests is that families often wait until the last minute before calling a priest. This is due, in part, to the fact that the sacrament of anointing of the sick is given as a sign of Christ’s presence, but also because many catholics are left wondering when and how they should pray over a ill person. The priest is then instructed to anoint the person with oil in the name of the Lord, and the anointing is given as a sign of Christ’s presence. The priest then says a prayer of faith will save the sick person.

As Canon No. 1004 provides that “the anointing of the sick can be administered to a member of the faithful who, having reached the use of reason, begins to be in danger of dying.”

What many forget is that the first purpose of anointing is to bring about healing, physically and spiritually. In his epistle, St. James (1:5-15) says: “Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person.”

If, instead, it be the will of God that the person will soon die, the prayer of anointing asks that the person be relieved of suffering and feel the power and peace of God. The sacrament should be administered when it can do the most good, so the rule of thumb is: Call the priest sooner rather than later.

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 askfkd@nyalbed.org and 40 Hopewell St. Albany, NY 12208.
Answer to prayers found in the silence of God

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Prayer.
Mysteries as it is powerful. Believers credit miracles as odds-defying healings, or surviving in the face of death to the power of prayer. Others remain skeptical.

People have prayed since ancient times in myriad of fashions but with one single purpose: seeking God’s intercession. The intentions may be as simple as a student praying to pass a test or as complex as a person petitioning God’s help in the recovery of a loved one who has fallen ill.

But what happens when those prayers seemingly go unanswered? Or when one’s spiritual life becomes more perfunctory than sincere, or worse yet hope turns to despair?

“Often, people struggle to hear God’s voice,” said Father Josh Johnson, parochial vicar at St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge. “People struggle to hear God’s voice in prayer because they never read the Scriptures. You cannot know God’s voice if you don’t know God as he revealed himself to us in the Scriptures.”

“We were created with this capacity to receive God, and he desires for all of us to receive him and communicate his love for us,” he added. “We all receive him in a different way in different seasons of our life.”

While serving as parochial vicar at Christ the King Church and Catholic Center on the LSU campus, Father Johnson said he frequently heard from their students that their prayer life was dry. Father Johnson, who has become a popular retreat speaker not only in the Diocese of Baton Rouge but in other areas as well, cited several reasons why a person’s prayer life can be adversely affected.

Physical illness or fatigue could be significant factors, he said. Additionally, Father Johnson said it could be the Lord is “stripping us so we long for him and only him and not for the gifts he gives us in prayer.”

He said a person’s own sin may be an impediment as well as the person not praying in the way God wants his followers to encounter him. While counseling students, Father Johnson would ask if they attend eucharistic adoration. If not, he would ask, “How could you speak to God if you are not looking at him?”

Father Johnson would challenge students who admitted to an aversion of reading Scripture by asking, “How can you hear him if you don’t listen to the word of God?”

As part of strengthening one’s prayer life, he encourages people to volunteer at a homeless shelter or soup kitchen, pointing out that, one of the main ways God communicates “is through the poorest of the poor. That’s not optional, he demands it.”

“We are all the body of Christ and we can’t ignore a part of the body of Christ just because it makes us uncomfortable,” Father Johnson said. “It’s not about what we want but about what the Lord wants. We have to be open to communicating with the poorest of the poor, which can be really messy at times.

“This is something the Lord wants us to take seriously.”

A parched spiritual life can often lead to individuals leaving their faith, a fact not lost on Pope Francis. In his calling for the Jubilee Year of Mercy, the pontiff is inviting all displaced Catholics to return to their spiritual roots, through the sacrament of reconciliation.

Father Johnson used the parable of the Prodigal Son as how God welcomes back those who have strayed but seek redemption. He stressed how the father welcomed back his wayward son, quickly offering forgiveness.

“God wants us to come as we are in our brokenness, with our imperfections, with our sins, with our questions, with our doubts,” he said. “The more we come to God as we are the more he has the opportunity to work with us. If we come, we open ourselves to receiving God’s mercy and graces.”

He said those who say they disagree with the church and walk away “never open (themselves) up to encountering God in the midst of our stuff.”

The first steps of a healthy spiritual life, he said, is to form a relationship with God because “God is human,” adding that all too often people ask God “gimme, gimme.”

“What if I entered into a relationship with another person as if what can you do for me?” Father Johnson said. “I would just be using (that individual). Jesus Christ is a person. He wants us to be willing to say ‘I am going to spend time with you for who you are. Not just for what you do. I’m willing to come to you, and be with you even if you give me nothing because it’s part of the relationship. I’m going to spend 30 minutes a day in prayer, just sit with you, just be with you.’”

Similar to any relationship, Father Johnson admitted there could be differences, even with God. But he said God yearns for authenticity.

“Have you asked God, don’t lie to him,” he said. “He wants us to be really honest with him and expose to him what is really going on with us so he can work with us.”

Father Johnson noted that God’s first language is silence and by hearing silence in prayer, “that’s God.”

“It’s hard,” he admitted. “We want a genie in a bottle. We are babies, narcissistic, egotistical babies. We are using him for what we want. What about going in prayer and saying, ‘God how can I console you today? Let me suffer for you as opposed to giving me this?’”

“He knocks at the door of our hearts (and asks), ‘Will you invite me in?’”

How people answer that knock may determine whether their own life of prayer is to be a great mystery or a way of life providing an abundance of spiritual enrichment.

How grace changed my life

O ur planet needs hope and joy. It needs what you have to give. Each of us must try to find a way to help others find encouragement and inspiration in this darkened world. When these insights hit me – and I concluded that one person can make a difference – it changed everything.

In 1977, I received word that a Catholic multimedia organization, known as the Christophers, was searching for a new director. My heart leapt. I had admired their recently deceased founder, Father James Keller, ever since my father gave me his book, “You Can Change the World” when I turned 18.

The Christophers, a nonprofit corporation, had two components: a radio and television production company and a publishing house that produced spiritual books and pamphlets. Communications is at the heart of its mission.

Getting a job like that would be a dream come true. In college, I joined the radio station at Fordham University hoping to prepare myself for a career in media, but after I decided to be a priest, it all changed. I put away those dreams and considered them a youthful fantasy.

I was working as a pastor and running the marriage tribunal of the Diocese of Paterson in New Jersey, and had no experience running a media organization. Why even bother to apply? I also felt unworthy to be Father Keller’s successor. Doubts like that killed my enthusiasm.

Three weeks later, a burst of energy hit me. I suddenly thought, “What have you got to lose?” I decided to write a letter to the board of directors applying for the position. This surprising shot of courage took over before I had a chance to question it. Looking back, I now see that God’s grace led me to act.

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BISHOP MUENCH’S SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, March 29</td>
<td>6:30 p.m.</td>
<td>St. Joseph</td>
<td>Paulina</td>
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<td>Wednesday, March 30</td>
<td>6:30 p.m.</td>
<td>St. Michael, Sacred Heart, Gramercy</td>
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<td>Thursday, March 31</td>
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<td>St. Isidore, St. Pius X, St. Louis King of France</td>
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<td>Sunday, April 3</td>
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<td>St. Philomena, St. Anne, Napoleonville, Assumption</td>
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<td>Sunday, April 10</td>
<td>8 a.m.</td>
<td>St. Francis Xavier</td>
<td>Baton Rouge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, April 13</td>
<td>7 p.m.</td>
<td>St. John, Zachary, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel</td>
<td>Zachary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday, April 14</td>
<td>7 p.m.</td>
<td>St. Paul, Immaculate Conception, Baton Rouge</td>
<td>Immaculate Conception, Baton Rouge</td>
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<td>Sunday, April 17</td>
<td>3 p.m.</td>
<td>St. Gabriel, Holy Family</td>
<td>St. Joseph Cathedral</td>
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<td>Tuesday, April 19</td>
<td>7 p.m.</td>
<td>St. Jean Vianney</td>
<td>Baton Rouge</td>
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<td>Wednesday, April 20</td>
<td>7 p.m.</td>
<td>St. Alphonsus Liguori</td>
<td>Greenwell Springs</td>
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<td>Thursday, April 21</td>
<td>7 p.m.</td>
<td>St. Anthony of Padua &amp; Le Van Phung</td>
<td>Baton Rouge</td>
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<td>Saturday, April 23</td>
<td>4 p.m.</td>
<td>St. Patrick</td>
<td>Baton Rouge</td>
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<td>Thursday, April 28</td>
<td>7 p.m.</td>
<td>Holy Rosary</td>
<td>St. Amant</td>
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<td>Friday, April 29</td>
<td>7 p.m.</td>
<td>Mater Dolorosa, St. Joseph, French Settlement, St. Helena, St. Margaret, St. Stephen &amp; Our Lady of Pompeii</td>
<td>Holy Ghost, Hammond</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday, May 9</td>
<td>7 p.m.</td>
<td>St. George</td>
<td>Baton Rouge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday, May 15</td>
<td>Noon</td>
<td>Diocesan Adult Confirmation</td>
<td>St. Joseph Cathedral</td>
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LIFT YOUR VOICES – Guitar player Mona Dugas and singer Ruth Hirsch lead others in singing a rosary hymn or chant during the recitation of the rosary at the March meeting of “A Morning with the Blessed Mother.” The March 1 meeting, which was attended by more than 70 people, marked the second anniversary of the group and was followed by a jambalaya lunch. Betty Robert of Gonzales started “A Morning with the Blessed Mother” which meets every month on the first Tuesday. She felt the need to begin the prayer group after receiving an unsolicited mailing on Our Lady of Fatima. Photo by Rachele Smith|The Catholic Commentator
Rosary maker spreads joy to many

By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

Most people would agree that after working 33 years as a teacher, coach, principal and school system supervisor, Herbert Daigle has earned the opportunity to do anything he wants during retirement. But for this lifelong educator, the devotion to others continues. This time, it’s in a way beyond the classroom and one that he hopes will lead others to the Blessed Mother.

Since leaving the Assumption Parish School System, Daigle has been making rosaries, a skill he learned while attending Saint Joseph Seminary College. During his time there in the mid-1950s, Daigle met Father Clement Steinacker, who was the postmaster and also operated a small store on campus.

“We called him Father Clem. I saw him often, and a lot of the time, I saw him making rosaries. I asked him if he would show me how to do it,” said Daigle, who still has the pliers, the first tool given to him by Father Clem.

While the lessons were free, there was a cost involved for the supplies, but his mom helped with that during her visits.

“The first rosary I made I gave to my mom. It was a crystal rosary and fully capped (with filigree caps), and everything on it was sterling silver,” he said.

“At that time in the 1950s, it cost about $10 to $15 to make the rosary. Now, just the parts would be over $200,” he said.

For a special gift, however, the amount of money or time required is a small part when compared to the meaning. That’s something Daigle would see first hand when he made another rosary shortly after leaving the seminary and returning home to finish high school. This rosary, one just like his mom’s, was a Christmas present for his high school girlfriend, a girl who would later become his wife.

Married for 53 years now, Daigle jokes that the rosary is “quite old, but she uses it daily,” he said.

“First, he began making all-cord knotted rosaries followed by a few plastic bead rosaries. All were donated to Rosary Army, a group located in Denver, Colorado, which distributes rosaries free of charge.

“Then I got to thinking, ‘Why didn’t I check to see if anybody or any organization locally could use them instead of sending them off,’” he said.

That lead to a conversation with Father Paul Gros, pastor of the clustering parishes of St. Anne Church in Napoleonville and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Plattenville.

He said he would like to have some rosaries for when he visited local homebound residents,” Daigle noted.

During this time, Daigle estimated he made and gave away about 500 or more rosaries.

“We also placed some in the churches with a sign that said, ‘These rosaries are provided free to those who don’t have one,’” he said.

Many took one, and Daigle is encouraged that others are praying the rosary.

“We need to pray. So many don’t listen to the promises at Lourdes and Medjugorje. The Blessed Mother said for us to pray the rosary,” said Daigle, noting that the world, country and communities desperately need Mary’s protection.

As his desire to make more rosaries continued, Daigle found himself wanting to make a rosary from his Cajun culture, one using Job’s tears.

That changed 20 years ago when he retired.

“I had time on my hands and dug out the stuff,” Daigle said.

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When the Cajuns were first exiled and came here, they didn’t have any religious articles with them, so they started making their rosaries out of this (Job’s tears),” said Daigle, explaining that Native Americans also used the dried, hard, hollow seeds of this tropical plant to make jewelry and other types of decoration.

Daigle noted that the seeds has a natural hole that cuts completely through it.

“Somebody (God) already did that for you,” he said, smiling and noting how easy the hole allows threading.

Through a matter of circumstances and letting others know he was interested in Job’s tears, Daigle was able to find not only seeds, but the plant itself. This past year he harvested enough seeds to make 50 rosaries.

“Job’s tears was a favorite of Mother Teresa and (Saint) John Paul II because of its simplicity and durability,” he noted.

He has found that these rosaries are also popular at home after his wife took some to church to have them blessed and many people wanted one.

“It’s my hope that many people will turn to the rosary,” he explained.

Daigle typically uses a step-by-step process when he makes rosaries, completing a decade at a time. He usually makes ten rosaries at any sitting. Rarely does he make just one rosary; however, he estimates it would take him about an hour to do just one.

“Sometimes I catch myself saying ‘Hail Mary’s’ as I’m making the rosaries,” he admitted.

Daigle uses an online rosary making source for his supplies.

“They’re on speed dial,” he jokes and marvels that a hobby he began as a teenager can still bring him so much joy.

“I have the time and the talent,” Daigle said. “And the amount of treasure it takes isn’t that much to spread the use of the rosary.”

Herbert Daigle of Napoleonville holds a rosary he made using Job’s tears. Photo by Rachele Smith | The Catholic Commentator

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Pope Francis waves as he leads the Angelus from the window of his studio overlooking St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican on March 13. The pope was elected three years ago on March 13. Photo by CNS

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – Pope Francis celebrated the third anniversary of his election with a simple Tweet “Pray for me” and the usual Sunday recitation of the Angelus prayer with tens of thousands of people gathered in St. Peter’s Square.

In his talk March 13, the pope did not mention the anniversary, but focused on God’s forgiveness and mercy as he did in his first Angelus address in 2013.

“God does not nail us to our sins; he does not identify us with the evil we have committed,” the pope told the crowd.

“God wants to free us,” the pope said. He wants people to use their freedom to do good and not evil. “This is possible it’s possible with his grace.”

Pope Francis’ Angelus address focused on the Gospel passage being read at Masses around the world: St. John’s account of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery.

The scribes and Pharisees, planning to stone the woman in accordance with the law, brought her to Jesus in an attempt to trick him. “If Jesus followed the severity of the law, approving the stoning of the woman, he would lose his fame of meekness and goodness, which so fascinated people,” the pope said. “But if he wanted to be merciful, he would go against the law, which he himself said he had come not to abolish but to fulfill.”

Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”

“This response scatters the accusers, disarming all of them in the true sense of the word,” the pope said. They leave one by one, beginning with the oldest, who is “more aware of not being without sin.”

“How good it would be for us, too, to be aware that we are sinners,” Pope Francis said. “How good it would be if we had the courage to let fall to the ground the stones we have for throwing at others and rather to think about our own sins.”

Every sin is a betrayal of God, making people “adulterers before God,” the pope said. But Jesus says to all, like he said to the woman in the Gospel, “Go, and from now on do not sin anymore.”

“Her experience represents God’s will for each of us: not our condemnation, but our salvation through Jesus,” Pope Francis said.


The pope thanked the volunteers, especially those who are grandparents and share the faith with their grandchildren. Speaking from the window of the apostolic palace, he noticed that thousands of people were outside St. Peter’s Square and he asked the volunteers to “think about the people in Pius XII Square you see they couldn’t get in make sure they receive a copy of this Gospel, too.”
EAGLES FLY – Gonzales-based Boy Scout Troop 65 recently promoted eight members to Eagle Scout, the highest rank in boy scouting. They are, from left, Matthew Savoie, Luke Savoie, Erik Viator, Jeffrey Kelley, Joe Stassi, Mason Ruiz, Charles Hoops and Chris Delatte. As part of the requirements of attaining Eagle Scout, each boy had to earn at least 21 merit badges, demonstrate leadership and research, plan, organize and execute a community service project. Matthew Savoie, a 2015 graduate of Ascension Prep., painted parking lot stripes at Holy Rosary Church in St. Amant. Luke Savoie, a senior at St. Amant High, cleaned and repainted the parking lot at Holy Rosary for striping. Viato, a sophomore at Dutchtown High, developed a Family Items Bank for families in need at St. Mark Church in Gonzales, Kelley, a senior at Catholic High, poured concrete slabs and installed concrete benches for St. Mark Church’s Way of the Cross courtyard; and Stassi, a senior at Catholic High, completed some landscaping and cleaned the stations and pathway of the Way of the Cross at St. Mark. In addition, Ruiz, a senior at St. Amant High, researched and installed a new flagpole in front of St. Theresa School; Houpy, a 2015 graduate of St. Amant High, organized a project. Matthew Savoie, a 2015 graduate of Ascension Prep., painted parking lot stripes at Holy Rosary Church in St. Amant. Matthew Savoie, Luke Savoie, Erik Viator, Jeffrey Kelley, Joe Stassi, Mason Ruiz, Charles Hoops and Chris Delatte. As part of the requirements of attaining Eagle Scout, each boy had to earn at least 21 merit badges, demonstrate leadership and research, plan, organize and execute a community service project. Matthew Savoie, a 2015 graduate of Ascension Prep., painted parking lot stripes at Holy Rosary Church in St. Amant. Luke Savoie, a senior at St. Amant High, cleaned and repainted the parking lot at Holy Rosary for striping. Viato, a sophomore at Dutchtown High, developed a Family Items Bank for families in need at St. Mark Church in Gonzales, Kelley, a senior at Catholic High, poured concrete slabs and installed concrete benches for St. Mark Church’s Way of the Cross courtyard; and Stassi, a senior at Catholic High, completed some landscaping and cleaned the stations and pathway of the Way of the Cross at St. Mark. In addition, Ruiz, a senior at St. Amant High, researched and installed a new flagpole in front of St. Theresa School; Houpy, a 2015 graduate of St. Amant High, organized a project.
Redemptorist students celebrate the life and works of Dr. Seuss

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

As America yawned over Dick and Jane primers and debated their effectiveness in teaching children to read, Dr. Seuss sprang on the scene and opened a box of mischief with “The Cat in the Hat” and readers of all ages have loved the unique vocabulary, characters and life lessons in his books for decades.

He urges readers to have fun by turning a rainy day into a chaotic adventure with a troublesome feline in “Cat in the Hat,” and pesters them like Sam-I-Am to grow by trying something new in “Green Eggs and Ham.” He illustrates a person is a person no matter how small in “Horton Hears a Who” and demonstrates the transforming power of love in “How the Grinch Stole Christmas.”

Quotes from Seuss’ books emphasized that he wanted to teach children to think as well as read:

“The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you’ll go.” – I Can Read With My Eyes Shut!

“Think and wonder, wonder and think ... you have brains in your head, you have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself in any direction you choose” – Oh, the Places You’ll Go.

Seuss wrote in his essay “Writing for Children: A Mission in the Hat” and readers of all ages have loved the unique vocabulary, characters and life lessons in his books for decades.

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Bears coach Pete Boudreaux selected for National High School Hall of Fame

By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

The 34th National High School Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony this summer will feature a Baton Rouge coach honored many times not only for his coaching ability but also for what Catholic High School Athletic Director J.P. Kelly calls “his excellent example of Christian values” both on and off the field.

CHS coach Pete Boudreaux will be inducted into the National High School Hall of Fame on July 2 in Reno, Nevada. Boudreaux is one of 12 people nationwide selected for the honor this year. He will be recognized alongside other high school sports and performing arts leaders, including Heisman Trophy recipient Steve Spurrier.

Boudreaux was selected for the National Hall School Hall of Fame honor following a two-level selection process. Once inducted, the CHS cross-country and track and field coach will be one of 447 members in the organization, which was started in 1982 to recognize the extraordinary achievements and accomplishments of high school athletes, coaches, contest officials, administrators, performing arts coaches/directors and others.

Throughout his 49-year coaching career at CHS, Boudreaux has led his teams to 43 state championships. That record includes 16 state cross country championships, 12 state indoor track titles and 15 state outdoor track championships. In addition, under his coaching, 23 CHS athletes set state records, including the 1975 cross country team which compiled the only perfect score of 15 recorded in state history.

In addition to coaching, Boudreaux, who graduated from Catholic High in 1959, is also a guidance counselor and physical education teacher at his alma mater. He served as the school’s athletic director for 30 years and was inducted into the school’s Grizzly Greats Athletic Hall of Fame. In 2014, he was inducted into the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame in Natchitoches.
**The Witch**

A24

Slim, disturbing mood piece about 17th-century New England, set some 60 years before the Salem witch trials. In lieu of showing panic within an entire community, writer-director Robert Eggers opts to study not, alas, to especially good effect, eerie occurrences within a single family. Exiled from their Puritan community, the unnamed clan (led by parents Ralph Ineson and Kate Dickie) struggles to deal with a series of gory events some among them are inclined to blame on the witchcraft supposedly being practiced by their baby daughter. Director Stephen Hopkins deftly explores the double meaning of the film’s title, chronicling Owens’ personal struggle against racism and bigotry while celebrating his astounding athletic achievements. What emerges is a valuable history lesson for adolescents as well as the parents, and an inspiring portrait of personal courage, determination, friendship and tolerance. Adult themes, an out-of-wedlock pregnancy, and occasional crude and profane language. A-II; PG-13

**Eddie the Eagle**

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**Race**

Focus

Olympic track and field legend Jesse Owens (Stephan James) is the focus of this entertaining film, chronicling Owens’ journey to the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, where he won four gold medals and, as an African American, single-handedly dealt a devastating blow to Nazism. A-III; PG-13

**Triple 9**

Open Road

Cops honest and otherwise clash with Russian mobsters on the mean streets of Atlanta in this extremely violent thriller directed by John Hillcoat. A mafia moll (Kate Winslet) blackmails corrupt officers (most prominently Chiwetel Ejiofor and Anthony Mackie) into carrying out a bank robbery, hoping to free her jailed lover back in Moscow. But a detective (Woody Harrelson) and his nephew, a rookie (Casey Affleck), suspect trouble and slowly begin to unravel the conspiracy. This elaborate, taut tale of extortion, revenge and (ultimately) justice. The eventual wrap-up may be morally acceptable, but along the path to it a whole lot of bullets are spent and buckets of blood are shed all to an ear-splitting soundtrack. The squeamish and those averse to grit will do well to choose another movie. Pervasive bloody violence, including gunplay and torture, drug use, full female and rear male nudity, frequent crude and profane language. L; R

**Gods of Egypt**

Lionsgate

This unintentionally funny swords-and-sandals epic about warring deities in ancient Egypt, directed with deadly seriousness by Alex Proyas, unfolds at a furious pace a fantasy adventure turned frenetic video game. A wicked god (Gerard Butler) usurps the throne of his brother (Bryan Brown), slaying him in the process, and gouges out the eyes of his nephew (Nikolaj Coster-Waldau), thereby removing his divine powers. But a teenage mortal (Brenton Thwaites) and his resourceful girlfriend (Courtney Eaton) schemes to return the rightful heir. Viewers are unlikely to fall into the sin of idolatry as a result of this overblown nonsense which strays, on occasion, into outright campiness before fading quickly and mercifully from memory. Mythological hooey, cartoonish action violence, an adulterous relationship, at least one crude term. A-III; PG-13

**Whiskey Tango Foxtrot**

Paramount

A low moral tone pervades this fact-based blend of comedy and drama, set in the early 2000s, about a deskbound reporter (Tina Fey) who impulsively transforms her life by becoming a war correspondent in Afghanistan. As she befriends her guide and translator (Christoph Abbott) as well as one of her few female peers (Margot Robbie) she also falls into a largely commitment-free romance with a dashing photojournalist (Martin Freeman) notorious for his womanizing. In adapting Kim Barker’s 2011 memoir “The Taliban Shuffle,” co-directors Glenn Ficarra and John Requa showcase the oppressive restrictions placed on women in some Muslim cultures, along with the hypocrisy of some public officials (personified here by Alfred Molina) charged with enforcing such mores. But their film takes for granted the off-kilter ethics that currently prevail in the West, exaggerated here by the decadence-breeding perils of a combat zone. Thus Robert Carlock’s screenplay gives an amused pass to cocaine-sniffing, drunkenness, alcohol-fueled promiscuity and even sex with animals. Scenes of armed conflict with brief but graphic gore, drug use, a debased view of human sexuality, semi-graphic nonmarital bedroom activity, fleeting pornographic images including an act of femmicide, numerous uses of profanity, pervasive rough and crude language. O; R
When reconciliation doesn’t work, it’s time to move forward

The song “Hello” marks Adele’s return to music after a hiatus. For fans of her jazzy vocals, this is indeed a welcome return.

The song presents vintage Adele sound, a power ballad that showcases her immense vocal talent. The song appears to be about a person’s nostalgic look at a past romance. However, Adele, in an interview, commented that the song is not just about a lost romantic relationship, but also about losing touch with others.

It is true that we meet people, like them, and yet because of the way life can unfold, sometimes we can’t continue the same level of closeness. However, the song’s character describes more than just a separation.

She says that “I must’ve called a thousand times to tell you I’m sorry for everything I’ve done. But when I call you never seem to be home.” He answers with “Hello from the outside. At least I can say that I’ve tried. To tell you I’m sorry for breaking your heart. But it doesn’t matter, it clearly doesn’t tear you apart anymore.”

Hello, how are you?
It’s so typical of me to talk about myself, I’m sorry. I hope that you are well. Did you ever make it out of that town where nothing ever happened? It’s no secret that the both of us are running out of time.

(Repeat refrain.)
Hello from the outside
At least I can say that I’ve tried
To tell you I’m sorry for breaking your heart
But it doesn’t matter, it clearly doesn’t tear you apart
Anymore

Sung by Adele | Copyright © 2015, XL/Columbia Records

**On The Record**

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**MARTIN** is an Indiana pastoral counselor who reviews current music for Catholic News Service. Your comments are always welcome. 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.”
Catholicism, a resurrection faith

I wonder how many of you readers have seen the movie “Risen.” You should. It is a film worth seeing. The movie industry has tried many times to put the life of Jesus on the screen. Most of these attempts have been not so good. To my mind, one of these, in my opinion, was “The Passion of the Christ” produced and directed by Mel Gibson. It was faulted by some for implying an intended condemnation of the whole Jewish people as responsible for Christ’s crucifixion, not just their religious leaders and the Roman governor, Pilate. However, it stayed closer to the Gospel, had a wonderful portrait of Mary, Jesus’ mother, and gave us a Jesus who was strong and believable. And, if I remember correctly, it had a resurrection scene that was imaginative, but just sort of added to the rest of the movie. The real connection of the resurrection to Jesus’ life and purpose was never explained.

“Risen” does a lot better with the resurrection. In fact, the resurrection is what ties the whole movie together. The producer’s decision to release it just prior to Easter was theologically as well as financially astute. For the movie is not so much about the life and ministry of Jesus as it is about the fear of Pilate that Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah and his promise that, even though the authorities will kill him, he will rise again, will somehow be vindicated. The Jewish people are expecting a messiah to lead them in revolt against the Romans, and should that happen, the peace and order Pilate was sent to maintain would be broken and his governorship would fail. To add to his problems, the Roman emperor is due to arrive in Palestine in a few weeks. It is time for Christ’s crucifixion, not just their religious leaders and the Romans, and must end in death. The Romans, and should that happen, the peace and order Pilate was sent to maintain would be broken and his governorship would fail. To add to his problems, the Roman emperor is due to arrive in Palestine in a few weeks. The producer’s decision to release it just prior to Easter was theologically as well as financially astute. For the movie is not so much about the life and ministry of Jesus as it is about the fear of Pilate that Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah and his promise that, even though the authorities will kill him, he will rise again, will somehow be vindicated. The Jewish people are expecting a messiah to lead them in revolt against the Romans, and should that happen, the peace and order Pilate was sent to maintain would be broken and his governorship would fail. To add to his problems, the Roman emperor is due to arrive in Palestine in a few weeks. It is time for Christ’s crucifixion, not just their religious leaders and the Romans, and must end in death.

Jesus’ role is not the lead role in the movie. Its time frame is only from the crucifixion to the ascension of Jesus into heaven. The story is told through the experiences of the Roman tribune, Pilate’s military commander in Palestine. He is played very well by Joseph Fiennes. It is his character, who represents all of us, the Roman, the pagan, the superb soldier hardened to death whose whole life is changed forever by his experience of the risen Christ. With close fidelity to the Gospels, the characters of Mary Magdalene and Simon Peter are very well portrayed in post resurrection scenes. Magdalene is street wise and totally attached to her savior. Her faith and her love are evident. St. Peter is perfect, just how most of us would imagine him. Big and burley, a little bumbling but always the leader. None of the other apostles are given names, and one of them is a little giddy. Except on the cross, Jesus is not seen until after the resurrection. He is a solid, youngish Jew, a teacher and example of love, healing, mercy and forgiveness and something of a mystery.

In a remarkable display of reticence, Hollywood does not go beyond the Gospel account in portraying the resurrection itself. Of course, the account in the Gospels fits the story line of the movie itself. Hollywood’s treatment of the ascension is something else. But then, the accounts of the ascension in Scripture differ. How would you imagine it? The way the movie handles it is effective and rather startling. You have to see it. Both the scene and the words of Jesus lead to a deeper understanding of the whole resurrection and ascension event.

God so loved the world that he sent his only son to save us. From what? To save us from our worldly, often sinful attempts to solve the problems of human life. Jesus, the Son of God came as true man to show us how God wants us to live a human life that is often difficult and must end in death.

As his disciples, we are called to follow him and, with the power of his spirit, to do likewise.

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 johnny.carville@gmail.com.

Mission Statement
The mission of The Catholic Commentator is to provide news, information and commentary to the people of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, Catholics and their neighbors alike. In doing so, The Catholic Commentator strives to further the wider mission of the Church: to evangelize, to communicate, to educate and to give the Catholic viewpoint on important issues of the present day.

PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PRAY FOR US
Please pray for the priests, deacons and religious women and men in the Baton Rouge Diocese.

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Apr. 1 Rev. Gary Belsey
What most moves your heart? I was asked this question recently at a workshop. We were asked to respond to this question: When do you most naturally feel compassion in your heart? For me, the answer came easily. I am most moved when I see helplessness, when I see someone or something helpless to tend to its own needs and to protect its own dignity. It might be a baby, hungry and crying, too little to feed itself and to safeguard its own dignity. It might be a woman in a hospital, sick, in pain, dying, helpless to get better, unable to attend to her own dignity. It might be an unemployed man, down on his luck, unable to find work, the odd man out when everyone else seems to be doing great. It might be a little girl on the playground, helpless as she is teased and bullied, suffering indignity. Or it might just be a baby kitten, hungry, helpless, pleading with its eyes, unable to speak or attend to its own need. Helplessness tugs at the heart. I am always touched in the softest place inside me by helplessness, by the pleading of finitude. I suspect we all are.

We're in good company. This is what moved Mary, Jesus' mother, at the Wedding Feast of Cana to go over to Jesus and say: “They have no wine!” Her request here has different layers of meaning. At one level, it is a very particular request at a particular occasion in history; she is trying to save her hosts at a wedding from embarrassment, from suffering an indignity. No doubt the shortage of wine was because of some poverty on their part, either a shortage of money or a shortage of good planning, but, either way, they stood to be embarrassed before their guests. But, as with most things in the Gospels, this incident has a deeper meaning. Mary isn't just speaking for a particular host on a particular occasion. She's also speaking universally, as the mother of humanity, Eve, voicing for all of us what John Shea so aptly calls, “the cries of finitude”.

What is finitude? The finite, as we can see from the word itself, contrasts itself to the infinite, to what is not limited, to God. God, alone, is not finite. God, alone, is self-sufficient. God, alone, is never helpless, and God, alone, never needs help from anyone else. Only God is never subject to sickness, hunger, tiredness, irritation, fatigue, bodily and mental diminishment and death. God, alone, never has to suffer the indignity of need, of getting caught short, of inadequate self-expression, of not measuring up, of being embarrassed, of being bullied, of being unable to help himself, and of having to beg silently with his eyes for someone to come and help.

Everything else is finite. Thus, as humans, we are subject to helplessness, illness, lameness, blindness, hunger, tiredness, irritation, diminishment and death. Moreover, within all these, we are also subject to indignity. So many of our words and actions are, in the end, cries of finitude, cries for assistance, the cries of a baby for food, for warmth, for protection, and for a safeguard from indignity. Although we are infinitely more sophisticated in our humanity, we are all still, at one level, the baby kitten, pleading with our eyes for someone to feed us, and all the assertions of self-sufficiency of the rich, the strong, the healthy, the arrogant, and of those who seemingly need no help are in the end nothing other than attempts to keep helplessness at bay. No matter how strong and self-sufficient we might believe ourselves to be, finitude and mortality admit of no exemptions. Tiredness, illness, diminishment, death and painful hungers will eventually find us all. Our wine too will eventually run out. Hopefully someone like the Mother of Jesus will speak for us: They have no wine!

What’s the lesson in this? A number of things:

First, recognizing our finitude can lead to a healthier self-understanding. Knowing and accepting our finitude can help quell a lot of frustration, restlessness and false guilt in our lives. I once had a spiritual director, an elderly nun, who challenged me to live by this axiom: Fear not, you are inadequate. We need to forgive ourselves for our own limits, for the fact that we are human, finite, and are unable to provide ourselves and those around us all that we need. But inadequacy is a forgivable condition, not a moral fault.

Beyond forgiving ourselves for our helplessness, recognizing and accepting our finitude should challenge us too to hear more clearly the cries of finitude around us. And so whether it’s the cry of a baby, the humiliation in the eyes of someone looking for work, the ravaged eyes of the terminally ill patient, or simply the pleading eyes of a young kitten, we need, like Mary, to take up their cause and ensure that someone spares them from indignity by changing their water into wine, by calling out: They have no wine!

**In Exile**

**Father Ron Rolheiser**

I once had a spiritual director, an elderly nun, who challenged me to live by this axiom: Fear not, you are inadequate. We need to forgive ourselves for our own limits...

**Learning to listen during the Year of Mercy**

I was sitting in a reconciliation room once, confessing my usual garden variety list of sins when I was suddenly aware that the priest was gazing out the window.

Being reflective, perhaps? No, I was fairly sure he was daydreaming. I left my confession with the feeling that I was forgiven by God but ignored by my confessor.

We’ve all been in situations where we know we’ve been talking and no one’s been listening. Sometimes, we’re sure, when asked a question by our spouse our answer is not, you are inadequate. We need to forgive ourselves.

We’ve all been in situations where we know we’ve been talking and no one’s been listening. Sometimes, we’re sure, when asked a question by our spouse our answer is

For The Journey

**Effie Caldarola**

but good practice, even for five minutes, and the God of love is there even if we have a tough time shutting up.

Second, our kids need a listening ear. Like most moms, my standard question when my kids walked in the door from school was often, “How was your day?” Not a very creative way to elicit conversation, and depending on the age and the attitude of the kid, that question might result in lengthy banter or a muffled grunt.

Better to stop what you’re doing, look your child in the eye and ask some meatier questions, maybe over a quick snack. Put everything else aside for a few minutes and listen. Because of the constant noise of our world – the Internet, social media, news – we often find ourselves listening to two things at once. I used to think multitasking was a good thing, but I realize it really means you’re just doing a couple of things very poorly instead of one thing well.

This is overwhelmingly true when it comes to listening to another. When my adult children or a friend phones, I’m often at the computer or maybe watching the news. It takes discipline to turn away from screens and give undivided attention for a few minutes to the person on the other end of the line. Focus on them. Say a prayer. Listen. If you’ve had a good spiritual director, or “spiritual companion” as they’re often called, you know what good listening is.

A good companion doesn’t tell you what you should be doing, shower you with advice or regale you with personal experiences. He listens and asks the right questions to lead you to clarity of thinking.

We should practice listening like that with our family and friends. In this Year of Mercy, we all need a trusted friend. Practice being that person.

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**For The Journey**

**Effie Caldarola**

not, you are inadequate. We need to forgive ourselves for our own limits...

FATHER RON ROLHEISER, theologian, teacher and award-winning author, is president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. He can be contacted through ronrolheiser.com or on facebook.com/ronrolheiser
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Monks to honor Pennies for Bread founder at special dinner

By: Marilyn Goff
Special to The Catholic Commentator

The monks of St. Joseph Abbey will honor the founder of the Pennies for Bread and the Abbey program and the 1965 alumni class at a dinner on Thursday, March 31.

That class will also present the Abbey with a donation of several thousand dollars for their bread-distribution “Program of Love,” said Chris Larsen, a retired marine-shipping executive in New Orleans and former handball foe of Bishop Robert W. Muench when both were in the seminary at St. Joseph Seminary College.

In a telephone interview from his home in Covington, Larsen, who founded Pennies for Bread in 1990, reminisced about his experiences at the abbey. He said Bishop Muench was a seminarian three years ahead of him and that both loved to play handball. Larsen admitted, however, that he never beat Bishop Muench.

“He was a fantastic handball player,” said Larsen.

He added that when his daughter married the son of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, Bishop Muench presided at the wedding and also attended the reception. The bishop, according to Larsen, threw a handball in the air at the reception.

Justice Scalia saw the bishop’s gesture and looked perplexed until Larsen told him of the history of the handball competition between the two. Larsen admitted Bishop Muench was still the top player and that Scalia got a great laugh at the story.

Although Larsen said the dinner is highly unusual, he said it is the abbey’s way of thanking the class for the bread program. He said about 40 people will be attending the event and that includes 20 alumni, plus their wives. Larsen ultimately left the seminary for married life.

He got the idea of the Pennies for Bread and the Abbey program when as a young executive in New Orleans, he would look out of his window over Lafayette Park and see an elderly monk carrying baked bread in a wheelbarrow and distributing it to the homeless and needy. Thus was born the idea of Pennies for Bread and the Abbey program, which included corporate and individual donations. A board of advisors was set up, with Larsen serving a chairman.

Larsen said in the beginning the monks needed a bakery, and he contacted Randy Delchamps who, at the time, was closing one of his food stores. Larsen said the donated equipment allowed the monks to set up a first-class bakery-kitchen at the abbey. As a result, in 1990 the Saint Benedictine monks began providing 1,000 loaves each week for the hungry through charitable organizations. Larsen said it was “a beautiful endeavor.”

The bread is distributed in Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Jefferson and St. Tammany parishes and to local organizations.  Larsen said it was “a beautiful endeavor.”

He said the bread comes from an old monk’s original recipe from Holland that includes natural ingredients, with no preservatives.

In its 25-year history, the monks at St. Joseph Abbey have baked and provided 1.8 million loaves of bread to the needy. Larsen said the value of that bread is $4.5 million. As a result, the recipient charitable organizations have that same amount, $4.5 million, available to purchase other goods and items for the homeless and needy.

Larsen, who managed the program for 10 years, also credit the success of the continuing program to Henry Carrigan, who managed the program for 15 years and Sonny Launey, who managed the program for nearly four years.

Larsen said the original baker was Father Johnathan Defranze, who came with a baker’s background as his father was a professional baker. Today the monks manage the successful program under Father Killian Tolg, bakery manager.
U.S. Supreme Court reverses Circuit Court ruling on abortion law

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Days after the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans upheld a Louisiana law requiring doctors who provide abortions to have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed that ruling, thereby allowing a clinic in Baton Rouge which had temporarily stopped performing the procedures to renew its practice.

The court gave no reasons in its decision issued Friday, March 4, but did note it was consistent with a ruling this past June involving a similar component of Texas’ abortion law. The court’s ruling came 48 hours after justices heard arguments in the Texas case. The Circuit Court has upheld both the Louisiana and Texas laws.

“I was disappointed by the court’s ruling but not surprised,” said Danielle Van Haute, director of the Respect Life Program for the Diocese of Baton Rouge. “I was encouraged by the 5th Circuit Court’s decision to enforce the ruling but it was tempered with the knowledge that this was one victory in a much bigger battle. We give thanks for the small victories when they come.”

Van Haute said Delta Women’s Clinic in Baton Rouge had temporarily ceased performing of abortions following the appellate court’s decision. She added the clinic had remained open, seeing women for pre- and post-abortion counseling as well as referring women to New Orleans for the abortion procedure.

“We are disappointed that the Supreme Court has blocked our common-sense admitting privileges law,” said Benjamin Clapper, executive director of Louisiana Right to Life. “Abortion physicians shouldn’t have exceptions to safety standards, and we hope the Supreme Court will ultimately decide to protect Louisiana’s right to enact appropriate regulations to protect the health of its citizens.”

Louisiana’s law will likely remain blocked until a decision is rendered in the Texas case, Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstedt, a fact Van Haute conceded.

“At this point we’re waiting,” she said. “It is difficult at times. We are called not just to end abortion but to build a culture of life. That’s not anything that we can do on our own.”

“We can easily lose focus and get overwhelmed by everything that needs to be done, could be done, should be done,” she added. “Joy and peace come from prayer, frequent reception of the sacraments, remaining faithful to the daily duties that the Lord lays in front of us, and ongoing conversion.”

Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry, who called the Circuit Court’s decision a “victory for Louisiana,” said he will continue to pursue the case.

Volunteers pitch in to help clean up ‘unmerciful’ devastation

By Rachelle Smith
The Catholic Commentator

“The devastation was total and unmerciful,”

That’s how Barry Aucoin, a parishioner of St. Elizabeth Church in Paincourtville, described the damage from a violent storm system that swept through the area on Feb. 23. Aucoin was one of more than 200 volunteers who gave up their Saturday on March 5 to help residents affected by the same EF-3 tornado that left two dead in Convent.

In Paincourtville, the storm cut a path through several streets off of Louisiana Hwy. 908, punching holes into houses and throwing family memories like photos, trophies and awards all about.

Volunteers from various local churches, including St. Jules in Belle Rose, St. Elizabeth, St. Ann in Napoleonville and St. Joseph the Worker in Pierre Part, as well as organizations, such as Assumption High School ROTC and Beta Club, and other groups, some even from out of town, moved debris, cut trees, supplied tarps, cooked, organized and offered help in any way they could.

Aucoin noted how surreal it was “to recover the precious keepsakes of people’s lives in ditches, under sheets of tin or under chunks of broken bricks and mortar.”

Nick Charlet, another volunteer and St. Jules Church parishioner, said the damage was hard for him to process at first because he had never seen anything like this so close to home.

“I was so thankful that no one in the area had been seriously hurt,” he said.

Charlet, who was able to use some of his experience in project management and executing large jobs during the volunteer day, added the number of people coming together to help made him proud to be part of the community.

“I was thankful that the community for people to stick together in this time of need,” Charlet said, adding that there is a lot of work left to do.

“God is definitely working in our area, and I hope as a community, we can embrace that.”

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Volunteers maneuver carefully around a large tree downed during violent storms that passed through Assumption Parish. Photos provided by Gena D’Agostino
the bugs nonstop. Benjamin has no objection.

“I feel so happy and full of joy,” said Catherine, a caring companion at St. James Place in Baton Rouge. “I do know there is a God who can make all things possible. And I will give him the praise that I am able to see my baby again.”

“God had his wings of protection that kept (Benjamin) safe all of these many years.”

As with many happy endings, the beginning is rooted in tragedy. The Clarkees are originally from the West African country of Liberia, a place where Catherine’s oldest son, Richard, 42, still resides and is the owner of a small business.

The family’s odyssey began in 1990 when Catherine’s husband was killed in a civil war that ravaged her country. Pregnant with Benjamin, she fled to a refugee camp in neighboring Liberia for three years with Richard and attended college at Stella Maria Polytechnic University in the nation’s capital.

When in Liberia, Benjamin, who was not listed on the original immigration process, was not reunited with his mother until 2006. She would not see her son again until 2013, forcing her to leave her newborn baby behind with her sister-in-law in Cote D’Ivoire, where Benjamin was born.

Not long after the birth of Benjamin, Catherine became ill, forcing her to leave her newborn behind with her sister-in-law in Cote D’Ivoire while fleeing to Ghana with her second oldest son, Augusta, who now lives in Missouri and was reunited with his younger brother in Baton Rouge on March 13.

While in Ghana, Catherine began the immigration process to the United States, taking advantage of a widow provision. However, because Benjamin was still living in Cote D’Ivoire with his aunt, he was not part of the process.

When Catherine’s sister-in-law died during a civil war in Cote D’Ivoire, Benjamin rejoined his mother in Ghana. But because he was not listed on the original immigration paperwork, he was not allowed to accompany Catherine to the United States in February 2006. She would not see her son again until the tearful reunion in Baton Rouge.

Catherine’s immigration also marked the start of what would be a lengthy and rather circuitous odyssey for Benjamin, who went back and forth from Ghana to Liberia on two occasions. When in Liberia, Benjamin, who earned his high school degree in a refugee camp in Ghana, stayed with Richard and attended college at Stella Maria Polytechnic in Liberia for three years with financial assistance being provided by his mother. He completed three years as a biology major with hopes of one day becoming a doctor, a dream he hopes to continue to pursue at LSU.

While Benjamin was hopscotching from Ghana to Liberia and back, Catherine was enlisting the aid of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge to bring his mother to her. She credits Corina Salazar, director of immigration services for CCDBR and her staff for their tireless efforts for not only reuniting her with her son but for their encouragement and giving her hope during her darkest hours.

“I am very much grateful to (Salazar),” Catherine said. “I give her all the thanks. I ask God to bless her.”

“I thank God for teaching me how to wait,” she added. “Because I could have given up. I almost gave up.”

“Catholic Charities has helped us a lot. They helped me with the process and bringing Benjamin here with the help of God.”

Catholic Charities has been an instrumental part of Benjamin’s life since his arrival on American soil. He currently is participating in CCDBR’s orientation program, along with 11 other refugees, becoming familiar with a new environment and helping him register for Social Security and Medicare. The agency will also help him land a job, which he explained will allow him to earn money to assist his mom and send to his brother in Liberia.

During a recent outing with his fellow orientation classmates, he was awestruck by the beauty of downtown Baton Rouge as well as the Mississippi River.

“It sure is a beautiful place,” he said, adding that some of the major changes he has noticed in Baton Rouge as compared to Liberia are a higher standard of living, better transportation and schooling and the abundance of electricity.

“Because I could have given up. I almost gave up.”

“I thank God for teaching me how to wait … because I could have given up. I almost gave up.”

Catherine Clarke

His mother has even exposed him to shopping at Walmart, where his first reaction to entering the iconic retail store outlet was, “Wow!”

“Catholic Charities has been a good help to me,” he said. “I am grateful (to the agency) for making it possible to reunite with my mom.”

Catherine, who is now working with Catholic Charities to bring her oldest son to Baton Rouge, has slowly introduced Benjamin to many of south Louisiana’s delicacies, including crawfish. Although learning to enjoy the new dishes, he responded with a hearty “no way!” when asked if he ate and peeled boiled crawfish.

For now, Catherine Clarke and her son are settling into a new way of life; for her, the joy of finally being reunited with her son, for Benjamin the excitement and trepidation that comes with learning a new environment and culture. But their mother-son bond, their love for each other is obvious.

“This is my baby. Thank you Jesus,” she said, tears of joy finally dawning years of sorrow.
education program at St. Michael. “We have seen tremendous improvement academically,” she said, noting how the program matches its curriculum based on Tyler’s individual needs.

Through this individualized instruction, Sherry Patton noted Tyler accelerated “two grade levels (by subject)” just since the beginning of the school year. Also, as practicing Baptists, she enjoys the focus on Christian values at the school. It’s something she added was not available at the public school Tyler attended last school year. But there’s also another reason why she is happy her son is at St. Michael, and it’s a reason other parents know is critical for a student’s success.

“He just enjoys school now,” she said.

Veronica Winchester, director of special education for the diocese, is hoping a “projected expansion” to its Program for Exceptional Students will allow other families, like the Patton’s, to find similar experiences.

Winchester noted the program is currently determining interest and enrollment at other schools. The programs, which were launched at the beginning of school this year, include services for students with autism, intellectual/other exceptionalities and a dyslexia lab as part of a regular education program.

Also, demonstrating that the program responds to student needs, a new program was started in November. In conjunction with the dyslexia lab offered at three of the diocese’s schools, instructional support services were made available to any student at those schools in need, according to Winchester.

Since 1962, special education has always been offered in the diocese, but last year, following a three-year study by a special task force, the program was changed from a single site to multiple schools, which makes easier access for families and students in need.

The innovative expansion this school year brought special education services to host schools St. Michael High, Our Lady of Mercy, St. Louis King of France, Redemptorist St. Gerard, Most Blessed Sacrament and Holy Ghost.

Now, with a projected expansion, more families and students in the diocese can benefit from a program that is already showing success.

“With this school year, students in the program as a whole are projected to have greater than one year growth across the board,” explained Winchester.

Jim and Wendy Boyle are seeing some of that success first hand with their son, James. A first grade student in the special education program at St. Louis King of France, the Boyle’s have been pleased with their son’s progress.

Knowing they wanted a private education for their son, Wendy Boyle noted there wasn’t a clear path of where to go at first. She heard about the diocese’s program through word of mouth, and since enrolling James, both she and her husband agree it is “definitely a valuable resource” for the community.

Jim Boyle explains James attends a small classroom and receives “so much individualized attention” for his core subjects. During the school day, he also takes part in regular education classes for religion and enrichment courses, and as would be expected with any first grader, James already has a favorite enrichment class.

“He likes Spanish,” said Jim Boyle, smiling.

“He was speaking sentences on the first day.”

Any family interested in learning more about the special education programs offered by the diocese, or if you would like to donate to the program so families and students in need can benefit, visit the Catholic Schools’ Office website at csoshr.org.

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**We Are Called to Put Our Faith into Action as Agents of Mercy**

After more than 2,000 years, Jesus’ message lives on. Our world may have changed, but our faith has not. As disciples of Christ, we are called to love one another, to extend a helping hand to those in need. With His help, we can perform miracles. We can turn misery into hope, despair into joy. And through service to others, our own faith is strengthened.

Easter is a symbol of God’s love for us, a time of rebirth and renewal, spiritual awakening, and a celebration of divine mercy. Pope Francis said, “Let us be renewed by God’s mercy... and let us become agents of this mercy...” Agents of Mercy: what a powerful way to describe individuals whose lives revolve around kindness, compassion, and generosity.

These agents of mercy are true heroes, people who have heard a call to action and responded with no expectation of rewards, honors, or accolades. In the graphic, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, founder of St. Vincent de Paul, 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.

Every St. Vincent de Paul supporter is an agent of mercy. Thousands of volunteer hours, financial support, and donations of food enabled our Dining Room to serve a record 242,695 meals last year. For people like two-year-old Jordan and his mother, our Bishop Ott Shelter is a safe haven and a chance to start over. Last year, we provided over 28,000 guest nights of shelter to homeless men, women, and children. The most vulnerable segment of the homeless population is women and children, and we will soon begin an expansion of our Sweet Dreams Shelter to better meet that growing need. At our Community Pharmacy, mercy is dispensed with every prescription we fill. In 2015, we filled over 30,000 prescriptions worth an estimated $8 million.

During this holy season, we are especially grateful for the people who make our work possible. We hope you will become an agent of mercy and support our efforts by using the envelope enclosed in this issue to make a difference in the life of someone who desperately needs a helping hand. You can also go online and give at svdpbr.org.

**Become an Agent of Mercy by using the enclosed envelope to make a gift or give online at svdphb.org**