Task force to release report

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Following months of delay brought on by this past summer’s flooding, the diocesan Pastoral Planning Task Force is debuting its much-anticipated report to the public.

A series of meetings at the deanery level began Feb. 2 at St. Mark Church in Gonzales and will conclude Feb. 21 at St. Joseph Cathedral in Baton Rouge.

Chairman Father Trey Nelson, who has spent the past three years working with task force members gathering information, attending church meetings throughout the diocese and helping craft the final document, said the report addresses immediate and long-term needs.

“The immediate need it speaks to is how do you deliver priestly ministry with smaller number of priests that has already in some places affected Mass schedules and will continue to do so?” said Father Nelson, who is pastor at St. Jude the Apostle Church in Baton Rouge. “The laity and priests alike are aware that priests in certain places may not be able to do as many Masses as they have been doing.”

Father Nelson cited St. Isidore Church in Baker and St. Pius X Church in Baton Rouge as to how Mass schedules are being impacted. Previously, each of the parishes held a vigil Mass but that has been reduced to one, which is alternated among each church depending on the time of year.

Additionally, Father Nelson noted how the cluster church parishes of St. Joseph Church in Paulina, St. Michael the Archangel in Convent and Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Gramercy have reduced their combined nine weekend Masses to six.

“This process will yield further recommendations to Bishop (Robert W.) Muench,” Father Nelson said.

He added that several of the task force’s recommendations have already been implemented, including establishing a resource and emergency phone number for priests to call if an illness, and he needs to find a replacement to celebrate Mass. Chancellor Father Yi, pastor at Ascension of Lord Church and St. Francis of Assisi Church, both in Donaldsonville, is the contact person for priests when necessary.

Also established and already implemented is that parish to parish tithing has been moved to extraordinary income, which means, according to Father Nelson, that if a financially stronger parish wishes to help a needy parish by donating money through a one-time donation or on a monthly basis, the needy parish will not be taxed by the diocese on the amount of the donation.

See REPORT PAGE 20

FUTURE DIVIDENDS

Club Blue making an investment in the lives of area youth

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

The young professionals organization Club Blue has an investment plan with returns surpassing any business goal. Its members pool their resources, talents and time into ministering to underserved children, who happily respond and talk about things going on in their lives and their hopes and dreams for the future, according to Club Blue founder Joseph Cefalu.

Cefalu, the 2016 Catholic Schools Distinguished Graduate for St. Michael the Archangel

SEE CLUB PAGE 7

Joseph Cefalu, co-founder of Club Blue, asks who wants to race first during some after-school activities for children in the Boys & Girls Club. Club Blue is a social and philanthropic network of young professionals who are dedicated to developing awareness of and providing volunteer opportunities to support the Boys & Girls Club. Photo provided by Joseph Cefalu
The Catholic Commentator  February 3, 2017

The gift of suffering

Suffering is an inescapable fact of life, from which no one is immune. Whether it’s the agony of the annual dental visit or much deeper mental and physical anguish caused by life events, suffering is inevitable.

For Catholics, however, suffering is the gift that keeps on giving.

Redemptive suffering, defined as any physical or mental tribulation, is an important tenet of the Catholic faith. Catholics, as well as Christians, believe that human suffering, when offered up through Christ, can remit the punishment for one’s own sins or for the sins of another.

Through our own suffering, by offering up the pain to Jesus, who, of course, went through the ultimate suffering to save all souls, we are able to help others gain entry into God’s kingdom.

“Christ is the ultimate for (redemptive suffering),” Deacon Pat Broussard said. “He suffered on the cross for all of us. So we share in his suffering.

“You offer (suffering) to God for special intentions. It gives you solace and gives your suffering purpose.”

Offering up one’s suffering can be achieved either formal or informally. Formally may mean using morning prayer to offer up the day’s joys, sufferings, pains and intentions.

Informally might be something as simple as using your own words to ask God to use a particular suffering for a specific purpose. Essentially, by accepting and not complaining about life’s daily inconveniences, frustrations and pains, and by offering that up to God, you are able to pay on your own debt, or that of others, owed to God for our human weakness.

Embracing the cross, or the acceptance of one’s hardships, is essential for eternal salvation.

So the next time you stub your toe and issue utterances that require confession, or find yourself stymied on the bottleneck that is I-10, or when lost in the desert of Lent wondering why you ever decided to give up chocolate, or even have a chat with the boss, take a moment to say a brief prayer and offer it up either for your own sins or that of others. In that moment, you will be helping a lost relative or friend with their own salvation.

Salt and Light

By Dina Dow

“Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.” (Mt 5:16)

The messages gleaned from the Sunday Mass readings over the next two weeks are incredibly conceivable and livable. Jesus uses tangible resources to teach us to be effective witnesses of his love. There is also reiteration of the necessity to follow the Law of God based on his wisdom, together with Jesus’ embellishment and fulfillment of the old covenant.

Light

The prophet Isaiah proclaims the goodness of deeds done in service of others through sharing of bread, sheltering the homeless and clothing the naked. Through these acts the light of heaven will shine forth and the glory of God will be seen. Sound familiar? It should. This is the precursor of the corporal works of mercy we know today. As God provides the necessities for his people, we imitate him as his disciples by providing the same for others. Thus, we are his light for the world to see. These rays streaming from simple acts of kindness have no barriers and radiate with love and mercy. We are carriers of the message of Jesus: a light in the darkness, a lantern of joy and a beacon for hope. Shine on!

Salt

Salt is an essential life-giving mineral. By way of processing salt harvested from mines, the ocean or small natural springs, what we use every day satisfies, preserves and heals. Too much or too little salt will cause harm, but just enough salt will add flavor to a bland meal, preserve precious goods and heal the deepest wounds. To be a seasoned witness of Jesus’ message means to be “salt-shaker.” Our area encompassing South Louisiana is well-known for meals bursting with flavor. As we satisfy our taste buds with good ole southern cooking, we can also share the savory treasures of life-giving faith in Jesus Christ by adding a little bit of salt to the pot.

God’s Wisdom

Finally, we hear Jesus reiterate the importance of the Ten Commandments, while at the same time deepening our way of observing them. Perfection in God’s law comes with love and accountability. Jesus fulfills the sacrificial laws of the old covenant through his passion, death and resurrection, while at the same time embelishes the moral laws, lifting us to new ways of seeking the best response of how to fully love God and neighbor. We are to stand firm, trust in his wisdom and know he has prepared eternity for those who truly love him. As we read in Sirach, “If you choose you can keep the commandments, they will save you; if you trust in God, you too shall live …” Lord, teach us the wisdom of God so that we may live with you.

Dow is the Director of Evangelization & Catechesis for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

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DID YOU KNOW

A rendering shows St. Joseph Cathedral in Baton Rouge as it appeared in 1853. As Baton Rouge celebrates its 200th anniversary, it’s important to remember the Catholic Church has been in the area for much longer. In fact, although the date of construction of the first Catholic Church in Baton Rouge remains a mystery, it is known it was already standing in 1792 when the first pastor arrived. The church stood near the site of what is the present State Capitol. The first known chaplain in Baton Rouge was Father Prothais Boyer, who was a Franciscan priest who served in New Orleans during the 1720s. The first marriage celebrated in Baton Rouge was that of Don Antonio de Gras and Genevieve Dulat on Jan. 15, 1773 by Father Carlos Burke. De Gras donated the land on which St. Joseph Cathedral now stands. Photo courtesy of the Archives Department | Diocese of Baton Rouge
Deacon Broussard joining trend of later in life vocations

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

A day that seemingly began like any other for Deacon Pat Broussard turned tragic three years ago with the sudden death of his beloved wife, Aminthe, who died at her desk at the age of 52.

Their's was a love affair like few have the good fortune of experiencing. Aminthe's death initially left Deacon Broussard pondering a future without the women who had become his life partner.

"Your world turns upside down at a moment's notice," he said. "Dealing with the shock and reeling with the situation, immediately God cradled me and surrounded me with such wonderful people. Father (David) Allen, (pastor at Holy Family Church in Port Allen where Deacon Broussard was assigned for seven years) met me at the hospital along with Deacon Ricky Patterson and longtime friend Ann Halphen."

But as so often happens, veiled in tragedy was a future with a twist. As Deacon Broussard recalls, 25 hours after his wife's death, he was sitting at his kitchen table with his mother-in-law Helen, whom he "loves to death" and calls her mom.

At one point, she looked Deacon Broussard in the eye and said, "You know Paddi, I think that you would make a wonderful priest."

"Some people might have gotten a little bent out of shape by that (comment) but it came from Mom and she is a very prayerful woman," Deacon Broussard said. "She was the first person who told me I should pursue the diaconate back in 2002."

"I actually felt through the numbness in hearing her say that it had a little feeling of rightness," he added. "That was a little bit of clarity."

Unbeknownst to Deacon Broussard at the time, the seeds had been planted for a pastoral ministry that will blossom in May when he is ordained a priest for the Diocese of Baton Rouge. And when he lies before Bishop Robert W. Muench at St. Joseph Cathedral in late spring, Deacon Broussard will be joining a trend of priests being ordained later in life.

A year ago, Father Edwin Martin, currently the parochial vicar at St. Thomas More Church in Baton Rouge, was ordained at the age of 59. Father Martin and Deacon Broussard share similar spiritual journeys, joining the priesthood following the death of their wives.

In the past two years, Father Matthew Graham, administrator at St. Elizabeth Church in Paincourtville, was ordained after spending several years in a successful career as a chemical engineer. Also in his class was Father Brad Doyle, who spent a year teaching before entering the seminary.

Deacon Ryan Halford, 33, who will be ordained with Deacon Broussard in May, has also taken the non-traditional route, spending several years in the secular world discerning his own vocation.

"You do have some older guys, but I think it's kind of both (traditional and non-traditional seminarians)," said Father Matt Dupre, director of seminarians for the Diocese of Baton Rouge and pastor at St. Patrick Church in Baton Rouge.

"Certainly, if you are to go to Notre Dame Seminary (in New Orleans) you would see a mixed group of guys," he said. "I can remember when we were in the seminary it was just young guys."

Father Dupre said the older seminarians bring a unique perspective in the sense that they have the experience of raising a family, or being out in the workforce.

"Will that make them more relatable for some people in certain situations," Father Dupre wondered. "I would say yes. But each seminarian brings his own unique talents. The younger guys have a lot to offer."

Deacon Broussard said he has noticed a trend at Notre Dame with later in life seminarians. In fact, he said he and other seminarians have formed an Over 50 Club at Notre Dame, noting that 11 of the 140 seminarians at the seminary have entered into their golden years.

"I love the young men, I love them dearly," said Deacon Broussard, who called Deacon Halford one of God's little gifts.

"But what I noticed right off is when you are sitting with men your own age, in their 50s and 60s, there's just a bit of a different camaraderie."

"We have all been through a little bit, and laugh about things that only older guys can do."

Father Dupre said Father Martin and Deacon Broussard are unique in that they were deacons at the time their wives died.

"It's still a blessing that the Lord is able to, even in those difficult circumstances, call these men into service and into the priesthood," he added. "It always goes back to guys who have an experience of a good pastor, a joyful pastor. That's really what fosters that of a vocation within a man."

After Aminthe's death, Deacon Broussard noted he was faced with three choices: remain a celibate deacon, be laicized and remarry or, as he said, consider the "remote possibility of becoming a priest."

"The call to the permanent diaconate is not the same as to the priesthood," he said. "You have to look at the life, and when I look at the life, I see the reality and the wonderful, and the not so wonderful, and I am still at peace with it."

Religious, political leaders condemn shooting at Quebec mosque

QUEBEC CITY – Faith and political leaders condemned a shooting at Quebec’s main mosque that left at least six people dead.

Vigils were scheduled Jan. 30 in Quebec City and Montreal, the evening after two men entered the Quebec Islamic Cultural Center and opened fire, killing at least six men who were praying and injuring 19 more. Police later arrested two suspects, two men aged between 20 and 30. The motive behind the attack remained unclear.

Pope Francis met with Quebec Archbishop Cardinal Gerald Lacroix in Rome Jan. 30 and assured him of his prayers for the victims of the attack on the mosque. A Vatican statement said the pope highlighted the importance of Christians and Muslims remaining united in prayer in these moments.

Afterward, the cardinal immediately departed for Canada. Archbishop Christian Lepvre of Montreal said: “Nothing can justify such murderous acts aimed at innocent people. We are called to say again that, whatever our beliefs are, as human beings we are all brothers and sisters, all equal in dignity.”

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By Rachele Smith  
The Catholic Commentator

Father Bayhi part of group visiting pope

Father Jeff Bayhi, pastor at St. John the Baptist Church in Zachary, during the pope’s general audience at the Vatican Jan. 18. The delegation was there to discuss human trafficking prevention. The Hospitaller Sisters of Mercy, who are establishing a safe house for girls in the area, are also part of the delegation. Photo by OIS

Father Bayhi said Pope Francis was pleased government officials in Louisiana and the church were working together to stop human trafficking and its grave violation and exploitation of children and women.

The pope said he will continue to pray for us as we fight human trafficking and he asked that we pray for him,” said Father Bayhi.

During their three-to-four minute meeting with the pontiff, Father Bayhi said Pope Francis also blessed a plaque, which will serve as the cornerstone for Metanoia, a home currently under construction at a secure location in the Diocese of Baton Rouge. Father Bayhi has been instrumental in the effort to make Metanoia a reality. The home will serve as a safe place for teen girls rescued from human trafficking. In 2016, statistics released in October from the National Human Trafficking Hotline showed that state officials in Louisiana investigated 76 human trafficking cases and fielded 2,454 calls. Baton Rouge is considered a prime area for human trafficking because of its location next to two major interstate systems.

In addition to their audience with Pope Francis, an opportunity Father Bayhi said was greatly facilitated through a letter written by Archbishop Gregory Aymond of New Orleans, the group also had a three-hour meeting with Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, the chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. Father Bayhi explained that Sorondo is the “pope’s point man” in the fight against human trafficking worldwide.

Father Bayhi also expressed appreciation that his traveling group was able to visit with Consolata Missionary Sister Eugenia Bonetti, a leading figure in helping those sold into trafficking, especially women forced into prostitution.

Father Bayhi said Sister Eugenia has been called the Mother Teresa of human trafficking, especially women.

Before returning home, Father Bayhi and some of his traveling group had the opportunity to show their appreciation and celebrate Mass with the Hospitaller Sisters of Mercy. The order has provided four sisters to help staff Metanoia in Baton Rouge.

“We were able to thank them for giving us such a great gift and for joining us in the fight to stop human trafficking,” Father Bayhi said.

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Speaker offers tips on how to be married and stay engaged

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Dr. James Healy was scandalized years ago when he heard a talk from a psychologist and marriage counselor who revealed he had been married six times. But the man revealed a deeper truth about commitment being the fuel of intimacy in marriage when he said “to the same woman.”

Healy, director of the Center for Family Ministry of the Diocese of Joliet, Illinois since 1989, recently spoke about the many “transfigurations, crucifixions/deaths and resurrections” that occur in marriage during a seminar, “How to Be Married and Stay Engaged,” at the Catholic Life Center.

“Some say that the meaning of marriage preparation is to put reality into the romance and the purpose of marriage enrichment is to put romance into the reality,” said Healy. He emphasized that marriage is an invitation to take part in the paschal mystery of Christ and the church should accompany couples during its journey by providing resources and support.

Many newly married couples often operate under the “halo affect” of romantic love in which “everything is perfect” and both spouses are shining. This is not unlike the transfiguration on the mountain, when Jesus revealed his divinity.

There is nothing “fake” about this period in marriage, as couples get a foretaste of heaven, Healy stated.

But through life’s circumstances, a couple finds it is no longer “on top of the mountain.” As it was for Jesus, it’s time to come down.

“And what is waiting for Jesus (and us) next? The cross,” said Healy.

Each season of change presents a “crucifixion” that requires sacrifice or denial to self, such as moving to a new community, of faith, the church sees marriage and offers them the assistance of self-giving love. Thus, the church plays a vital part in ministering to these couples, said Healy.

A good marriage preparation program will urge the couple to discuss areas of potential conflict that arise during marriage. But evidence suggests marriage prep is good only for the first 5-7 years of marriage, as the couple must continue to strive to strengthen their commitment and receive support if their marriage is to thrive, Healy stated.

“We’ve done a good job with marriage prep, but there’s more,” said Healy, who founded the Illinois Catholic Family Ministries and has served as an advisor to the National Council of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Marriage and the Family.

“We need churches to be supportive. They need to bring couples together to support, teach each other and normalize the stress. Instead of complaining about it, laugh about it sometimes,” said Healy.

A good marriage enrichment program will help a couple get “swept up” in the paschal mystery, Healy said.

“It’s at the Eucharist (Mass) that we unite our dying and rising with Jesus,” said Healy. “We don’t just send wheat and wine up there. We send two things made by human hands (bread and wine) that have been beaten up, broken and transformed. That is like our marriages. Our marriages are both natural and supernatural. Along with the bread and wine, we send up our marriages and say, ‘Lord, transform us.'”

This paschal vision is even reflected in the couple’s physical intimacy, said Healy.

“In the Catholic Church the priest takes the host, the Eucharist, and says, ‘This is my body, given for you.’

“The spouses will joyfully find that we unite our dying and rising with the Eucharist, said Healy.

The families of the honored couples, in turn, offer the larger community the witness of faithful, self-giving love. Thus, the anniversary celebration brings hope in that God is the author and sanctifier of marriages.

“If you look in the Bible, marriage is the most common expression God uses of faithful, divine love,” Healy said. “The kingdom of God is like a happily married couple. That’s the best image.

“The heart of the world, the heart of the universe, is not cruelty, not chance, but love. We (married couples) are supposed to be the most clear, in your face, flesh and bones sign of the ultimate love — what God’s love is really about.”

Mass to celebrate marriage set Feb. 12

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Bishop Robert W. Muench will celebrate a Mass honoring couples celebrating their 25th, 50th and 65th or greater wedding anniversaries on Sunday, Feb. 12, at 3 p.m., at Our Lady of Mercy Church, 445 Marquette Ave., Batou Rouge.

The longest married couple present at the liturgy will be recognized at the event.

The families of the honored couples are invited to attend the liturgy and reception afterward in the Our Lady of Mercy Parish Activity Center.

Couples wishing to attend are urged to contact their church parish office by Friday, Feb. 3. The couples whose names are received after this deadline may not have certificates ready. They can still attend the Mass and reception and register there to have a certificate mailed to them at a later date, according to Darrel Ducote, director of the Office of Marriage and Family Life for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Ducote said the Mass is an opportunity to celebrate in a special way the sacrament of marriage.

“The church has always recognized marriage as an essential element of human life and society. On the natural level, the church sees marriage, and the families that result from it, as the basic building blocks of society and therefore essential to human survival,” said Ducote. “On the level of faith, the church sees marriage as a sacred reality, intended as a gift from God the creator, to lead a man and a woman to form a bond of love that reflects the generous love of God himself as a sacrament. Marriage also allows the couple to cooperate with God the creator to bring new life into the world.”

He added, “Because the church holds marriage in such high esteem, it looks for opportunities to support married couples in their vocation or calling from God. It is in that spirit of supporting marriage that our diocese has a special celebration each year to recognize and honor those couples who have been true to their marital commitment for 25, 50 or 65 years of marriage. The anniversary celebration is an opportunity for the church to offer something to these faithful couples and for those couples to offer something to the church. In the anniversary Mass, the church invites couples to renew their commitment to each other and offers them the assistance of its prayers and blessings. The couples, in turn, offer the larger church community the witness of faithful, self-giving love. Thus, the anniversary Mass publically recognizes the mutual help and support offered between the couples and the church that continues almost unrecognized in the daily life of the community.”
Reverence in church/Catholics and the Freemasons/New rules for baptism?

Q Growing up in our family, God always came first. Our parents taught us to love and respect the Eucharist, especially when the Blessed Sacrament was exposed on the altar. (We would genuflect and bow.)

Our parish church now exposes the Eucharist before Sunday Mass. I am shocked on just why they are there and whom so much as a glance at the altar.

Begin to laugh and text without, it seems, and whip out their cellphones. Then they come one another warmly and catch up in what is clearly a sacred space. Parishioners can greet one another upon entering directly into the worship space. Doors can be closed to separate that area from the worship space as an indication that all conversation should cease once one enters the church proper, especially if the Eucharist is exposed. In smaller rural churches, however, there is often no gathering area at all and one enters directly into the worship space.

It is a natural instinct, and a good thing, for parishioners to want to welcome one another warmly and catch up on their lives and it is often a sign of a parish’s vitality that people genuinely enjoy socializing before and after the Sunday Eucharist.

In such a setting, it might be better not to expose the Blessed Sacrament on the altar before Mass; perhaps, instead, an announcement could be made shortly before Mass that the next few minutes will be spent in silent preparation for the sacred celebration.

And yes, I do think that your congregation needs a reminder from the priest that the use of cellphones is never proper in church whether to speak or to text.)

Q Recently, a friend asked me what the difference was between the Knights of Columbus and the Freemasons, and I didn’t really know what to tell her. I’ve read about the good works done by each of these organizations, and we were wondering whether a Catholic gentleman can belong to both. (Cumming, Georgia)

A The Knights of Columbus is an international organization of Catholic men whose chief work involves helping those in need. Their charitable donations total nearly $2 million annually, and they engage in joint projects with such organizations as Special Olympics and Habitat for Humanity.

Freemasonry is a fraternal society that traces its origin to medieval associations of stonemasons; in the U.S., there are grand lodges in every state, with a total membership of about 1.2 million in the U.S. Masons, too, involve themselves in a variety of charitable works, and no doubt many Americans view Masonry primarily as a social and philanthropic fraternity.

The reality, though, is that Masonry is at heart a naturalistic religion whose basic tenets are incompatible with Catholic faith and practice. (Pope Leo XIII said in 1884 that Masonry had as its fundamental doctrine “that human nature and human reason ought in all things be mistress and guide” and denied “that anything has been taught by God.”)

The Vaticans Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith declared in 1983 that “the church’s negative judgment in regard to Masonic associations remain unchanged” and that “the faithful who enroll in Masonic associations are in a state of grave sin and may not receive holy Communion.”

(1985, a report by historian William J. Whalen of Purdue University given to the U.S. bishops Pastoral Research and Practice Committee said that Masonry “honors Jesus Christ as it honors Socrates, Buddha and Mohammed,” and that Masonry “cannot acknowledge any special spiritual claims by Jesus, since this would violate the basis of Freemasonry,” and that “Catholics in the United States and elsewhere may not be Freemasons.”)

Q Have the rules changed on the sacrament of baptism? Recently I attended a Catholic christening where neither the first nor middle name of the child being baptized was the name of a saint. The only stipulation (Canon 855) is that the name chosen should not be “foreign to Christian sensibility.”

Prior to 1983, the church did require that the child be given a “Christian” name (e.g., “Faith” or “Christian”) or the name of a saint. If not, a saint’s name was added to the name chosen by the parents, and that second name was recorded in the parish baptismal registry as well. (In my own view, it is still preferable that parents choose a saint’s name, because as the child grows that particular saint might serve as an inspiration and example.)

As to the religion of the godparents, a sponsor must be a practicing Catholic, 16 years of age or older and have already received the sacraments of first Communion and confirmation (Canon 874). Technically only one sponsor is required (Canon 872); so if one godparent were a practicing Catholic, the other “godparent” at the ceremony could be a baptized non-Catholic, but that person would then be listed in the registry as a “witness” rather than a sponsor.

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 askfjerdoy@gmail.com and 30 Columbia Circle Dr., Albany, N. Y. 12203.
High School in Baton Rouge, and Chelsey Blankenship co-founded Club Blue in 2014. The organization hosts events and service projects to raise awareness and resources and encourage young professionals to become involved through leadership, volunteering and advocacy for Boys & Girls Club. There are currently 50-75 active Club Blue members.

“I think young professionals who are from Baton Rouge and the surrounding areas can see some of the challenges that kids in Baton Rouge face,” said Blankenship, a marketing consultant and co-owner of a boutique in Port Allen. “The Boys & Girls Club develops a sense of awareness for young professionals that can make us appreciate and understand those challenges and make Baton Rouge better.”

Members of Club Blue mentor children after school and during the summer, said financial advisor Todd Hymel, a board of trustees member for Boys & Girls Club and its liaison for Club Blue. The organization has hosted events such as a field day full of games, toy drives and haunted houses.

There are also events to encourage youth on their journey toward maturity. For the boys it is Passport to Manhood, a 16-week program that promotes and teaches responsibility in male Boys & Girls Club members ages 11-14. The program ends with a graduation luncheon in which the boys network with businessmen. The men present the boys with ties as a symbol of the young men’s commitment to increase their character and citizenship.

For the girls, there is a Girls at the Table luncheon, which emphasizes women need a place at the table by connecting girls with female mentors. There is also “Steak and Stake.” Club Blue members enjoy steak with Boy’s & Girls Club members while “taking a stake in their life.”

During these events Club Blue members say they realize the youth have not had the same opportunities as they did growing up.

Hymel said while attending Steak and Stake, “One child put the steak on a piece of bread and ate it like a hamburger, he had never experienced eating steak before, so he wasn’t sure how to hold a fork and knife. It’s the experiences that you take for granted growing up when you had someone teach you how to do these things. Some of these children have never had these experiences that we had growing up. It’s one of those moments that you realize how lucky you are to come from a family with parents who took the time to show you these things.”

At the Steak and Stake luncheon, Blankenship noted, “One of the questions on the place mats to break the ice was, ‘If you can do anything in the world you want to do, what would it be?’ I wrote, ‘Skydive’ and the girl next to me wrote, ‘Meet my dad.’ That was eye opening to me. Growing up with two parents in a household it’s hard to imagine not knowing your dad. Especially for our male mentors, they are positive influence in a boy’s life. That sometimes is lacking and unfortunately sometimes becomes a problem.”

Youth can even benefit from exploring the local area, said Blankenship.

Field trips to Bluebonnet Swamp or the capitol are things that are in our backyard that have a mystique, and it opens their eyes to a career they had never heard of before or about Louisiana history and how long we’ve come and where we are, now, said Blankenship.

Cefalu, an attorney, has seen the impact such excursions have on the youth.

“Some of the kids who did a shadowing program or field trips had never been in an elevator or seen the Mississippi River before. So we went to the top of the State Capitol to introduce them to it. They had heard about it, but they had never been in such a place before,” said Cefalu.

Club Blue members share with their peers the importance of working with the youth through events to raise awareness and money.

One of the big events is “Great Futures Gala,” a fundraiser which honors young professionals who are giving back, said Blankenship, gala committee chair. Funds raised support the Boys & Girls Club. More information about this event can be found at greatfutursegalaabr.com.

The young professionals noted their desire to give back stems from people who have positively influenced their lives. Each credited their parents as their primary mentors.

Additional mentors were people such as coaches, teachers and others who worked with youth daily.

“I watched people who impacted the community in a positive way. I wanted to emulate them,” said Hymel, who attended Ascension Catholic School.

He said the adults urged him to serve, cutting the grass at the church cemetery, cleaning up and painting the church and going with his parents to serve at the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

“It goes back to my Catholic roots,” said Hymel.

Blankenship fondly remembers her grandmother teaching children about the faith at St. Joseph Church in Marksville.

“My grandmother taught catechism at my church. I ended up teaching catechism with her,” said Blankenship.

The club leaders acknowledged their peers focus on balancing career, family and countless appointments. But they noted the reward of networking while impacting the next generation.

“Having the kids as your objective and helping them improve their lives is our goal — and it’s tangible,” said Cefalu. “You can see the results when you show up out of the blue and want to hang out with them. They are excited and want to talk about their life dreams.”

For more information about Club Blue email brclubblue@gmail.com.

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**PRAYING FOR THE UNBORN** — Approximately 450 young pilgrims from the Diocese of Baton Rouge gather for a picture on the steps of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. before going inside for Mass. Nine busloads of youth throughout the diocese participated in March for Life at the nation’s capitol, and the visit to the basilica is one of the highlights of the trip for many of them. Photo provided by Emily Freiba
Bishop Muench issues statement on president’s executive order

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Bishop Robert W. Muench said President Donald Trump’s executive orders on immigration and refugee resettlement will result in substantive changes in public policies.

In a statement released Jan. 28, the bishop said Trump’s “executive orders on immigration and refugee resettlement prescribe substantive changes in these two critical areas of public policy that directly affect the futures of so many of our fellow human beings.”

“It is my prayer that as these changes are reviewed and implemented, they will be morally defensible, compassionate, unambiguous, non-discriminatory and faithful to our principles as a nation birthed and built by the hands of those who came to our shores in search of lives free from religious persecution, hunger and fear,” the bishop added. “Thousands of those who want to come to America have those same hopes and dreams.

“As Catholics we know what we do for the least of these brothers and sisters and we also do for Christ. (Mt 25:40) We must for the least of these brothers and sisters.

“We respect the right of the United States government to care for its borders and its citizens, but we do not believe that a rigorous and intensive application of the law is the way to achieve those objectives; on the contrary, these actions generate alarm and fear among immigrants, disintegrating many families without further consideration,” they said.

Pax Christi USA sided with “our immigrant and refugee sisters and brothers living in fear of deportation and separation from their families.”

No one flees their countries of origin on a whim,” a statement from the Catholic peace organization said. “We honor the multiplicity of reasons people migrate to the United States, many of which are poverty, gang violence and terror. People are not the enemy, but that is the myth we are being told by President Trump. Building a wall is the visual symbol of these political lies.”

The Franciscan Action Network expressed concern that the country would be turning its back on refugees after Trump’s actions.

“The Gospels call us to welcome the stranger, so as people of faith we advocate and support the rights and dignity of all people,” Patrick Carolan, the Franciscan network’s executive director, said in a statement. “The United States was built by immigrants and we must continue to protect our immigrant and refugee sisters and brothers and keep families together.”

A brand new, free information workshop hosted by Peter J. Losavio, Jr., the only Louisiana attorney that is a Certified Elder Law Attorney through the National Elder Law Foundation accredited by the American Bar Association, and Kent DeJean, Attorney at Law.

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Louis Ruffino, Jr., left, and his son, Robert Ruffino discuss some of the features available on the washer and dryer set available to Home Again Program participants at their family-owned store, Sherwood Televisions & Appliances. Photo by Rachele Smith | The Catholic Commentator

Program helps bring families home

By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

A new program at St. Jean Vianney Church in Baton Rouge is offering support to parish families as they continue to rebuild their homes following August’s floodwaters.

The SJV parish community suffered greatly during the Great Flood of 2016, and since late December, volunteers and staff at the church office have been fielding phone calls, meeting with flood victims and inviting qualified applicants to participate in the Home Again Furniture/Appliance Assistance Program.

The program, operated through the collaborative efforts of St. Vincent de Paul Society of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, helps in the long road to recovery by allowing eligible families to choose between two pieces of furniture or one appliance.

The furniture options, which include a twin or full bed, sofa, dinette set or futon are made available by Olinda’s Furniture, while the appliances, which include a refrigerator, electric range or washer and dryer set, are provided by Sherwood Televisions & Appliances. Both businesses are locally owned.

“I first heard about this program in late November from St. Margaret Queen of Scotland parish church donations and funds provided by the diocese. “This program would be a step toward bringing a family home,” he explained, adding that by participating in this program, it gives “a signal that we all can make it back home.”

Bob and Ingrid Matens, parishioners at SJV, said they were asked by Father Ranzino to help lead the volunteer efforts for the program.

This program would be a step toward bringing a family home, adding that by participating in this program, it gives “a signal that we all can make it back home.”

Father Tom Ranzino
Pastor, St. Jean Vianney

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St. Elizabeth Catholic School was founded in 1876 and currently serves 233 students in Grades PK3 – 8. With 15 professional staff members, the school operates as a Catholic Christian family devoted to spiritual growth and academic excellence in a caring and safe environment. The school recently completed the self-study process for district reaccreditation.

St. Elizabeth Catholic School is part of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, which has thirty schools in eight civil parishes. There is a strong Catholic identity focus in all schools. The district is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (AdvancED). All schools work together to Evangelize Hearts, Educate Minds, Encourage Talent and Embrace the Future

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Deadline: Applications will be considered as received for Interim Principal (2016-17) and Principal (2017-18) must be received by March 15, 2017

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Pro-life supporters brave weather to participate in annual march

Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Parishioners in the Diocese of Baton Rouge demonstrated their commitment to the protection of unborn lives and their mothers as they marched from the Old State Capitol to the New State Capitol during Louisiana Life March South, themed “Protect Them Both,” on Jan. 21.

Early morning storms on the day of the march cleared before the event.

For Rhonda Perdue, a member of St. John the Evangelist in Prairieville, coming to Life March South is a family tradition. She has attended with her son in the past, and now attends with her grandson Walter, 14.

“We value life,” said Perdue. “The weather could have turned us around, but we felt this was more important than the weather and we have umbrellas and ponchos, but we don’t need it. We’ve been doing this for years. It’s one of our annual things that rain or shine we will do it. It’s important to make a good showing for Baton Rouge.”

The Louisiana Right to Life Federation, one of the sponsors of the event, estimated that about 1,500 people attended the march.

Perdue expressed her concern about messages downplaying the consequences of abortion in the life of mother and child.

“I think today’s there’s such a complacency with life and marriage and family life. It’s too easy to view abortion as a cost effective way (of birth control),” said Perdue. “But it’s not about the abortion (procedure) as much as supporting life. How life is very valuable from conception until natural death.”

Walter said he has seen the negative impact abortion has had on young people he knows.

“It’s sort of a pain that sticks with me,” he said after hearing their stories. “It makes them really sad and they wish they could take it back. But after it’s done you can’t take it back.”

He hopes by pro-actively making his pro-life view heard before a woman chooses to have an abortion such tragic stories will cease.

“I do this to bring awareness and show how life is more important than anything you can imagine,” Walter said. “Then hopefully someone will think twice before walking into somewhere and making a decision that will impact their life and the person they are carrying within them.”

Joseph Bresowar, a member of Christ the King Church and Student Center at LSU, said he attended Louisiana Life March South because he believes prayer and support helps a woman with a crisis pregnancy choose life.

“This is something that we as Catholics feel strongly about. We care about life as special, precious. I’m here to support that with my fellow Christ the King members,” said Bresowar.

He pointed out a success story in which one of the members of a Christ the King small group asked for prayers for a friend who was considering abortion. They prayed for her, and the woman gave life to the baby.

Life March South allowed women who have had an abortion to voice their regrets about their choice, seek healing and show others abortion is not the only choice in a crisis pregnancy. They participated in the march as part of the “Silent No More” campaign and stood on the steps of the state capitol with signs stating they regret their abortion.

“The Silent No More sign ‘I regret my abortion’ is the armor that the Lord has given me. It’s about redemption, not about paralyzing guilt,” said Elaine Matherne, a member of Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs. “It is about the triumphant joy and victory that comes from the mercy of a loving, compassionate, forgiving and merciful God who loves us more than we can ever imagine no matter what we have done in the past. I know many may see those who carry this sign as one who remains in the past and can’t move forward. This is far from the truth. It is a statement of true freedom that releases any guilt that may hinder what it means to be an authentic woman, made in God’s image and likeness – complete and beautiful whom God chooses to bring the gift and miracle of life into the world.”
By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

A sun-splashed afternoon painted an idyllic backdrop as one of the most beloved landmarks in Pointe Coupee Parish and certainly an important piece of south Louisiana history displayed a radiance that had been slowly eroding because of age’s natural ravages.

Several hundred parishioners of St. Mary of False River Church gathered with Bishop Robert W. Muench, pastor Msgr. Robert Berggreen and other clergy members on Jan. 29 to celebrate a special rededication Mass commemorating the renovations of the historic church.

“In the river towns, in the small communities in south Louisiana, two institutions were critical for the communities: the school and the church,” Msgr. Berggreen said in the week leading up to the Mass. “The church is crucial for this community.”

Originally opened in 1907, the church had fallen on hard times in the past few decades. A leaky roof had caused damage to several spots on the interior, and at one point a pail was placed near the altar to collect leaking water. Significant water damage was also evident in the choir loft, and at one of the side entrances.

The $1.5 million renovation included replacing the roof, repairing the steeple, gutting and refitting the sacristies, repairs to damage caused by the leaky roof, pressure washing the bricks, plastering the walls where necessary, painting the church, replacing the carpet in some areas and restoring the original hardwood floors in others and restoring the Way of the Cross stations. A new guard rail was also installed in the choir loft, with the design commemorating the old Communion rail.

“It was a massive job because the church had been let go for so long,” Msgr. Berggreen said, adding the fundraising campaign, which had a goal of $1.5 million, raised $1.6 million.

“The people have been very generous and good,” he said. “It speaks to the commitment they have for the church. They love the church and if the people see a need, they will be generous to fulfill it.”

That commitment was also noted by Bishop Muench in his closing remarks, telling parishioners they are “a great example to other parishes in the Diocese of Baton Rouge and beyond of what it means to be a community of faith. You are an inspiration.”

“The beauty of the work that has been accomplished is a reflection of the beauty of you, parishioners at St. Mary, your dedication to the church and to this church parish, and the great leadership and great sacrifice and great devotion for which you are known,” he added. “I commend you, I congratulate you, I thank you, I praise you.”

As part of the renovations a new guard rail was installed in the choir loft, with the design commemorating the original Communion rail.

Bishop Robert W. Muench blesses the congregation during a special Mass commemorating the renovation of historic St. Mary of False River Church in New Roads on Jan. 29. The bishop also blessed the altar and other areas. Photos by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator

The $1.5 million in renovations included repairing the roof, replacing the carpet, above, and repairing water damage caused by the leaky roof.
The most treasured object in Haley Anderson’s life is pearl-colored and shiny but is not a piece of jewelry or glittery trinket. It reminds her of her special bond with her father, Peter Anderson Jr. (PJ), who died from colon cancer in December 2014.

“One of the incredibly amazing things I treasure is my dad’s loud, fast and furious old-school truck. I treasure it because it’s something my daddy cherished when he was here, and now that he has passed away I committed to take care of it and keep it in good shape,” wrote Anderson in an essay for which she was chosen the middle school winner of the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence. The award, sponsored by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, recognizes rising African-American fiction writers. Anderson was honored for her achievement at the Mansfield Theater on Jan. 19 as well as for her achievement at the school.

Anderson, who likes to “clown around” herself.

While Anderson’s father owned several old vehicles, the 1990 Chevrolet truck came to mind when writing the essay because it was special to the whole family, which includes mother, Hagar, and brother Peter Anderson III.

“The white truck was his first race truck. He took his time and put his own motor in it,” said Anderson.

She was instructed to use her five senses when writing the essay, and she wrote vividly about the truck.

“Just being able to listen to my dad drive it is awesome,” Anderson wrote. “Every now and then, I run it to let my mom to have to pay cost more than what I have, so I’ll cause my mom to have to pay for it. I don’t like her spending any more money than paying the bills and providing for us.”

She enjoyed spending Friday nights with her family at State Capitol Raceway, where her dad raced the white truck.

“Those nights were the best part of my life,” Haley said.

She continued, “I found it interesting that (the white truck) had one seat in there, down where he kept his racing helmet. There was this stick thing, it almost looked like a clutch stick, that he shifted gears with.”

Andersen and her family loaded up with food before watching the action.

“When we’d get to the track, he (PJ) always gave me a lot of money to rack up on snacks. My cousins, my brother and I always had candy in our mouths while watching our dads race their old-school cars,” she wrote.

Her father raced to win, according to Anderson.

“If he didn’t win, he would say, ‘I’m going to keep on going until I win,’” she said. “He would bring home a tall trophy that was as tall as I was. He only brought home one small trophy, all the rest were big. He never brought home any medals, which was for lower places.”

But the most winning things about her dad was his smile and friendliness.

“He was a jokester. He liked to talk, to laugh and put smiles on people’s face. He was loving and always took care of people,” said Anderson, who likes to “clown around” herself.

While she has adjusted to her dad’s death, she acknowledged, “Not seeing him or hearing him in the house was kind of a weird thing. It is kind of unbelievable that he passed away at such a young age.”
First-year principal Paula Johnson said the fair supports the philosophy of the STREAM Academy at the school. Photo provided by Paula Johnson | St. Louis King of France

It was a great experience.” Fifty-one St. Thomas students and six chaperones attended the march. Photo provided by Sheri La, Eleanore Plater

A-List Students – Holy Ghost School in Hammond held its second quarter Honors Day ceremony on Jan. 3. Students were honored for achievements in Accelerated Reader, Top Readers, First in Math, Duke TIP, Honor Roll status and Catholicity. Pictured are Kamryn Hecker, left, and Logan Love signing the “Principal’s List” banner for earning all As during the second quarter. Photo provided by Cindy Wagner | Holy Ghost School

Send your school news and story ideas to Rachele Smith, at rsmith@diobr.org.

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The Bye Bye Man
STX

Overwrought horror flick in which a college student (Douglas Smith), his live-in girlfriend (Cressida Bonas) and his best pal since childhood (Lucien Laviscount) rent a spooky house together where they are plagued by the malevolent specter of the title (Doug Jones). His main trick is to cause hallucinations setting each member of the trio against the others with potentially fatal results. In adapting a chapter from Robert Damon Schneck book, “The President's Vampire,” director Stacy Title goes easy on the gore. But the ensemble’s whining about their collective plight leaves them with few resources. Marital struggles difficult to handle. Probably acceptable for mature teens. Some physical violence, several discussions of death, intense emotional scenes. A-III; PG-13

Sleepless
Open Road

Based on the 2011 French film “Nuit Blanche” (“Sleepless Night”), this tense thriller, directed by Baran bo Odar, involves a complex game of cat-and-mouse between the police and drug dealers on the mean streets of Las Vegas. An internal affairs investigator (Michelle Monaghan) suspects two fellow cops — played by Jaime Foxx and rapper T.I. — of dealing cocaine, supplying a casino owner (Dermot Mulroney) as well as a local drug lord (Scott McNairy). Things fall apart when a heist goes awry and Foxx’s son (Octavius J. Johnson) is kidnapped, resulting in a race against time to right all the wrongs. The last-minute message that crime doesn’t pay barely retrieves this gritty vigil from being ruled out for all. Relevantless graphic violence, including gunplay and torture, pervasive crude and profane language. L; R

Split
Universal

Psychological thriller from writer-director M. Night Shyamalan posits that victims of childhood abuse are not only prone to dissociative identity disorder, split personalities but also that each person can have unique physical characteristics. Shyamalan’s not out to make anyone think too deeply about this prognosis. He prefers to couch the story in the efficient tropes of a cheese-ball teen-abduction drama, using reliable scream queen Anya Taylor-Joy as a lure. Together with Haley Lu Richardson and Jessica Sula, Taylor-Joy plays one of a trio of abducted teenagers kidnapped and threatened by schizophrenic molestation survivor James McAvoy. From early on, the film follows the familiar pattern of teen girls in peril, with a general “moral” about what doesn’t kill you making you stronger in this case, amazingly stronger. Possibly suitable for older adolescents. Gun and physical violence with some gore, mature themes, including sexual abuse, fleeting rough language. A-III; PG-13

20th Century Women
20th Century Fox

Writer-director Mike Mills’ rambling, unfiltered drama loosely based on his adolescence in late 1970s Santa Barbara, California is a pleasant, nostalgic journey to yesteryear. But it’s also nearly plotless, which makes for an often-frustrating viewing experience. A free-spirited mother (Annette Bening), whose idea of motherhood, a no-nonsense role model for her own boy (Lucas Jade Zumann) becomes a sensitive, caring man. Everyone on screen is determined to make moral decisions in the face of whatever obstacles they encounter. But with their ethical cluelessness they rely heavily on the self-help literature of the time. Leaves them with few resources. Marijuanu use, brief upper female nudity and lengthy dialogue about sexual matters, including allusions to nonmarital activity. A-III; R

A Monster Calls
Focus

Uncompromisingly dark melodrama about an adolescent British boy (Lewis MacDougall) struggling to cope with a variety of problems, the most dramatic being his mother’s (Felicity Jones) impending death from cancer. Coming to his “rescue” is a benevolent giant (voice of Liam Neeson) formed from the bark of an ancient yew tree and with a voice as deep as a coal mine. His new companion’s centuries of observing human behavior and ability to dispense slightly off-kilter fables are supposed to bring the lad gruff instruction if not exactly comfort. Though it’s based on Patrick Ness’ award-winning 2011 children’s novel, and scripted by Ness himself, director J.A. Bayona’s adaptation is not a film for kids. Even many adults will find its mawkish treatment of death and its supply of blithe “answers” to life’s struggles difficult to handle. Probably acceptable for mature teens. Some physical violence, several discussions of death, intense emotional scenes. A-III; PG-13

Monster Trucks
Paramount

This action comedy certainly lives up to its title since it revolves around strange creatures powerfully propelling utilitarian vehicles in the absence of an internal combustion engine. A North Dakota high school senior (Lucas Till), wanting nothing more than to escape的基本 education, enrolls at a university that will come with his own set of wheels, has been restoring an old pickup truck at the salvage yard where he works. Meanwhile, a profit-focused oil-drilling outfit has carelessly tapped into a nearby aquifer that serves as the native habitat for a group of friendly monsters, one of whom seeks refuge in the young man’s cherished vehicle. Cue a series of antics, mainly devoted either to crushing other rigs or to tormenting the drillers. Complex thinking is not what director Chris Wedge’s children’s film demands, though it does manage to fold in an environmental message amid the harmless mayhem. A few intense action sequences, a slightly crass sight gag. A-1; PG

Patriots Day
Lionsgate

Effective but unrelenting dramatization of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing and its violent aftermath. Director and co-writer Peter Berg approaches these events from multiple perspectives, predominantly that of fictional police Sgt. Tommy Saunders (Mark Wahlberg), who is among the first responders to the chaos unleashed by brothers Tamerlan (Themo Melikidze) and Dzhokhar (Alex Wolff) Tsarnaev. Other strands of the story involve lead FBI investigator Richard DesLauriers (Kevin Bacon), his local counterpart, Ed Davis (John Goodman), and Chinese-born app designer Dun Meng (Jimmy O. Yang), whom the murderous siblings carjack and kidnapped. Berg ratchets up the suspense as authorities scramble to identify and capture the fugitives before they can carry out further attacks. And his script, penned with Matt Cook and Joshua Zetumer, is clear about the need to oppose evil with love and decency. But the bloody carnage caused by the assault is not kept off-screen, nor are viewers shielded from a torrent of tension-induced swearing. Disturbing and sometimes gruesome images of terrorist mayhem, considerable gore, drug use, a marital bedroom scene, several uses of profanity, pervasive rough and crude language. L; R
Navigating blended families

I have to admit R&B star Alicia Keys is one of my favorites, not just because of her compelling vocals, but also for how she is willing to address significant topics in 21st-century life.

Her latest release, “Blended Family,” speaks to how many children in today’s society grow up in stepfamilies. Keys’ new song describes how all involved can work together to make God’s love manifest for everyone in these families.

While the ideal is for children to grow up in a household headed by their biological parents, current statistics show that in the U.S., 40 percent of all marriages lead to the formation of stepfamilies. Consequently, by the age of 15, 29 percent of all U.S. children will experience two or more mothers.

Keys herself is a stepmother. What she suggests is at the heart of helping children navigate the challenges of living with both parents and stepparents.

As the song’s character addresses her stepchild, she states that “I might not really be your mother,” but “that don’t mean that I don’t really love ya.” She assures this child that “everything’s all right with me and ya mama” and “there ain’t nothing I won’t do for us.”

She recognizes the challenges involved and states that “it may not easy, this blended family.” Yet, she assures her stepchild that “everybody here you know adores ya,” and that’s “what you do for love,” that is, genuinely take care of each other.

The song presents the ideal, namely, that everyone works together in the sometimes complex family situations, so that every stepchild feels loved, accepted and supported. Helping this occur takes a commitment to real listening.

Blended Family (What You Do For Love)

Hey I might not really be your mother
That don’t mean that I don’t really love ya
And even though I married your father
That’s not the only reason
I’m here for ya

I think you’re beautiful
I think you’re perfect
I know how hard it gets
But I swear it’s worth it, worth it

What do you do for love
I know it started with a little drama
I hate you had to read it in the paper
But everything’s all right
with me and ya mama
Baby everybody here you know adores ya

I think it’s beautiful
I think it’s perfect
I know how hard it gets
But I swear it’s worth it, worth it

Refrain:
That’s what you do, what you do, what you do, what you do
What do you do for love
Cause there ain’t nothing, there ain’t nothing, there ain’t nothing
I won’t do for us
It may not be easy
This blended family, but baby
That’s what you do, what you do, what you do

What do you do for love
I know love could bring us closer than blood
I remember having four stepmoms at 9
Love Christmas time and birthday was fly
Hit my sisters just for dinner cause the cookin’ was bomb
Her mother’s supper made me love her like she took me to the prom
And shoutout to my sisters on welfare
Flacko care, if nobody else care
And shoutout to the stepisters and stepbrothers
And godisisters who eventually slept with us

Real love, but you do it right, all right
I’m here for you
Everything’s all right, all right

Refrain:
That’s what you do, what you do
What you do for love
For love of the babies (for love)
We’re a blended family (for love)
And it’s all right (for love)
Said it’s all right (for love)
I’ll be here forever

Family members then can hear what each person’s needs are and figure out the best way to respond to these needs. When ongoing efforts at respect, forgiveness and a willingness to learn are fostered, love can grow.

It is beyond the scope of this column to offer further guidance for how to navigate the challenges inherent in stepfamilies. There are many books and websites that offer this type of information. However, I will make two suggestions that apply to all families as they attempt to enhance loving family bonds.

The first is to hold a family meeting once a week. This meeting should include recognition of what we need to thank individual members for during the previous week, plus offer a collective consultation on any problems or conflicts that may be emerging. This shows that we both appreciate each other and can work together to solve problems.

I also suggest that the meeting part of the gathering be followed by a fun family activity. For example, my own family would follow up the meeting with pizza and a friendly ping pong or badminton competition — shared fun deepens family bonds!

Second, go to Mass together. There is powerful healing and bonding in having this as a weekly activity when all receive the Eucharist and are renewed in their endeavors to be disciples of Jesus.

In commenting on her own family and the song “Blended Family,” Keys stated: “The understanding, compassion and support we’ve found is a powerful testament to the healing that comes when we choose love. Especially for the kids ... the most important part of our lives.” Let her words set a goal for all family lives.

On The Record

Charlie Martin

Entertainment

New York Times crossword

Across
19. 19th century Australian cardinal and advocate for justice.
10. Whip.
15. Neiman Nastase.
17. Slides.
18. Boxer Max.
19. Competes.
20. Upper house of the United States Congress.
22. Easily bent.
24. Season during which the Sorrowful Mysteries are used.
26. Internet connector (abbr.).
27. “So, ___ you.”
28. Locomotive track.
32. “...the fish of the sea and the birds of the ___.” (Gen 1:26)
34. Wife of St. Joachim.
35. “Go away!”
37. Clerical representative.
41. About, on a memo.
43. Wretched hut.
46. Adiabatic wind.
46. Catholic Oscar-winning actress, Vivien ___.
48. Seasons.
50. Appt. calendar note.
51. Alcoholic liquor.
53. Humidity.
55. “He has shown might with his ___” (Magnificat).
58. NT epistle.
60. Folk legend.
61. “Love your ____ as yourself.”
64. Catholic convert who became a cardinal.
68. Roman emperor who persecuted Christians.
69. Hershisher of the diamond.
71. Make up for sin.
72. Addict.
73. “Light from light, ___ God from ___.”
74. Italian lady.
75. Suffix with Congo.
76. Stimulate.
77. Pry.

Down
1. Sunday service.
2. Rubberneck.
3. Genesis weather.
4. To fill with horror.
5. Baby boomers are becoming empty ones.
6. Bro or sis.
8. Judges blood money bought it (Mi.
27:6–8).
10. Members of this tribe of Israel carried the Ark (Deut 10:8).
11. Person used as an excuse.
12. Refine metal.
13. Firefighters’ tools.
21. He walked with God (Gen 5:24).
23. 44 to Cato.
25. Fortune-telling cards.
28. Communion banister.
29. Patron saint of Canada.
30. Letters above the cross.
31. Kingly pestle.
33. Eye beginner.
34. “Vicious, for one.”
35. “Let us adore him...”
40. “...to Riches.”
42. Gvmd.
44. Ade Flavor.
47. “Angels we have heard on ___.”
49. Oleo and others.
52. Ahab desired his vineyard (1 Kings 21:1–2).
54. Unit of force.
55. Declare a marriage invalid.
56. Wipers of “Legally Blonde.”
57. Bogs down.
59. Motor truck.
63. Sign on again.
66. ___ Domini.
67. Tide.
70. “Inside Man” director Spike.

Solution on page 18.

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The Catholic Commentator
I don't know if our four days of priests' continuing formation in January were the cart or the horse, but prayer was the subject of our annual formation conference in Metairie that caused us to be absent from your church parishes Jan. 9-12. Included in our packets for the conference was an excellent book (69 pages) by Father Ronald Rolheiser OMI entitled "Prayer: Our Deepest Longing." The Christian Formation Secretariat of the Diocese is inviting all parishes to "read, reflect and share their thoughts" on this one book during the season of Lent. I wonder which planning committee inspired the other, but I heartily recommend you readers to urge your church parishes to get the book, which costs only $3 per copy when ordered online in bulk at: cart.diohr.org and can be downloaded at no charge. You may also want to join the third year of our "Prayer for Priests" series starting March 3. This year we will examine the work of St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. John of the Cross. We will also have a special edition of "Prayer: Our Deepest Longing." The series is available at our website: http://www.thecatholiccommentator.org.

Another Perspective

Father John Carville

Prayer: Our deepest longing

We are physical beings, but the spiritual side of humanity is also a break for a cultural experience. As St. Augustine said, "We abuse our talents, but the spiritual nature is quite different from the material. We can only experience it indirectly, through symbols, parables, and religious rituals."

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.

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<th>Mission Statement</th>
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<td>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.</td>
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PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PRAY FOR US

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

Feb. 8 Rev. Gerard F. Young Dcn. Falon Lorenz Br. Renzo Alvarado MCM
Feb. 9 † Bishop Robert E. Tracy Dcn. Willbur Martinez Sr. My-Dung Pham ICM
Feb. 10 † Bishop Joseph V. Sullivan Dcn. Robert McDonner Br. Cesar A. Munoz Arias MCM
Feb. 11 † Bishop Stanley J. Ott Dcn. John L. McGinnis Jr. Sr. Tuyen Anh Pham ICM
Feb. 12 Bishop Robert W. Muench Dcn. Larry L. Melancon Br. James Burns SC
Feb. 18 Rev. Joey F. Angeles Dcn. Roger A. Navarra Br. Ramon Daunis SC
Feb. 19 Rev. J. Cary Bani Dcn. Angelo S. Nola Sr. Anne Michelle Ramagos CJS
Greetings of peace in the New Year!

After two years of work and visitations to every church parish in our diocese, the Diocesan Pastoral Planning Task Force has completed and presented to me the report containing recommendations for ongoing pastoral planning in our diocese. I am very happy to accept these recommendations and offer my support as we move forward toward implementation.

You will notice that the report is divided into four sections: 1. Introduction, outlining the history of the work of the task force and the process used in creating this document; 2. Part One: Immediate need adjustments; 3. Part Two: Infrastructure changes; and 4. Part Three: New pastoral planning infrastructure.

The recommendations contained in the report range from areas such as the celebration of Masses, to the ongoing formation of parish lay leadership, our commitment to ongoing pastoral planning in our diocese and many other areas. Some of these recommendations have already been implemented or are in process, such as a resource for priests to help them obtain assistance with weekend Masses in case of emergency and the establishment of a Parish Pastoral Resource Team. This team consists of 25 to 30 volunteers from throughout the Diocese of Baton Rouge and is designed to assist pastors and parishioners in developing a specific pastoral plan for their individual parishes for present and future ministry needs.

Members of the task force are currently visiting each of the six deaneries in our diocese to present this report to you and seek your thoughts. Thank you for your participation in this part of our pastoral planning process.

This report would not have been possible without the diligent work and assistance of the members of the Pastoral Planning Task Force, SSA Consultants of Baton Rouge and the many volunteer members of our parish visitation teams. I thank them for their time and effort, and I thank all of you, the faithful of our diocese, for your openness to this process and your continued commitment to pastoral planning.

Bishop Muench offers support to task force recommendations

Reciently a man came to me, asking for help. He carried some deep wounds, not physical wounds, but emotional wounds to his soul. What surprised me initially was that, while he was deeply wounded, he had not been severely traumatized either in childhood or adulthood. He seemed to have just had to absorb the normal bumps and bruises that everyone has to absorb: some belittling, some bullying, never being the favorite, dissatisfaction with his own body, unfairness within his family and siblings, career frustration, unfairness in his workplace, the sense of being chronically ignored, the sense of never being understood and appreciated, and the self-pity and lack of self-confidence that results from this.

But he was a sensitive man and the combination of all of these seemingly little things left him, now in late middle life, unable to be the gracious, happy elder he wanted to be. Instead, by his own admission, he was chronically caught-up in a certain wounded self-absorption, namely, in a self-centered anxiety that brought with it the sense that life had not been fair to him. Consequently he was forever somewhat focused on self-protection and was resentful of those who could step forward openly in self-confidence and love. “I hate it,” he shared, “when I see persons like Mother (St.) Teresa and Pope (St.) John Paul (II) speak so with such easy self-confidence about how big their hearts are. I always fill with resentment and think: ‘Lucky you!’ You haven’t had to put up with what I’ve had to put up with in life!”

This man had been through some professional therapy that had helped bring him to a deeper self-understanding, but still left him paralyzed in terms of moving beyond his wounds. “What can I do with these wounds?” he asked.

My answer to him, as for all of us who are wounded, is: Take those wounds to the Eucharist. Every time you go to aEucharist, stand by an altar, and receive Communion, bring your helplessness and paralysis to God, ask him to touch your body, your heart, your memory, your bitterness, your lack of self-confidence, your self-absorption, your weaknesses, your impotence. Bring your aching body and heart to God. Express your helplessness in simple, humble words: Touch me. Take my wounds. Take my paranoia. Make me whole. Give me forgiveness. Warm my heart. Give me the strength that I cannot give myself.

Pray this prayer, not just when you are receiving Communion and being physically touched by the body of Christ, but especially during the eucharistic prayer because it is there that we are not just being touched and healed by a person, Jesus, but we are also being touched and healed by a sacred event. This is the part of the Eucharist where we generally do not understand, but it is the part of the Eucharist that celebrates transformation and healing from wound and sin. In the eucharistic prayer we commemorate the “sacrifice” of Jesus, that is, that event where, as Christian tradition so enigmatically puts it, Jesus was made sin for us. There is a lot in that cryptic phrase. In essence, in his suffering and death, Jesus took on our wounds, our weaknesses, our infidelities and our sins, died in them, and then through love and trust brought them to wholeness.

Every time we go to Eucharist we are meant to let that transformative event touch, touch our wounds, our weaknesses, our infidelities, our sin and our emotional paralyzation and bring us to a transformation in wholeness, energy, joy and love.

The Eucharist is the ultimate healer. There is, I believe, a lot of value in various kinds of physical and emotional therapies, just like there is immeasurable value in 12-step programs and in simply honestly sharing our wounded selves with people we trust. There is too, I believe, value in a certain willful self-effort, in the challenge contained in Jesus’ admonition to a paralyzed man: Take up your couch and walk! We should not allow ourselves to be paralyzed by hyper-sensitivity and self-pity. God has given us skin to cover our rawest nerves.

But, with that being admitted, we still cannot heal ourselves. Therapy, self-understanding, loving friends and disciplined self-effort can take us only so far, and it is not into full healing. Full healing comes from touching and being touched by the sacred.

Taking our wounds to the Eucharist

In Exile

Father Ron Rolheiser

therapy, self-understanding, loving friends and disciplined self-effort can take us only so far, and it is not into full healing. Full healing comes from touching and being touched by the sacred.

From The Bishop

Bishop Robert W. Muench

New Year!

February 3, 2017

VIEWPOINT

The Catholic Commentator

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor should be typed and limited to 350 words and should contain the name and address of the writer, though the address will not be printed. We reserve the right to edit all letters. Send to: Letters to the Editor, The Catholic Commentator, P. O. Box 14746, Baton Rouge, LA 70898-4746, or to tcc@diobr.org.
COMING EVENTS

February 3, 2017

Pro-Life Mass – A pro-life Mass will be celebrated on Tuesday, Feb. 14, 5:30 p.m., at St. Agnes Church, 749 East Blvd., Baton Rouge. For more information, call 225-389-4112.

Metairie Retreats – The Archdiocese of New Orleans Retreat Center, 5500 St. Mary St., Metairie, will host the upcoming retreats in February: Friday, Feb. 10 – Sunday, Feb. 12, “Celebrating Life’s Sacred Moments,” with Father Joe Nassal CPPS; Saturday, Feb. 18 – Sunday, Feb. 19, “Accepting and Responding to the Unconditional Love of God,” with Msgr. Doug Doussan. For more information, visit retreats.arch-no.org, or call 504-267-9604.

Ascension Catholic School Dinner – Ascension Catholic Diocesan Regional School in Donaldsonville will have a dinner, auction and raffle on Saturday, Feb. 11, 7 p.m., at the Ascension Catholic High School gym, 311 Vincent Street. Cocktails and appetizers will be served at 6 p.m. Cost of the dinner is $50. For more information, call 225-273-9227.

Sacred Order of Discalced Carmelites – The Sacred Order of Discalced Carmelites welcomes all who are interested in developing their prayer life according to the Carmelite saints. The next meeting will be Sunday, Feb. 12, 1:30 p.m., at Our Lady of Mercy Parish Activity Center in St. Gabriel’s Room, 445 Marquette Ave., Baton Rouge. For more information, call 225-343-3181 or 225-803-3391, or email robertwhite456@att.net.

St. Aloysius Mission – Father Simeon Gallagher of FMCap will present a mission, “Healing Hearts and Homes: Reclaiming Lives,” Monday, Feb. 20 – Thursday, Feb. 23, at St. Aloysius Church, 2025 Stuart Ave., Baton Rouge. For the morning session, which begins at 9 a.m., there will be confession from 7:30 – 7:55 a.m. and Mass at 8 a.m., followed by coffee with Father Gallagher. The evening sessions will be a repeat of the morning sessions and start at 7 p.m., beginning with the liturgy of the word.

Religious Emblems Training – The Catholic Committee on Scouting is looking for adults to become religious emblems counselors for Boy Scouts, Girls Scouts and Cub Scouts. Training will be Sunday, March 5, 1 – 5 p.m., at the Our Lady of Mercy Parish Activity Center library, 445 Marquette Ave., Baton Rouge. For more information, visit info.ccsbr.net, or call Kathy Gora at 225-753-7046.

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CHS grads launch app to give financial boost to schools, businesses

By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

Is it possible to support your favorite school, help local businesses thrive and save money at the same time?

It is, according to three Catholic High School graduates, who say they have created a unique app that can accomplish all of those things and even more.

Called sLocal, the app lets users take advantage of money saving offers from local businesses while also providing a way for those same companies to compete in the ever-growing (and often cost-prohibitive) mobile marketplace.

But how can an app that creates an online meeting place for consumers and business owners also help schools?

J.P. Kelly, athletic director at CHS and one of the app’s creators, said sLocal supports public and private K-12 schools as well as many colleges and universities.

He explained consumers download the sLocal app for $2.99 a month (cost can vary depending upon length of enrollment) with 25 percent of the purchase price going directly to a school of their choice.

Discounts and other offers are a win for consumers who want to save money, and as local businesses grow and schools receive extra funding, “ultimately, it makes the community a better place,” said Kelly, who along with CHS technology coordinator Jay Butcher and tech guru and app designer Bradley Katzmarzyk, are the founding partners of JBK Save Enterprises, a company they formed after creating sLocal.

Kelly said it’s easy for a school to generate funds.

“Let’s say a school has 1,000 people download the app. Over the year, that’s $90,000 the school can raise,” explained Kelly, who as a school administrator confirmed those funds can be used in many valuable ways.

“They can be translated into iPads for students or maybe used to buy textbooks or anything else the school might need. The point is the funds are not defined. It’s money not in their budget,” he added.

Providing schools with options is important for the app’s creators, who admit, at its core, sLocal is an educational initiative designed to allow schools and students to succeed.

“Over two years ago, before we started developing the app, we were thinking about a business that we could start that would help high schools,” said Kelly.

After kicking around some ideas that included a coffee shop for high school students and even opening a driving academy, the men, all on staff at Catholic at the time, soon recognized the potential in a technology-based idea that would allow local businesses to have a mobile media presence. Their app, however, had to meet certain criteria.

“It’s easy to see how the idea sparked the perfect storm, bringing together as Kelly said, “three different generations with three unique skill sets” in education, business and technology.

Yet, as effective as their different talents were in creating sLocal, the CHS alums also have a shared set of values, something each said was instrumental in forming their company and the reason why they chose to make education paramount.

“Our core values (of the company) are pretty close to the core values of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart (the founding brothers of Catholic High),” said Kelly.

In addition to education (a hallmark of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart), those values also include respect, service (every current and future employee will have to commit to at least two hours of service each week, said Kelly) and personal attention.

“One way that we distinguish ourselves (as a company) is through personal attention. This is important to the brothers, and it’s something we feel is missing in the tech field. Yet giving that personal attention, (such as) picking up the phone instead of just sending an email is what we feel is necessary, and what we want to separate us from others” said Butcher.

Since successfully completing a two-month beta testing period, sLocal has started the new year with an even larger footprint, increasing its local business count (which includes different location sites) to 160 and growing its consumer base to more than 1,500 users. The men anticipate both numbers will continue to rise.

According to Butcher, the company is focused on growing the Baton Rouge market while keeping tethered to what it believes will help schools.

Kelly added success in Baton Rouge will lead the way for local initiatives elsewhere, offering more positive connections for schools, local businesses and consumers in other communities.

“We created a platform (with sLocal) that can go as wide as people want to take it,” he said, noting that plans are already underway to expand the concept to other cities.

To download the app or find out more, visit slocalapp.com.
Diocese of Baton Rouge Catholic Schools Office
Principal Opening 2016-17 School Year

St. Thomas Aquinas Regional Catholic High School
Hammond, Louisiana

Founded in 1986 on 48 acres in Hammond, Louisiana, St. Thomas Aquinas High (STA) provides outstanding Catholic education based on the Dominican philosophy of Veritas to families in Tangipahoa Parish. With a student population of approximately 310 students in Grades 9 – 12, STA has expanded and upgraded the physical plant over the years to accommodate advancements in instruction and programming. The one-to-one iPad program is embraced across the curriculum as academic accomplishments continue to rise, and the recent capital campaign supported establishment of a second school building and athletic stadiums and tracks. Professional staff and supportive board members engage to fulfill the mission to teach Gospel values in an environment of academic excellence that fosters the development of the whole person in a Catholic-Christian community.

St. Thomas High is a diocesan school within the Diocese of Baton Rouge, which has thirty schools in eight civil parishes. There is a strong Catholic identity focus in all schools, and the district is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (AdvancED). All schools work together to Evangelize Hearts, Educate Minds, Encourage Talent and Embrace the Future.

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- Minimum of five years of experience in education, preferably in Catholic high schools
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- Qualifications to meet the Non-Public certification requirements for State of Louisiana

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The Catholic Commentator  February 3, 2017

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REPORT

From page 1

would be,” he said, adding that Bishop Muench approved this recommendation immediately. Another recommendation currently in use is a mentoring program for priests who have been ordained less than five years. Mentors have already been assigned to those priests who have been ordained in the past few years.

The program also includes mentoring for first-time pastors as well as those priests being pastored with a school for the first time.

The latter program is being developed jointly by the task force and the Catholic Schools Office.

The diocese is also developing and establishing a protocol for working with foreign-born priests who are serving in the diocese. Father Nelson said that will include reception, orientation, development and evaluation for those priests.

Also established and operating is the Pastoral Support Committee, which consists of 25 to go lay volunteers from throughout the diocese. Father Nelson said the volunteers “were trained by SSA Consultants of Baton Rouge with the purpose to assist pastors, priests and parishes in discerning the structural and pastoral ministry model for their particular commonality given the fewer number of priests available and changing demographics in their area.”

He said the committee is divided into teams of three to five members and paired with a church parish or cluster of parishes.

He said those team members, using the parish pastoral support committee guidebook, guide the priest and leadership through the process of discerning what is the best model for the community.

“Their role is not to go in and tell a community what to do,” Father Nelson said. “They conduct extensive interviews, they try to build a consensus and they make recommendations to the parish and the diocese.”

He said that in theory the committee could be used in every parish but currently it is being used in areas that have experienced demographic change and areas where the diocese cannot necessarily provide the same number of priest personnel.

Father Nelson said those areas or parishes currently include St. Isidore in Baker and St. Pius in Baton Rouge; Sacred Heart in Gramercy, St. Joseph in Paulina and St. Michael in Convent; Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Plattenville and St. Philomena Church in Labadieville; Our Lady of Peace Church and St. Philip in Vacherie and St. James in St. James; and Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Maringouin, St. Francis Xavier Cabrini Church in Livonia and St. Joseph Church in Grosse Tete.

Father Nelson said that perhaps the task force’s most important recommendation is that the proposed Office of Pastoral Planning be established as a permanent position.

“At its core but it just could not happen this year,” he said, adding there needs to be a mechanism in place for pastoral planning to continue.

Meetings to review the document are scheduled Feb. 8 at St. Francis of Assisi Church, Feb. 9 at St. John the Baptist Church in Broussard, Feb. 15 at St. Margaret, Queen of Scotland Church in Albany, Feb. 20 at Our Lady of Mercy Church in Baton Rouge and the final one at St. Joseph Cathedral on Feb. 21. Meetings are generally scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. and last approximately one hour, 15 minutes.

Sisters to celebrate anniversary

The Sisters of the Holy Family, who have been serving in the Baton Rouge area for nearly 100 years, are celebrating the 175th anniversary of the founding of their congregation on Feb. 12 at the 8 a.m. Mass at St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Baton Rouge.

All are invited.
INTRODUCTION

“Amen, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:19).

In April of 2014, Bishop Robert W. Muench announced the establishment of a Pastoral Planning Task Force consisting of clergy, consecrated persons, and laity to consider present and future needs of the Diocese of Baton Rouge. In his homily during the Chrism Mass, Bishop Muench stated, “The Task Force will consider the development of a diocesan long-range plan that integrates creative proposals for clergy personnel to provide parish ministry in new ways along with the design and possible redesign of some parish configurations” (Chrism Mass Homily, April 16, 2014).

Along with considering ways to offer sacramental ministry in light of an increasing number of Catholics and declining number of priests, the Bishop also stated that the work of the Task Force would include an emphasis on lay ministry formation and a revitalized focus on vocation discernment. Invaluable to this entire process has been the assistance offered by SSA Consultants of Baton Rouge. Their time, energy and resources offered have been an amazing act of stewardship to our church. We thank them for their guidance.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Diocesan Pastoral Planning Task Force is an advisory body to the Bishop of Baton Rouge. It reviews long-term and short-term needs including demographic shifts in different areas of the diocese and the number of clergy available for ministerial service in order to recommend to the Bishop possible reconfigurations of parishes and models for parish leadership with the goal of meeting the pastoral needs of the faithful in this local Church in the most efficient and effective ways possible (November 2013).

A PROCESS OF DIALOGUE

The Task Force developed and implemented a basic process of dialogue to gather the information and insights necessary to fashion the recommendations included in this report. Beginning in the fall of 2014 and concluding in August of 2015, the Task Force, assisted by volunteer facilitators from throughout the diocese, initiated a three-part dialogue with priests and laity.

First, a confidential survey was administered to all priests. Second, visits to all 67 parishes of our diocese were scheduled and conducted; these included open group conversations and the completion of individual surveys. More than 1,200 Catholics participated in this visitation process. Third, smaller focus group conversations with priests and other stakeholders were organized and completed.

DIALOGUE PROCESS COMPONENTS

Survey of Priests

The goal of this survey was to gather relevant information from the active and retired priests of the diocese as a means of better understanding the pastoral planning challenges and opportunities facing the diocese over the next five to ten years. The survey included 11 rated (close-ended) statements, three general open-ended questions and four demographic questions. The online survey instrument was distributed by email to a total of 102 active and retired priests. A total of 82 surveys were completed, yielding an excellent return rate of approximately 80 percent. In their responses to the survey, priests were very clear that the first priority of the Task Force should be to enter into a dialogue with laity across the diocese.

Parish Visitations

In late spring 2015, the Task Force enlisted the help of eight volunteers to assist with reviewing and categorizing the verbal input gathered.

Focus Group Conversation with Parish Directors of Administration

Task Force members visited at length with various lay directors of administration from throughout the diocese. This conversation yielded much helpful input. Two of the primary concerns that emerged were:

1. The development of a process for training potential lay and deacon directors of administration and parish life coordinators, and
2. The need to impress upon pastors, directors of administration, parish life coordinators and parish staffs the importance of a collaborative working relationship between one another.

Focus Group Conversations with Priests

During the summer of 2015, priests of the diocese were also invited to attend smaller focus group sessions centered around an informal
meal. These sessions were hosted by Father Trey Nelson, Chair of the Pastoral Planning Task Force. In advance of these gatherings, priests were asked to submit “three specific actions that you would suggest for consideration at the diocesan level to help meet immediate and long-term needs in our diocese.” From these conversations six categories of suggestions emerged:
1. Clustering (of parishes);
2. Masses and weekend mass assistance;
3. Finances (parish and diocesan);
4. Administration of parishes;
5. Apostolates and campus ministry; and
6. Priestly morale.

These focus groups were opportunities for priests to further elaborate on their ideas and occasions for priestly fraternity.

DEVELOPMENT OF RECOMMENDATIONS

During the fall of 2015, the Task Force began to review all input and data received through the dialogue process — with the goal of presenting the grace of the Holy Spirit to lead commitment to and reliance upon cooperation in this initiative.

We recall the words of our Holy Father Pope Francis who writes, “By the gift of the Holy Spirit, the members of the Church possess a sense of faith. This is a kind of spiritual instinct that makes us ‘sentire cum Ecclesia’ (to think with the mind of the Church) and to discern that which is in conformity with the apostolic faith and is in the spirit of the Gospel” (Pope Francis, Joy of the Gospel, 2013).

Together with the entire Diocese of Baton Rouge we pray that our efforts and commitment to the Holy Spirit. May the Lord bless all of us with the gifts of hope and courage and, as Bishop Muench urged us at the beginning of this process, may we continue to offer our “prayerful understanding, support, assistance and cooperation in this initiative. Commitment to and reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit to lead

and guide us are essential. Truly we are and will be called to pray that “the master of the harvest send laborers to the vineyard” (Mt. 9:38). Through it all we can trust the promise of Jesus to be with us ‘until the end of time’ (Mt. 28:20) and the enduring gift of the Holy Spirit to guide us” (John 14:26).

TACTIC TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS | PART I IMMEDIATE NEED ADJUSTMENTS

“The People of God believes that it is led by the Lord’s Spirit, Who fills the earth. Motivated by this faith, it labors to decipher authentic signs of God’s presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which this People has a part along with other men of our age. For faith through the Spirit, the reason that man manifests God’s design for man’s total vocation, and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human” (Gaudium et Spes, Part 1: Paragraph 11).

“The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common. With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all. There was no needy person among them...” (Acts 4:32).

While it is prudent that pastoral planning would continue to discern current and future trends, it is imperative that our efforts consider immediate needs and develop adjustments in response. A number of lay at all diocesan levels, and representatives of other appropriate persons delegated to them, have been formed to address the specific recommendations included in this report.

CONTINUED DISCERNMENT OF GOD’S WILL

We recommend the following five Immediate Tactical Adjustments be implemented as soon as possible:

a. A corporate, diocese-wide reduction of masses. It is our recommendation that every parish conduct an annual review of its Mass schedule to determine whether or not the schedule of Masses (in a parish or cluster of parishes) is excessive and/or unrealistic. Factors to consider are: the health and availability of priests, parish finances, the ability to secure an adequate number of lay liturgical ministers, and, of course, the overall quality of the liturgical experience.

b. A standard for Saturday vigil Masses. It is the recommendation of the Task Force that only one Sunday anticipated or Saturday vigil Mass be celebrated in a parish or cluster of parishes.

c. A standard for simul-aneously scheduled Masses. It is the recommendation of the Task Force that no more than one Sunday Mass be celebrated in a parish or cluster of parishes at the same time, except in extraordinary circumstances.

d. A reminder of the current policy. Pastors and all priests are reminded that in the Diocese of Baton Rouge the following policies remain in effect: Masses of obligation (i.e. on Holy Days of Obligation, and anticipated Masses on the days preceding these) may be celebrated outside of a church building only with the explicit permission of the local ordinary. An anticipated Mass on Sat-urday or the day preceding a holy day of obligation is not to begin prior to 4:00 p.m. Nuptial or funeral Masses on Saturday or on a day preceding a holy day of obligation are not to begin later than 3:00 p.m. in the Diocese of Baton Rouge (Consult the Pagella and Policies of the Diocese of Baton Rouge for full text).

e. The celebration of Masses for specialized groups and events. The Task Force recommends that Masses traditionally celebrated for specialized groups and events be incorporated into the regular Mass schedule of a parish. One such example would be the request for a priest to travel to a retreat site for the celebration of Mass.

We do recognize, however, that there may be special pastoral needs that require the scheduling of particular Masses, such as the need to celebrate Mass in Spanish.

g. The development of collaborative Mass schedules. Given the number of opportunities available for Mass scheduling, we recognize that the diocesan Office of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, it would be extremely benefi-cial for pastors to design and embrace a schedule of Masses that minimize duplicate Mass times across contiguous parishes. Such an approach would serve at least three beneficial purposes: it would contribute to the overall health and happiness of priests, offer lay faithful a greater variety of Mass times from which to choose and encourage priests to substitute for one another when they are unable to secure substitute help for Masses.

This recommendation applies to weekend Masses (the Saturday anticipated or “vigil” Mass and Sunday Masses) and daily Masses. Again, we recommend that a formula be developed to determine a realistic number of Masses that will result in reasonable Mass schedules.

h. Diocesan consultation prior to adjusting a Mass schedule. The Task Force recommends that a pastor consult with the Task Force or the bishop’s delegate prior to implementing any change to a Mass schedule. Communication between individual parishes and the appropriate office(s) of the diocese is essential if we are to work and grow together in a spirit of collaboration as a diocese.

To establish a plan for the above mentioned consultation, the Task Force recommends that an annual review of the effectiveness of Mass schedules throughout each deanery be initiated by the local dean in conjunction with the Task Force or other appropriate persons delegated by the bishop.
The Task Force recommends that a resource be designed and established for the purpose of helping priests secure help with weekend Masses in the event of illness or an emergency. This resource could be designed using one of many potential models including the following three models.

- Volunteer model—a lay person or deacon
- Paid position model financed by the Diocese of Baton Rouge
- Partial model—responsibility assumed by a staff member of a parish that might be in the position to offer this as a service to the diocese.

Some other standards should apply here as well:

a. Priests who are able would be asked to have their name included on a resource list as someone who could possibly help another parish when help is needed. Parishes who, for example, do not have an evening Mass on Sunday could be in the position to assist another parish in a time of emergency need.

b. In parishes where more than one priest is assigned, the priests of the parish would rely primarily on one another for assistance when such assistance is needed. Parishes in these situations would then turn first to the other resident priests to cover Masses in their particular parish.

c. This recommended new resource to assist priests would not be utilized to secure help with Masses due to vacation—but only in cases of need due to illness or emergency.

3. **Broaden the sense of financial collaboration throughout the diocese.**

The Task Force recommends the diocesan definition of Extraordinary Income be broadened to include “any income received by a parish as a title from another parish” and that the Extraordinary Receipts category within the Parish Share Guidelines (July 2013, Diocese of Baton Rouge) include the additional category entitled Title from Other Parish.

4. **Eliminate Celebrations of Mass at chapels of ease.**

Pastors, in consultation with the Task Force or others delegated by the bishop, should annually review the necessity of celebrating Masses at chapels of ease within their parish boundaries. Standards to utilize in these reviews should include:

a. The distance that a priest is asked to travel to and from a chapel;

b. Whether or not traveling to a chapel at a particular time makes it difficult for a priest to exercise his ministry at his parish church;

c. The number of persons in attendance at Mass at the particular chapel;

and

d. Whether or not the celebration of Mass at a chapel fosters a sense of community that is separate from the church parish.

5. **Design and inaugurate an annual priests’ appreciation effort.**

The Task Force recommends the establishment of an annual priests’ appreciation day—a large scale event in which clergy, religious, and laity would be invited to participate. This effort would be designed to build morale among priests and foster a greater sense of union between the Presbyterate and the people of the diocese.

**CONCLUSION**

We conclude this part by again recalling the words of our Holy Father Pope Francis, who, in *Joy of the Gospel*, reminds us, “the word solidarity is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few” (Pope Francis, *Joy of the Gospel*, 2013, Paragraph 188).

It is our hope and prayer that our efforts as a Task Force and as a diocese will increase our understanding of the call to true solidarity with one another and with Christ in His Church. We are more than a set of parochial entities. We are an ecclesial community which demands that we envision our life together, not in isolation, but for the common good.

**TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS | PART II INFRASTRUCTURE CHANGES**

“Bishops, to whom is assigned the task of ruling the Church of God, should, together with their priests, so preach the news of Christ that all the earthly activities of the faithful will be bathed in the light of the Gospel. All pastors should remember too that by their daily conduct and concern they are revealing the face of the Church to the world, and men will judge the power and truth of the Christian message thereby. By their lives and speech, in union with Religious and their faithful, may they demonstrate that even now the Church by her presence alone and by all the gifts which she contains, is an unspent fountain of those virtues which the modern world needs the most” (*Gaudium et Spes*, Part IV: Paragraph 43).

**Relationships**

The Bishop is the chief shepherd of the diocese and oversees the diocesan parishes in collaboration with the local pastors. The Bishop’s knowledge of the local parish is enhanced with a system of regular parish visits, using a specific agenda to understand, evaluate and make suggestions for the local church. Pastors are responsible to the Bishop and to the people of the parish for their personal ministerial and spiritual development. Pastors should be able to seek the Bishop’s support when dealing with potentially controversial or particularly difficult pastoral decisions. Pastors are best selected for parish assignment based on their experience, maturity and personal spiritual acumen. Pastors of the diocesan model must be assured that the diocese recognizes that daily life in the parish might have challenges that even the most experienced pastor might not be able to handle.

To facilitate the relationship between the Bishop, the diocesan departments and the pastors, mentoring, training, guidance and discernment should be given as often as needed.

The Pastoral Planning Task Force recommends the following structural refinements:

1. Institute a regular parish visitation process by the Bishop which includes a protocol of objectives, outcomes and accountability. The Office of Pastoral Planning would collaborate with the chancery on the design and implementation of this process.

2. Develop a mechanism designed to gather from parish councils, parish finance councils and parish school boards descriptions of a parish’s priority needs and the clergy attributes that would best meet those needs. These “parish need summaries” would be requested (as needed) by and delivered to the Personnel Board and the Pastoral Planning Task Force.

3. The Bishop and Personnel Board should develop and provide a set of specific expectations to every priest assuming a new pastoral assignment. These expectations would address personal objectives, ministry experiences and skills to be developed and hoped for outcomes regarding parish ministry and parish structures.

**Business Administration of Parishes**

The Task Force recommends the following structural refinements:

1. **All parishes (or parish clusters)** should design and fill a business administrator position with a person whose knowledge and ability is commensurate with the complexity of the parish served. This position would be full-time or part-time as appropriate to meet the essential needs of the parish. If deacons are to be considered for this position, a specific part of diocesan formation should include business administration.

The Pastoral Planning Task Force recommends the following structural refinements:

1. A program to form parish business administrators containing minimum requirements, standards and procedures should be created. This program would be developed collaboratively by the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization, the Diocesan Finance Office and the Pastoral Planning Task Force.

2. An assessment of data gathering tools and processes should be conducted to address the recognized need for more accurate spiritual and pastoral statistics and financial reports on the parish and diocesan level.

3. An ad hoc exploratory committee should be commissioned to develop guidelines that would support the design of parish school subsidy formulas.

**Fraternity and Mentoring Programs**

The Task Force recommends the following structural refinements:

1. The mentoring program for newly-ordained priests should be re-instituted for the first three to five years after ordination. The program would continue and encourage informal deanery advice and assistance. This program may be created by using one of the national priest mentoring processes available.

2. Mentoring programs for new parochial vicars, first-time pastors and first-time pastors with a school should be developed. These newly-created mentoring programs should be complementary to the mentoring program for newly-ordained priests and consistent (in design) available and recognized mentoring programs of this type.

3. An ongoing leadership formation and orientation program should be developed and required for third- and fourth-year theology students regarding what the diocese will expect from a newly-ordained priest and what a newly-ordained priest can expect upon entering diocesan life. This orientation program could be created in collaboration with the Diocesan Vocations Office and Priest Continuation Formation Committee.

4. Priest support groups should be continued and encouraged. Membership in one should be strongly recommended and participation strongly encouraged at regular intervals by the Bishop and Priest’s Continuing Formation Committee.

5. A diocesan clergy personnel evaluation process should be created and used for pastors to evaluate parochial vicars and parish deacons. This process should be designed and implemented in collaboration with the Priests Personnel Board, the Priest Continuing Formation Committee and the Office of the Diocesan.
6. All seminarians should receive language and cultural training focused on providing ministry to the growing Hispanic population in our diocese. This effort would be coordinated by the Diocesan Office of Vocations.

7. A new protocol for the reception, orientation, development and evaluation of foreign born priests who serve in the Diocese of Baton Rouge should be established in collaboration with the Diocesan Personnel Board and the Priest Continuing Formation Committee.

Public Affairs and Relations with Public Media

The Task Force recommends the following structural refinements.
1. The Communications Secretariat should coordinate all conventional diocesan media, social media and digital resources, and recommend ways to add value to the diocese’s current multi-media communications activities to facilitate positive and accurate outreach to the public.
2. The Communications Secretariat should develop clear directives and protocols for all diocesan personnel relative to media engagement and interaction. These directives would include all forms of new/social media.
3. The Communications Secretariat should develop and implement individual parish profiles with statistical data pertinent to pastoral planning including financial histories, spiritual and pastoral statistics, and notable ministry and demographic changes.

Catholic Life Center Mission Statement of Service to Parishes and Institutions

The Pastoral Planning Task Force recommends the following structural refinement:
1. The Office of Human Resources should direct an annual process of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics” (Gaudium et Spes, Paragraph 4).

Effective pastoral planning is an ongoing process involving a cross-section of diocesan and parish leadership including clergy, consecrated persons and laity. To plan wisely, the Church must recognize an ever changing ministerial environment while being honest about evident challenges which arise. She must diligently seek out effective opportunities to proclaim the Gospel in these times. As one Church, we embrace this visionary commitment as a community of disciples.

Through constant prayer and listening, studying and dialogue, we are called to discern steps that are necessary at this time to move this vision forward with a sense of dedication, while allocating resources with an attitude of good stewardship.

The Pastoral Planning Task Force recommends the establishment of a permanent Office of Pastoral Planning to facilitate ongoing pastoral planning efforts in the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

The roles and responsibilities of this new Office of Pastoral Planning would ideally include:
1. The gathering of data and development of objectives and strategies for effective long-range planning, including recommendations for parochial structural modifications as necessary. The Office would be responsible for aggregating and analyzing information supplied by parishes regarding growth and decline for the purpose of offering any needed alternatives to meet the pastoral mission of the corporate local Church. The Office would create individual parish profiles with statistical data pertinent to pastoral planning including financial histories, spiritual and pastoral statistics, and notable ministry and demographic changes.

This Office’s scope of responsibility would include the evaluation of current parish needs, the potential restructuring or closing of parishes, the establishment of new parish boundaries, the adjustment of parish boundaries, the projection of future property needs and the acquisition of property. The Office would provide to the Bishop recommendations regarding ministerial leadership throughout the diocese based upon criteria including, but not limited to, income changes, cultural nuances, demographic growth and decline, and the history of parochial operations in any geography.

2. The Office of Pastoral Planning would work to facilitate the process of identifying parishes affected by significant growth or decline in crafting recommendations for new configurations of ministry based upon their own lived experience and particular needs. The Office would effectively prepare parishes for structural changes (such as opening, clustering, merging, closing) before such changes are announced by the Bishop. The Office would also provide continued support in the wake of such changes.

This would best be accomplished using proven methods and professionals appointed as a committee of the Office to be called The Parish Transitioning Committee. Experts appointed to this committee would include individuals skilled in administration, spirituality, civil and canon law, staff dynamics, human resources and in various other disciplines. Aside from preparing parishes for structural concepts such as clustering, the Committee would also assist parishes, pastors and their staffs in other transitions and changes that affect the life of a parish.

3. This Office would take a proactive approach to planning and examining how ministry is currently operating in every parish and every deanery, testing the assumption that the status quo is effective.

A Focused Effort in Support of Rural Parishes – Many parishes [over 50%] are located in what can be considered rural areas of the diocese. The Office of Pastoral Planning, in collaboration with other diocesan departments and the deaneries should develop a protocol to explore the implications of this reality and to make recommendations with respect to the vitality of these parishes.

These recommendations could include, for example, how the diocese can best offer faith-formation of the laity, how innovative models of parish structure could lead to shared ministries within the deaneries, and how the future financial needs of the rural parishes can be assessed and addressed.

4. The Office would explore the effectiveness of all territorial, parochial and deanery boundaries with special consideration for demographic shifts – to facilitate improved ministry and the equitable distribution of priest personnel resources.

5. The Office would support diocesan priests in the creation (and ongoing update) of personal portfolios that include: educational summaries, inventories of the priest’s gifts and talents, ministerial and diocesan interests and development goals, and ministry service history (curriculum vitae). These personal portfolios would be made available to the Clergy Personnel Board and the Bishop and used to facilitate ministerial placements.

6. The Office would identify other determinants for ministry placement in collaboration with the Clergy Personnel Board, to assist in effectively utilizing all available resources to address the task at hand in a more equitable use of human resources and the paring of individuals and their gifts with the needs of a particular parochial situation.

7. The Office would design and facilitate a process for all diocesan priests to complete annual self-evaluations and share these self-evaluations with the Office of Pastoral Planning which will share these with the Bishop and Diocesan Personnel Board.

CONCLUSION

The work of this Task Force has encompassed two years of deliberate and collaborative work. While producing the recommendations encompassed in this report is one tangible result, the Task Force sees the possibility of such work continuing with the recommendation to establish an Office of Pastoral Planning for the Diocese. During the time this recommendation will be considered, it is the Task Force’s strong hope that the work embodied in the mission of such an Office of Pastoral Planning continue with the initiative and guidance of the Task Force until the office is established.

The work of creating effective structures for mission within the Catholic Church is never finished. Relying on the Holy Spirit to fill up what may be lacking, the Task Force offers this work with a determined love for our Diocese and an invitation for all to embrace a future filled with hope.