WOW FACTOR

New St. George church inspiring

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Bishop Robert W. Muench tilted his head upward, first to the left, awe partnering with joy to create a broadening smile. As if on cue, the bishop then looked up to the right, his facial expression telegraphing his exuberance.

Finally, he raised up his hands and exclaimed, “Wow!” to the delight of a congregation that broke out in applause at St. George Church in Baton Rouge.

Moments earlier, outside under the canopy of a brilliant early spring sun, the bishop had handed the keys to the stunning new church, officially unlocking the future for the second oldest parish in Baton Rouge with roots dating to the 1840s.

“Today, once again St. George Parish makes history and all of you present are part of that history,” he said during his homily of the dedication Mass on March 26. “The story of this parish is fascinating. What great priests and great parishioners this church has had and has.

“I have always been proud of you, the parishioners of St. George,” he added. “I have never been more proud than I am today.”

Finding joy in the darkness of Lent

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Viewing the beauty of Ireland last September from Croagh Patrick, where St. Patrick fasted on the summit for 40 days in the fifth century, Father Jason Palermo, pastor of St. Joseph Church in French Settlement and St. Stephen the Martyr Church in Maurepas, and his fellow pilgrims doing the same on the church walls, the lighting of the altar and the placing of relics of St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta and St. John Neumann in the main altar and the chapel altar, respectively.

Also included in the ceremony was a eucharistic procession led by Father James David, pastor of St. Margaret Queen of Scotland Church in Albany that culminated in the blessing of the tabernacle.

“We are an old parish with deep roots and a history of faith,” he said during a homily at St. George Church.

“I have never been more proud than I am today,” he added.

The beautiful two-and-half hour ceremony was punctuated with symbolism and sacred rites, including the bishop blessing the baptismal font, anointing the altar with chrism oil and clergy members doing the same on the church walls, the lighting of the altar and the placing of relics of St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta and St. John Neumann in the main altar and the chapel altar, respectively.

“We are an old parish with deep roots and a history of faith,” he said during a homily at St. George Church.

“I have never been more proud than I am today,” he added.
DID YOU KNOW

The art of building a church

A new church can often serve as a spiritual resurgence for parishioners, as well as a recommendation to not only their own faith lives but also to the parish in which they belong.

After a drought of no new church construction, the Diocese of Baton Rouge is experiencing a renaissance this spring with two new buildings coming online. The first was March 26 when Bishop Robert W. Muench blessed a palatial new house of worship at St. George in Baton Rouge.

Next month St. John the Baptist Church in Zachary is scheduled to swing open the doors to a new building.

Long before the veil is lifted on a new building, however, an enormous amount of work behind the scenes is required, including years of planning and the always arduous task of fundraising.

Naturally, church designs vary dependent on the creativity of the architect and the whim of what is normally a building committee overseeing the project for the church parish.

St. George and St. John are both what is considered the more traditional cruciform design, meaning the structure is in the shape of a cross. Some might suggest this particular design is experiencing a rebirth of its own, after going through several decades of new churches becoming more circular in shape.

This style was often seen in church parishes during suburban sprawl in the mid and late 20th century.

When it comes to designing the interior, the Vatican has a number of guidelines and suggestions to secure the sacredness of the building.

Naturally, at the heart of any church is the altar, with the Vatican II guidelines referring to the eucharistic feast as a “sacred meal.” Thus, the altar design must carry a dual symbolism, that of a dining table and place of sacrifice. According to the Vatican II guidelines, the altar must be “simple and unpretentious,” allowing the celebrant to face the congregation as he celebrates the Mass.

Microphones and speakers, as per requirement, the second floor of the Neelis family warehouse for Mass until the church was completed in 1902. The current church was dedicated by Bishop Robert W. Muench and Father Robert Perry OP on March 15, 2002.

Photos courtesy of the Archives Department | Archdiocese of New Orleans

Why God became man

“Twill be the last great act of love. Once eaten, the Eucharist transforms us into him. We become a living presence of the real presence of the one who creates, loves, forgives and invites. Thus we are to be Christ to all.

Passion

Jesus’ passion gives us the strength to endure our suffering. He experienced false accusations, denial, mockery, painful torture, injustice and most extreme humility. How heavy was his cross, carved from solid wood? How much pain did it cause? How much power did he use to look forward to new life with God. “Untie him and let him go…”

Baptized in Jesus Christ, we are called to embrace the Holy Spirit throughout our lives. The spirit is powerful as long as we allow him to act within us. God’s mercy and fullness are revealed to us through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Thus, as we cross ourselves “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen” we say “yes” to the gift our faith infused in the Holy Trinity. Thus, we too are capable of raising others from the dead. Aside from the mortal, spiritual death surrounds us, as we walk with those who once believed but now doubt, waiver or completely give up. We are called to share the good news of Jesus, our belief in the one sent to save us. We are called to lovingly bind those wrapped in strips of secularism, materialism, hopelessness, despair, loneliness, anger, isolation and other forms of entrapment. We are called to roll back the stone which separates those in darkness and call them by name into the light of faith, hope and love.

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest…”

Imagine the Queen of England entering Trafalgar Square on a tricycle and every one was waving flags and shouting “hail to the queen.” Then a few days later, the same crowd asks for her to be executed. How can the mindset of her supporters change so quickly? Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem was indeed the beginning of his walk on death row. Only thinking of those who followed him, Jesus institutes during his last Passover, our present day Eucharist. Taking bread which he blessed, broke and shared, followed by the wine poured, blessed and shared, Jesus gives us his very self: body, blood, soul and divinity. Every time we go to Mass, we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, whole and complete.

This is his second to last great act of love. Once eaten, the Eucharist transforms us into him. We become a living presence of the real presence of the one who creates, loves, forgives and invites. Thus we are to be Christ to all.

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Passion
Historic St. Clare house part of the Audubon Pilgrimage

By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

Seen for months in brochures, newspaper and other media campaigns promoting the 46th annual Audubon Pilgrimage, the rectory at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in St. Francisville is starting to make a name for itself.

The home, named St. Clare in honor of St. Clare of Assisi by Father Cary Bani, pastor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, was one of five private residences on tour for the popular West Feliciana Parish event.

It’s the first time St. Clare was included on the weekend-long pilgrimage, held this year on March 17-19.

In addition to the rectory, the Audubon Pilgrimage named after one of the area’s most popular guests, artist-naturalist John James Audubon, also featured tours of churches and gardens as well as special presentations.

“This is such an honor (to be on the tour); it really is,” said Johnette Rettig, a parishioner of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and the steady force behind preparing the rectory for visitors.

Located behind the church on Catholic Hill in St. Francisville, the home was purchased by the Diocese of Baton Rouge for the church parish in Dec 2006. At that time it was used for meetings, classrooms and youth activities. However, a parish-wide effort soon started to bring the structure, which was constructed around 1913, back to its former glory.

Rettig explained the home was constructed using a classical revival architectural style, illustrated by its Doric columns, symmetrical windows and door. It also features porch windows, a coved ceiling and transoms over each door.

According to church records, the home was originally built for the Aubic family shortly after the massive 1912 Mississippi River flood destroyed their Bayou Sara home. It is speculated that some of the building materials used were reclaimed from that Bayou Sara home.

Through the six decades that followed, the Aubic siblings kept residence at the home, spending a great deal of time here, have never been back here (by St. Clare). This brings them up the hill and they can see how peaceful it is here. We want to welcome everyone,” she said.

Rabalais shared that shortly after the Aubic family left the home, it began to fall into disrepair, with vines and other natural elements starting to claim the property.

“Some people, even those who live here, have never been back here (by St. Clare). This brings them up the hill and they can see how peaceful it is here. We want to welcome everyone,” she said.

In 2015, the church parish began renovations on the home, paying utmost attention to its historical past.

“Most of our parish community was on the renovation committee, building committee and things like that, offering input both financially and from the standpoint of aesthetics,” said Rabalais.

When the renovations were complete, the church community hosted an open house, where plans ultimately were laid for the 2017 Audubon Pilgrimage.

“One of our parishioners is on the committee and she asked Father (Bani) about putting St. Clare on the pilgrimage,” said Rettig.

“We talked about it and realized how good this would be not only for the church parish but for West Feliciana Parish, too,” she added, noting how Our Lady of Mount Carmel was also opened during the Audubon Pilgrimage, allowing visitors to view the church and grounds, even learning more about the Catholic faith.

Rabalais said she has been happy to show St. Clare to others and believes the pilgrimage has been a wonderful opportunity for her church community.

“The camellias were just in bloom here, and it is spectacular,” said Erin Rabalais, a parishioner of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and a volunteer docent at the home during the recent pilgrimage tour.

“Most of our parish community was on the renovation committee, building committee and things like that, offering input both financially and from the standpoint of aesthetics,” said Rabalais.

The home, named St. Clare in honor of St. Clare of Assisi, is part of the Audubon Pilgrimage, allowing visitors to view the church and grounds, even learning more about the Catholic faith.

Docent Lynn Richard, dressed in clothing reminiscent of the 1820s, shares historical information about the home with visitors during the 46th annual Audubon Pilgrimage. Photo provided by Johnette Rettig
Discalced Carmelites focus on contemplative prayer

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

St. Teresa of Avila said, “Prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us. The important thing is not to think much but to love much and so do that which best stirs you to love. Love is not great delight but desire to please God in everything.”

Such contemplative prayer is what helps people stay faithful and close to the heart of God in a fast-paced, secularized society, said Ethlyn White, president of the St. John of the Cross and St. Anthony Community of the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites of Baton Rouge.

The Discalced Carmelites are Catholic men and women who are called to a deeper spiritual life under the protection of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and are inspired by the teachings of St. Teresa of Avila, St. John the Cross and St. Therese of Lisieux. Its members make a commitment to the order to seek God for the church and for the world.

“The secular order of Carmelites longs to seek God through prayer, to find him and to share him with others,” said White.

She said the Discalced Carmelites seculars are members of the Carmelite family of the 16th century reform of St. Theresa of Jesus. Discalced means shoeless.

“St. Teresa’s followers wore sandals rather than shoes, which distinguished them from Carmelites of the Ancient Observance,” said White.

She noted that followers of St. Teresa are present in today’s world as friars, enclosed (cloistered) nuns and seculars. All three branches of the Carmelite family follow a rule of life by St. Albert, patriarch of Jerusalem given to the hermits on Mount Carmel about 1208.

“We seculars come from all walks of life, from every level of education and from every type of work. We are Catholic laity people over the age of 18, married or unmarried, ordained diocesan priests or deacons,” White said.

The habit of the secular order of Discalced Carmelites is a brown scapular.

“It symbolizes that we are under the loving protection of Our Lady and that we pledge ourselves to her service. She is our queen mother,” said White.

The Carmelite community in Baton Rouge was canonically erected in November 1984, said White.

The life of a Secular Discalced Carmelite follows the “6 Ms,” according to White, meditation (suggested 30 minutes a day); morning and evening prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours; Mass, daily if possible; Mary, honoring the Blessed Mother every day; meetings on the second Sunday of the month, which include formation, information and fellowship; and mission, sharing the Carmelite mission of knowing God so God can be known.

The secular Carmelites also emphasize actively serving in the church parishes and assisting in the community. One of the things they do is assist the Missionaries of Charity at St. Agnes Church in Baton Rouge.

White described contemplative prayer as the process beginning with quiet reading of holy Scripture in solitude, prayerful intimate meditation of holy Scripture, praying for the grace and wisdom to desire to be guided by holy Scripture and finally, contemplation or actually living in union with God.

“If asked about the charism of the order, a secular Carmelite would probably say the charism is contemplative prayer, but it’s not the prayer itself, but the particular prayers or the method of praying – it’s the time and energy that is put into prayer,” said White.

She pointed to the April 2009 canonization of Carmelite Saint Nuno Alvares as placing focus on the importance of prayer.

“Pope Benedict said, ‘Carmel teaches us to know Christ productively today,’ ” said White.

“Of most importance, the prayers of the Carmelite saints. When facing a ‘dark night of the spirit’ or ‘dark night of the soul,’ St. John the Cross will tell you to keep praying. When struggling with the daunting task of true self-understanding, St. Teresa of Avila will tell you to keep praying. When dealing with everyday aggravations of the people around you, St. Therese of Lisieux will tell you to keep praying. Or even when facing the darkest caverns of the Nazi camps (or the equivalent in your life), Blessed Titus Brandsma will tell you to keep praying.”

Such commitment to prayer is needed in the world today, according to White.

“By being active in the world, taking part joyfully in the activities of daily life, we give evidence to today’s fast-paced world that it is possible to live the teachings of Christ productively today,” said White.

“It is possible to take time to just be silent.

“Of most importance, the prayers of the Carmelites, prayers for all who need them, are needed in the world today, probably more than ever.”

Those interested in learning more about the Discalced Carmelites are invited to attend their monthly meetings, which take place on the second Sunday of the month at 1:30 p.m. in the St. Gabriel Room of the Parish Activity Center of Our Lady of Mercy Church, 445 Marquette Ave., Baton Rouge.

Next: Holy Family Institute

The Catholic Commentator wants your school news and photos! Send them to Rachele Smith, at rsmith@diobr.org.
Baskets show joy of Easter season

By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

Stepping into Pat Hill’s home this time of the year is like walking into an Easter wonderland. Hundreds and hundreds of Easter baskets, each lovingly filled and representing every color of spring, sit side by side in her Baton Rouge home. The baskets, each wrapped in cellophane and topped with a pretty bow, cover just about every inch of her home’s foyer and nearby rooms, conquering both the furniture and floor and resembling the inventory of an overstocked small store.

But unlike the owner of a holiday shop, Hill doesn’t have any plans to sell these Easter baskets. Instead, the St. Thomas More Church parishioner will do what she has done every year since 2008. She will donate each one of her Easter creations to St. Vincent de Paul’s Build a Basket ministry, a program that helps provide Easter baskets to children in need.

“Last year, I made just over a thousand baskets, so you know I have to do at least that much this year,” laughed the 76-year-old Hill.

And so far, she’s right on track.

A peek into her basket building room details a well-oiled machine that would rival any manufacturing plant, complete with containers of candy-filled plastic eggs, Easter colored grass and an assortment of toys and books spread out on a table.

“I start with a book in each basket,” admitted Hill, explaining that she doesn’t want to give just candy. Rather, she wants the children to have something for later.

“There’s no requirement (from St. Vincent de Paul) for the baskets to have a book. It’s just me,” said Hill.

“A book teaches a story, and it’s just a good time for them. Maybe they don’t own a book, but they can have this one,” she added.

When building each basket, Hill tries to match the book characters to toys or stuffed animals she has on hand. She said these items help make the book “come alive” for the kids. Plus, they help her create a theme for each basket, something Hill especially enjoys as evidenced by the care she takes in building the perfect basket each time.

“Look at this book,” Hill said, as she pointed to a children’s book featuring a goofy-looking alligator on the cover. Then just as quickly, she revealed what appeared to be the perfect representation of the alligator from her toy bin.

“They go great together, don’t they?” she said, knowing the joy the duo will bring to a child.

With her Easter basket system in full swing this time of year, Hill said she finds it easy to complete lots of baskets. She buys many of her supplies during after-Easter sales and frequents garage sales for the best prices on books and toys.

In addition her family lends their support: Her daughter, who lives in Texas, makes each basket bow, and her brother and daughter-in-law help by pre-filling plastic eggs with candy.

Even her church family participates. Hill said she has received both supply and monetary donations from St. Thomas More parishioners.

“It is just so beautiful how they help,” she noted.

Hill said she decided to get involved in the Build a Basket program after seeing an advertisement in The Catholic Commentator almost 10 years ago.

“I thought it was a nice idea,” she said, adding, “We do things at Christmas for others, and this was a good opportunity to reach children in the area that won’t have anything for Easter.”

Michael Acaldo, president and CEO of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, said Hill is an inspiration to the program. He noted Hill has been helping her own family affected by the August flooding, yet she continues to reach out to others.

“She’s a saint of a lady,” he said.

Hill, however, is humble. She said she didn’t become involved in the program for fame and only agreed to be featured because she wants to encourage others to get involved in the ministry, too. Hill remarked that during her first year, she completed 17 baskets.

“But that’s still good; that means 17 children got one,” she emphasized.

During the past nine years, Hill has steadily increased the number of baskets because she not only knew it was something she could do, but because it was also important.

“I do this for the children,” said Hill.

“I want them to know Easter is a beautiful holiday. I don’t think I appreciated that when I was younger, but I’ve grown through the years to realize the beauty of the resurrection, what Christ went through and how much he loved us,” she explained.

Hill said that sometimes a little gift, like an Easter basket, might be all it takes to help a child recognize that something good happened on that day.

“Hopefully they’ll grow up and look a little further into it,” she said and discover for themselves the true meaning of Easter.

Surrounded by dozens of filled Easter baskets in her home, Pat Hill prepares to place Easter grass and other assorted items into a new basket for the St. Vincent de Paul Build a Basket program. Photo by Rachele Smith | The Catholic Commentator

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Did Jesus feel abandoned?/Prayers during adoration

When Jesus was dying on the cross, according to the Gospel, he cried out, “My God, why have you abandoned me?” Why was he saying this? Did he really feel that his father had abandoned him? (Coxs Creek, Kentucky)

Q

A

Half a century ago, when I first began to think about the meaning of scriptural verses, the conventional explanation was this: The passage you quote is only the first verse of Psalm 22, a prayer well-known to Jews of Christ’s time. That psalm, which begins as a cry of abandonment, actually ends up to be a prayer of hope and praise, a vote of confidence in God’s saving love. Verse 25 of that psalm, for example, reads: “For (God) has not spurned or forsaken the one he loves.”

This explanation was meant to assure the questioner that Jesus, the divine Son of God, could never have felt distanced from his Father. For me, to be honest, that explanation never rang true. Jesus did not “pretend” to be a human being. He really was one of us, subject to all the vulnerabilities that real human beings experience. How could he not have felt isolated, even abandoned by God? In the midst of his excruciating torture, all but one of his friends had fled in fear, their leader had denied even knowing Jesus, and Judas had betrayed him to his captors.

Fortunately, more than 20 years ago, Scripture scholarship caught up with what our instinct was telling us to be true. In the 1990s, Father Raymond Brown, then the world’s most noted Catholic New Testament scholar, argued that Jesus did truly feel abandoned as he hung on the cross. Father Brown pointed to the fact that, while praying in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before, Jesus had addressed his Father with the Aramaic word “Abba,” a term of filial intimacy for “Daddy.” But here on the cross, just moments before his death, Jesus now uses the word “Elohi,” a much more formal term for “Lord,” indicating a greater sense of separation.

Personally, I feel much more attracted to this very real human being and much more confident that he understands us in our own moments of loneliness.

Q

Is it appropriate for people to say prayers out loud during adoration of the Blessed Sacrament? I have always cherished this silent time with the Lord, but in the parishes I go to, when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed, people start praying the chaplet of Divine Mercy even before the priest has left the sanctuary. (Lincoln Creek, Oregon)

A

To my knowledge, there is no “rule” that prohibits public prayers during the exposition and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. That having been said, the main goal of such a devotion is to foster private prayer and meditation. On the feast of Corpus Christi in 1967, the Vatican, in an “Instruction on Eucharistic Worship,” said that the practice “stimulates the faithful to an awareness of the marvelous presence of Christ and is an invitation to spiritual communion with him” (No. 66).

The liturgical guidelines of the Diocese of Lansing in Michigan explain that “as properly understood, adoration is reverent and private time in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.”

The Vatican instruction does allow that, during the period of adoration, “to foster personal prayer, there may be readings from the Scriptures together with a homily, or brief exhortations which lead to a better understanding of the mystery of the Eucharist” (No. 62).

But that same document is quick to add that “it is desirable that there should be periods of silence at suitable times” and notes that “during the exposition everything should be so arranged that the faithful can devote themselves attentively in prayer to Christ our Lord.”

FATHER DOYLE is chancellor for public information and a pastor in the Diocese of Albany, New York. Questions may be sent to Father Doyle at askfatherdoyle@gmail.com and 30 Columbia Circle Dr. Albany, New York 12203.

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as well as your local church parish

THE CATHOLIC COMMENTATOR

Send your church parish, school and organization news and photos to Richard Meek, editor, at rmeek@diobr.org.
Confession an opportunity to cleanse one’s soul of the despair of sin

By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

It’s been called a Catholic’s “Easter duty,” an opportunity, if you will, to “come clean” and be fully united in God’s merciful and loving care.

Yet, many Catholics do not take advantage of the sacrament of reconciliation or confession.

According to a 2015 Pew Research Center Survey of Catholics living in America, about four in 10 Catholics say they go to confession at least once a year with an even fewer number going monthly or several times a year.

Considering confession is also one of the precepts of the Catholic church, according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, those numbers are alarming.

But beyond the minimum actions required of Catholics regarding the Church, confession, in its basic form, is helpful, both spiritually and physically, to make more progress on two legs than one.

Father Jeff Bayhi, pastor of St. John the Baptist Church in Zachary, “we are offered peace.”

Quoting a line from St. Augustine, “…our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee,” Father Bayhi said a good confession can mend the “therapeutic mindlessness” so often found in today’s society, and allow God’s forgiveness and unending mercy to move individuals closer to God, not farther away.

Father Tom Duhe’, pastor of St. Thomas More Church in Baton Rouge, explained that sin separates individuals from God, but through the sacrament of reconciliation, “You know God has forgiven you and absolution has healed you.”

Calling confession a tremendous blessing and grace, Father Miles Walsh, pastor of Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Baton Rouge, offered a visual image of confession as tied to the two sacraments he said Jesus gave to us for daily warfare.

“I think the Eucharist and confession are the two legs upon which we walk,” he said, noting that we make more progress on two legs than one.

“If you try to hop along on one leg, and many Catholics hop along with the Mass, not availing themselves of the sacrament that predisposes us to receive God’s presence in the Eucharist,” he added.

Since confession is not an outward community sacrament, meaning it only involves the penitent and a priest who acts as the ears and heart of Christ, it might be easy to think that skipping confession, for whatever reason, only affects the individual.

However, Father Chris Decker, pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Maringouin, St. Frances Xavier Cabrini in Livonia and St. Joseph Church in Grosse Tete.

“…sin is like a rock that causes a ripple effect when thrown into water, so no sin is private. Sin affects everyone.”

Father Chris Decker, pastor
Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Maringouin, St. Francis Xavier Cabrini in Livonia and St. Joseph Church in Grosse Tete

“So, we truly are the mystical body of Christ. Christ is the head and we are its members. It’s not a metaphor. We are an organism,” Father Decker said.

Knowing this, it is easy to see that when a person goes to confession, the redemptive grace that occurs through the Holy Spirit, touches the heart and thereby others.

“If you think of it like a cross, whenever a person comes to reconciliation, they are coming before God. So, there’s the vertical aspect of reconciliation where I am looking up to God,” said Father Decker.

In addition to this vertical component, the horizontal image, completing the cross, is the priest that stands as a representative of the entire body of Christ as a community, he added.

By looking at reconciliation as the cross of Jesus, the priest, acting in the mercy of God, gives absolution while at the same time providing an opportunity to reconcile with the community, Father Decker explained.

So, how does one make a “good” confession?

That question will be addressed in part two of this look at the sacrament of reconciliation.

If you are searching for an opportunity to go to confession, whether it has been months or years, the Diocese of Baton Rouge wants to make it easy by offering the sacrament of reconciliation through its “The Light is on For You” campaign. Visit dibfr.org for more information.

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Bishop Muench welcomes RCIA candidates in ceremony

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

“You are welcomed, embraced, supported and loved,” Bishop Robert W. Muench told the nearly 500 candidates and catechumens during a Rite of Election welcoming ceremony March 5 at St. Joseph Cathedral in Baton Rouge.

Bishop Muench confirmed the desire of the catechumens and candidates to join the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil Mass by celebrating the Rite of Election and Call to Conversion Candidate Rites, one at 1 p.m. and one at 4:30 p.m.

The cathedral was filled with people at both ceremonies and an atmosphere of joy as the bishop commended those present for answering God’s call to a deeper relationship with him through entering the church.

“What a beautiful site it is, this house,” said Bishop Muench. “It is the Lord who brings us into this beautiful historic house of God at this time on this day because God is alive and has called us. And God wants to bless us.” The bishop emphasized to the soon-to-be Catholics that God wants them to experience his love and that they are an especially unique gift to God and the world.

“You are the key signs that God is among us,” said the bishop.

He further told them that they bring new life to the church.

The bishop also stated, “Every one of you has a place in this church, not only to be a member but a person who carries out the evidence of the love of God.”

“There is no such thing as a second-best member of the church,” said the bishop.

He told the people God wants them to be comforted, empowered, opened and strengthened knowing that God has something he wants them to do.

Noting the rich history of the current cathedral, which was built beginning in 1853, the bishop said church parishes are not identified by their structure but for their purpose of serving and bringing the love of God to others.

“Please know you are part of our mission,” the bishop said.

Following the bishop’s remarks, the catechumens and candidates confirmed their intentions to join the church.

“Our I am Lord,” responded the catechumens who will enter the church at the Easter Vigil Mass at church parishes in the Diocese of Baton Rouge after being questioned by Bishop Robert W. Muench about their readiness to join the faith at a Rite of Election welcoming ceremony March 5 at St. Joseph Cathedral in Baton Rouge. Photo by Debbie Shelley | The Catholic Commentator

“Here I am Lord,” respond the catechumens who will enter the church at the Easter Vigil Mass at church parishes in the Diocese of Baton Rouge after being questioned by Bishop Robert W. Muench about their readiness to join the faith at a Rite of Election welcoming ceremony March 5 at St. Joseph Cathedral in Baton Rouge. Photo by Debbie Shelley | The Catholic Commentator

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USCCB grant helps Cristo Rey to return to Redemptorist site

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Cristo Rey Baton Rouge Franciscan High School in Baton Rouge is coming home, and much sooner than anyone expected.

Crisco Rey president Brian Moscona could hardly contain his excitement as he relayed the news on March 23 that the school, which was driven from its north Baton Rouge site by floodwaters this past summer, should be operational in August with the utilization of temporary buildings.

“That’s our plan,” a beaming Moscona said, after learning only moments earlier that Cristo Rey was awarded a $500,000 flood recovery grant by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The grant, along with confirmation from FEMA that the agency will pick up 90 percent of the costs of establishing a modular campus, all but assured Cristo Rey will return to the site of the old Redemptorist High School, which the diocese has donated to the school. Cristo Rey, currently in its first year, opened in August, 2016 only to be exiled to Bon Marche Business Park by the historic flooding that left up to four feet of water in the school.

“This grant allows us to have confidence going back to the site because we’re still able to pay 10 percent of the cost for the (temporary) buildings,” said Moscona, who only recently took over as president after the sudden retirement of Dr. James Llorens this past fall.

“Our plans are to go back to the site in August with a modular campus, which will be our temporary home while we build a new school,” he added. “We are doing everything possible to make it happen. All of the (modular building contractors bidding on the job) have been told we need to be in the building, ready to operate on Aug. 1.”

Moscona said because so many schools in the area flooded during August the companies are familiar with the unique demands and timelines of establishing a temporary school. He also noted he recently went through a similar experience a year ago when he was principal at Our Lady of Mercy School in Baton Rouge and 12 modular classrooms had to be set up.

“So I have a lot of relations I can go to and make this happen,” he said.

Cristo Rey board chairman Vic Howell said he has been told by FEMA representatives the agency views the reestablishment of schools as critical community elements.

“They prioritize organizations like schools because the faster they can get schools back up and running, the more they can try to get the neighborhoods rebuilding them because the hub is there,” Howell said. “So they have an interest in trying to expedite schools.”

Cristo Rey has hired a contractor to act as a liaison between the school and FEMA to help cut through the red tape, a process many residents have become quite familiar with during the past six months.

Groundbreaking on a new school appears to be at least a year away and will depend on what FEMA grants to the construction as well as a Cristo Rey capital campaign. Howell said FEMA uses a complex formula to determine the amount of funding the school will receive.

Estimates for construction of the new school range from $8 to $10 million, but the final amount needed to be raised will remain unknown until FEMA makes its final determination.

“When we initiate a capital campaign we are going to be looking to the Baton Rouge community to support the work that we are doing,” Moscona said. “The students of the families that we serve are not going to be the ones that are going to be able to pay for this. So we’re looking for support from the community who believe in our mission, who want to support north Baton Rouge.

“We are looking for people who believe in Catholic family, who believe in serving families who are low income who otherwise would not have the opportunity to go to a Catholic school and people who are looking to reshape north Baton Rouge.”
LEAP OF FAITH

‘LEAP OF FAITH’

Two years after leading up to the dedication, said a firm was then hired to survey parishioners to determine if they would rather see a new church constructed and renovate the old church to a preK-4 building or vice versa. He said those answers were about evenly split.

However, a second question was far more revealing. When parishioners were asked if they would donate money to build a new church, Father Schatzle said the response was overwhelmingly positive.

“We took a leap of faith,” he said.

In the spring of 2014 an executive committee was formed and chose GraceHebert of Baton Rouge as the architects. During the same time, Father Schatzle and several other parishioners visited eight to nine churches in the Houston area to glean ideas from churches with seating capacities of at least 1,200. A capital campaign followed, and to date $18.3 million has been pledged for the $21 million project that also includes tearing down the old church and constructing a center for children up to four years old.

Father Schatzle noted the church was first estimated to cost in the neighborhood of $12 million but the bids came in at $17 million.

“The people really responded,” he said, his voice bursting with pride. “They were very generous.

“St. George has a history of always what is the next step we need to take for the good of St. George. And the people responded. They were very generous and very excited.”

The result is a state-of-the-art building that features four video screens, lighted stations of the cross, capturing stained glass windows by local artist Steve Wilson featuring the sacraments of baptism, the Eucharist and confirmation, uniquely shaped pews that encourage fellowship along the congregation, a daily chapel and a high-tech sound system.

Even the main aisle is unique, with medallions crafted into the floor featuring the sacraments of reconciliation, anointing of the sick, marriage and holy orders.

“We wanted to mix in the best of the old with the new,” Father Schatzle said. “There is a lot of symbolism throughout the church.”

Parish administrator Martin Hernandez, who Father Schatzle credits for much of the church’s beauty and opulence, used the internet to locate stations of the cross that were more than a century old. Father Schatzle said the stations were being stored in a warehouse in Pennsylvania.

Likewise, Hernandez said the internet to locate 100-year old bells, which came from a closed church in St. Louis. The bells feature German inscriptions and are hanging in a bell tower standing sentry over the church.

“I’m very pleased with the end result,” Father Schatzle said. “When you enter the church, there is a sense of the sacred, a sense of God’s presence.”

Before the final blessing, Bishop Muench looked at Father Schatzle and with a smile, said, “Father Mike, you pulled it off,” to which the congregation gave their pastor a lengthy and enthusiastic standing ovation.

The bishop also noted that Father Schatzle was completing his 12th year at St. George in June, which would mean he would be reassigned. In a playful manner, the bishop asked the congregation, “What do you think if I gave him an extra year?”

A second rousing ovation caused the bishop to respond, “I think that is what people call a jury’s unanimous decision.”

“So granted.”

Bishop Muench blessed the baptismal font shortly after entering the church. The font is located to the right of the altar.
Girl Scout Sunday a special day for Immaculate Conception troops

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

The atmosphere on Girl Scout Sunday March 12 at Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs was sweetened by cake, cupcakes and pure joy of Girl Scouts from the Denham Springs area celebrating. Their reunion was a happy moment in their ongoing journey of recovery after the bitter days of August 2016 when flood waters wreaked havoc on their homes and sense of normal lives.

Girl Scout Sunday was the first time the scouts had gotten together since December, when they held a ceremony at ICC to receive their religious awards, said Girl Scout troop leader Dee Ardonne. She and co-troop leader Beth Matherne said they were dislocated, gutting houses, and unable to attend the diocesan late Conception alone receiving their Religious Awards together.

This resulted in 14 girls from Immaculate Conception alone receiving their Religious Awards Medal in 2016. Many of them were unable to attend the diocesan awarding of the awards in August because they were dislocated, gutting houses, stressed or exhausted.

“Some of the girls had water in their homes and lost nearly everything, including their Girl Scout vests, uniforms …,” said Ardonne.

Most of the scouts and their parents said they were in “survival mode” in August.

Sophia Weir, who also earned her Family of God Award recipient, whose home fortunately did not flood, thought about her fellow scouts, remembering the difficult time.

“They were troops where the girls were scattered out with no idea of when they would be home again.”

Ardonne and Matherne worked quickly to assess what happened to the Girl Scouts and to bring them back together.

The leaders were also touched that Girl Scouts from across the country sent donations to help the Denham Springs troops.

“All the scouts are used to helping in the local community. But this reinforced to them the importance to not only give to others, but to receive charity from others. It’s nice for them to know that their sister Girl Scouts were thinking of them,” said Matherne.

Juliana Easley, a Family of God Award recipient, whose home fortunately did not flood, thought about her fellow scouts, even with a house full of family members following the flood.

“I was wondering if they were okay and if we would actually see each other again,” said Easley. She was excited to see her fellow scouts at the awards ceremony and relished her time with them on Scout Sunday.

Her parents, Jay and Melissa Easley, were proud of her maturity at such a difficult time.

“She’s grown up and experienced a lot,” said Jay Easley.

Sophia Weir, who also earned her Family of God Award, basked in the company of her sister scouts. Her mother, Emma Weir, said the reunion of the troops was something her daughter needed.

The Livingston Parish Sheriff’s Department evacuated Matherne and her family. “I burst into tears,” Matherne’s daughter, Aubrey, said after she saw some treasured belongings ruined. The family salvaged what they could, and Aubrey is relieved to be back in her home.

“Scouting as a whole was disrupted for our parish and our individual troops,” said Beth Matherne. “There were troops who were scattered out with no idea of when they would be home again.”

“After receiving their awards, we had a reception in the youth hall and everyone was so excited to be there. It wasn’t the grand ceremony and reception that was originally planned, but the girls were thrilled nonetheless,” said Ardonne.

Kathy Gora, CCOS committee chair, said, “We are so very proud of the Girl Scouts from Denham Springs. These young women certainly persevered, waiting until December to receive their Catholic Scouting Religious Awards together.”

Ardonne said, “I’ve thought a lot about how the girls were able to live out the Girl Scout law during the flood. The more I read through and listened to their stories, the more I realized the extent to which the girls exemplified the Girl Scout law.”

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FREEDOM WRITERS – Abby Mitchell, left, and Melanie Dietrich, eighth-grade students at Our Lady of Mercy School in Baton Rouge, were the top winners selected from a field of 250 entries in the Knights of Columbus Patriotic Essay Contest. Mitchell was awarded second place and Dietrich captured first for their writing based on the question, “How can I show freedom for my country, the United States of America?” Both students were recently recognized at a banquet where they read their essays and received monetary prizes. Photo provided by Christy Haldane | Our Lady of Mercy School

FEEDING THE SAINTS – Mater Dolorosa Church Parish in Independence held its St. Joseph Altar on March 19 at the K.C Hall. The community members, led by Cheryl Santangelo, came together to make the traditional Italian cookies, cakes, cannoli, pupukolovas (baked bread dyed with Easter eggs symbolizing the coming of Easter) and many other assorted frittatas (vegetable dishes). The main dish served was the traditional pasta Milanese (red gravy) cooked with finocchio and anchovies sprinkled with mudica (toasted bread crumbs and sugar to resemble saw dust). Twelve students from Mater Dolorosa School were chosen to represent a saint of their choice. The students were Rebekah Doty (Mary), Brett Angelette (St. Joseph), Gage DiVittorio (Jesus), Ethan Mendez (St. Paul), Gaige Truxillo (St. Francis of Assisi), Dane DiVittori (St. Jude), Abigail Lemane (St. Maria Goretti), Chloe Hebert (St. Bernadette), Rebecca Thiel (Blessed Jacinta of Fatima), Ava Peco (St. Peregrine), Peyton Owens (St. Elizabeth of Hungary) and Isabella Lamarca (St. Teresa of Calcutta). Photo provided by Erin Mendez | Mater Dolorosa

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Kong: Skull Island
Warner Bros.

Impressive monster movie, set in 1973, in which an ensemble of scientists and soldiers led by a fringe researcher (John Goodman), the troops by a hard-bitten colonel (Samuel L. Jackson) travel to a previously uncharted island where they encounter an updated version of King Kong. As a World War II-era Air Force officer (John C. Reilly) who bailed out over the isle and has been stranded there ever since eventually explains to them, however, while the outsized ape may be the monarch of this hidden realm, he is far from the only lethal threat its new visitors will face there. Director Jordan Vogt-Roberts’ action adventure, which also features Tom Hiddleston as the group’s guide and Brie Larson as a Vietnam War photographer who has decided this is her next big story, references everything from a range of science fiction movies to Francis Ford Coppola’s 1979 film “Apocalypse Now” and its partial source material, novelist Joseph Conrad’s “Heart of Darkness.” The multiple dangers the cast confront lead to some unsettling mayhem and a few grisly deaths, marking this as a journey strictly for grown-ups. Stylized but grim combat and other violence with little gore, a few gruesome images, a couple of uses of profanity, at least one rough term, occasional crude and crass language. A-II; PG-13

A United Kingdom
Fox Searchlight

Casting as Disney’s live-action adaptation of its beloved 1991 animated film is an imaginative if problematic work, an old-fashioned Hollywood musical with an arresting visual style. The eponymous lovely Beast (Emma Watson) exchanges places with her kidnapped father (Kevin Kline) in a haunted castle inhabited by a furry monster (Dan Stevens), who is in fact a prince transformed by a wicked spell. The same curse turned his staff into household objects, including a candelabra (Ewan McGregor), mantel clock (Ian McKellen), and teapot (Emma Thompson). Only if the odd couple finds true love can the hex be broken, but a vengeful hunter (Luke Evans) stands in the way. The decision of the studio, director Bill Condon and screenwriters Stephen Chbosky and Evan Spiliotopoulos to reimagine the hunter’s sidekick (Josh Gad) as Disney’s so-called “first gay character” is a regrettable one and firmly at odds with Christian values. A few scenes of peril and action violence, a benign view of homosexual activity, some sexual innuendo. L; PG-13
A farewell column

It has been a great privilege for me to write this column for the past 40 years. During this time, I have received hundreds of letters and emails from readers. One of the sure blessings of writing this column is how many of you engaged with me, offered your own perspectives or brought questions about your lives to me for suggestions.

Whenever possible, I have offered ideas of who you might contact in your own diocese to receive the support and guidance that you deserve. To each of you who have reached out to me with your questions or commentary, I thank you.

While the column was structured around today’s popular music, and in 40 years there have been many changes and evolutions in this artistic endeavor, in reality, the column was a vehicle for religious education and exploration of the importance of values stemming from our Catholic faith.

I often heard from religious educators about how they would use the column with those that they instructed in our Catholic heritage and values.

Occasionally, I actively collaborated with religious education classes either in schools or in parish religious education settings. I always enjoyed these collaborations and would do my best to integrate the insights of the students into future columns.

While there are many people that I am grateful to for these 40 years of collaboration, nobody has been more important than those individuals who served as my direct editors for the column. I am sure that I cannot remember all who have served in this role, but I especially want to thank Kate Bird, Carole Norris Greene and, in particular, Rhina Guidos.

Their skills as editors, their insights into the writing process and their perspective on how to better communicate the ideas that I would present to them made the column helpful to others. Without their assistance, I am sure the column would have been short-lived, and the fact that it was published over the past four decades is a direct result of their skills and efforts.

Ultimately, the goal of this column, as well as many aspects of Catholicism, is to help us grow as today’s disciples of Jesus. It seems that at this time in the human story, those insights and commitments that foster the foundation of human dignity and social justice lead us in the way in which it means to us to be Jesus’ disciples. I have attempted to support the teaching and vision of Jesus as conveyed in the Gospels, at least in my way of hearing them, as an impetus for all of us to grow in our commitment as disciples.

I do know this — your gifts, your courage and your faith are so needed as our world heals and evolves into the kingdom of God and the reign of peace and justice that Jesus announced.

So, I end this time of my working with Catholic News Service with a blessing for all those that will continue this important work for our church. I send a special blessing to those new voices that will help to lead all of us to understand the ways that we can grow in discipleship and make the healing presence of God more manifest in our world.

A blessing to each of you who receive this final column.

On The Record

Charlie Martin

VATICAN CITY – (CNS) Celebrating the 100th anniversary of apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima, Pope Francis will lead the evening recitation of rosary and celebrate Mass on the anniversary at the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima when he visits Portugal on May 12-13.

The pope will make the two-day pilgrimage to the site where Mary appeared to three shepherd children May 13, 1917. The apparitions continued once a month until Oct. 13, 1917, and later were declared worthy of belief by the Catholic Church.

During his visit, the pope also will meet with President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa and have lunch with the bishops of Portugal.

Pope Francis will be the fourth pontiff to visit the Marian shrine, following in the footsteps of Blessed Paul VI, St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, who each made visits on a May 13 to mark the anniversary of the first apparition.

On May 12, the pope is scheduled to meet with the Portuguese president, pray at the Little Chapel of the Apparitions and end the evening by giving a speech and recitation of the rosary.

The following day Pope Francis is scheduled to meet with the prime minister of Portugal, celebrate an outdoor Mass at the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary at Fatima and have lunch with the bishops of Portugal before his scheduled 3 p.m. departure.
Prayer, our deepest longing

Father Rolheiser begins his introduction of the book by describing the spiritual situation of our lives today. Our age, he says, lives rather defensively on the surface of life. We are bombarded by so much mass communication that it is difficult for us to be enchanted by anything. Yet, and maybe therefore, we pray long for depth, to be touched by poetry, faith and love.

“We are made,” he says, “for intimacy with each other and with God.” Yet, “We have trivialized and tamed our longing.” We need to connect with God who is our deepest longing. We need prayer. As Jesus told his fishermen disciples, we must “put out into the deep.”

In Chapter One, Father Rolheiser explains why we struggle with prayer today. “Where we differ from the past is not so much in badness as in busyness.” Prayer requires discipline for us because we don’t want to miss out on any experience. For prayer we need solitude, which is not something we do, but a form of awareness. It is a reflecting on our daily life with gratitude, peacefulness, enjoyment and prayer. Solitude begins when we place ourselves silently in God’s presence. This done daily establishes a bond, an intimacy with God. “What’s important is that we pray what’s inside of us, and not what we think God would like to see inside of us.” Like Adam and Eve, we can’t hide from God.

Chapter Two is about hearing God’s voice in prayer. How do we recognize God’s voice among all the other voices we hear in this era of mass communication? Jesus tells us to listen to the “Good Shepherd.” His sheep, we will know his voice. We need to listen for that voice in our prayer. Father Rolheiser says that “because we think God is disappointed in us, especially at those times when we are disappointed in ourselves, we fail to meet the one person, the one love and one energy – God that actually understands us, delights in us and is eager to smile at us.”

Some give up and stop praying. Yet, “In Scripture, the opposite of faith is not doubt but anxiety.” It is worry that God has forgotten us, written us out of the heavenly book of life.

Next, in Chapter Three, Father Rolheiser writes about the different kinds of prayer that Catholics need to practice, especially the church’s public or liturgical prayer which is so identified as Catholic, the Mass, sacraments and the divine office. Our church doesn’t exist for itself. It exists to evangelize the world, to bring Christ’s message to the world. Part of that message is the public worship of the true God in our liturgies. In the Eucharist “we enter into the prayer of Christ through the church for the world.” In liturgical prayer we are praying for the needs of the world. Such prayer is contrasted with devotional or “affective” prayer, which “is about us, focused precisely on bringing us and our feelings to God.”

Chapter Four is about practicing this “affective” or personal, devotional prayer. This prayer “tries in myriad ways to open us up in such a way that we can hear God say to us, ‘I love you.’” Personal prayer is so simple we rarely understand its essence. A perfect example is Mary Magdalene not recognizing the risen Christ. Father Rolheiser explains: “Just as Mary Magdalene didn’t recognize Jesus until he called her name in the garden, we need to hear God saying our name, ‘Steve,’ ‘John,’ ‘Judy,’ ‘Cathy.’” And we must occasionally answer, “Jesus, God, I love you.” The problem is that we often raise our minds but not our hearts to God. But insight is meant “to establish friendship.”

We have trivialized and tamed our longing. It is cheap and quickly obtained from a store. It is meant to enrich our journey in Christ. It is meant “to unfold, as do flowers and pregnancies, life itself and within love itself. They need time and patience.”

With his final chapter (six) Rolheiser writes about the different kinds of prayer that Catholics need to practice, especially the church’s public or liturgical prayer which is so identified as Catholic, the Mass, sacraments and the divine office. Our church doesn’t exist for itself. It exists to evangelize the world, to bring Christ’s message to the world. Part of that message is the public worship of the true God in our liturgies. In the Eucharist “we enter into the prayer of Christ through the church for the world.” In liturgical prayer we are praying for the needs of the world. Such prayer is contrasted with devotional or “affective” prayer, which “is about us, focused precisely on bringing us and our feelings to God.”

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And we must occasionally answer, “Jesus, God, I love you.” The problem is that we often raise our minds but not our hearts (to God).... But ultimately, prayer is about love, not insight. It is meant “to establish friendship.” Such daily personal prayer is crucial to the spiritual life. Father Rolheiser concludes, “In my experience, the extraordinary people I have known and admired all have had the same secret: they prayed privately.”

“Growing to Maturity in Prayer” is the subject of Chapter Five. When the world goes mad around us and beats us down, what does the Christian do? Father Rolheiser’s beginning example is great: “There’s a Ziggy cartoon that shows him praying to God in these words: ‘I just want to let you know that the meek are still getting clobbered down here!’ If Jesus loves us and he is God, then why does he let us die? Father Rolheiser answers: “Each of us asks that question in our own way because what we want is a God who rescues us ... and who doesn’t let us get sick and die.” Yet, “God, as a Jewish axiom puts it, is never in a hurry!”... if atheism is just another way of saying, ‘I will no longer wait for God...’ faith is just another way of saying, ‘I will wait for God.” The answer is that God is God. “He has no need to play such a game, and neither do we .... The need for patience arises out of the rhythms innate within life itself and within love itself. They need to unfold, as do flowers and pregnancies, according to their own time.”

Father Rolheiser’s final chapter (six) is “Listening to God’s Heartbeat.” He sets the scene of St. John reclining on the breast of Jesus at the Last Supper. Then he interprets that scene: “This is (St.) John’s ultimate image for discipleship: The ideal disciple is the one who is attuned to Christ’s heartbeat and sees the world with that sound in his or her ear.” That scene is what solitude or contemplative prayer is all about.

There is an awful lot of wisdom in this very small book. Read it – you will enjoy it, and I think it will help you to “rend your heart” and make this Lent a suitable offering to God.

FATHER CARVILLE is a retired priest in the Diocese of Baton Rouge and writes on current topics for The Catholic Commentator. He can be reached at johnycarville@gmail.com.
Father Nelson eulogizes Father Mike Collins at memorial Mass

March 31, 2017

VIEWPOINT

The Catholic Commentator

Mike was a true brother to me. For this I will always love him. For this I will always be thankful. As a brother, priest and friend, he brought me to a better place. He made me laugh, often. And he made me stronger. In my years as a priest, I have been blessed with three great priest-mentors: Father Albert, Father Tom Ranzino and Mike. These past few days, especially, I again realize how lucky I am.

Many of you don’t know this, but from May of this past year on, it wasn’t just Mike and I living together. It was me, and Mike – and Duke. Duke was my youngest sister’s family’s dog, a 14-year-old Golden Retriever. He was staying with us until they finished renovating their new house. Soon after Duke moved in, though, he quickly became Mike’s dog. Duke sat right at Mike’s bedroom door all day, every day, literally. Because of his age, Duke died a few months ago. Last night, when I was beginning to feel a little nervous about this, I spoke on the phone with my pastor emeritus. “Don’t say it!” he said. “I'm from the Holy Land!”

But most of us know that Mike was most courageous. We, too, must give thanks for his love of Jesus the Good Shepherd, the Eucharist, and the many ways in which he showed us who Christ was and what it meant to trust him. One of my seminary professors from my years in New Orleans, the late Father Warren Archary, wrote a prayer entitled, “Prayer of a Priest,” in which he asked, “Jesus, shepherd of my soul – live in the soul of your shepherd.” Truly, THE shepherd lived in THIS shepherd. He loved and was humbled by the people he served, stating in a 2011 interview for The Catholic Commentator: “People are living in a complicated world. Their priest needs to be loving, forgiving, compassionate and patient. It humbles me to see the faith people have when they face the issues in their lives and actually minister to me.”

Our second reading today from St. Paul says, “I have run the race; I have fought the fight.” As strong as Mike was, as energetic as he was all his life, and as much as he taught us how to fight and stay strong, during these days, there were moments when he was tired. He did not want to have the surgery. It took those who loved him the most to urge him to do so. But he was tired. I share this with all of you, because, in his illness, Mike showed us how to rise again in a new way. He showed all of us what it meant to find Jesus our shepherd in those moments when we hurt the most. Mike was very fond of that image of Jesus (printed on the cover of your program today), especially the fact that there is no door handle on the outside of the door. “The handle is only on the inside of the door,” he would say, “reminding us that it is up to us as to whether or not we will let Jesus in.” In his illness, Mike showed us in a new way how to do this.

I would like to share with all of us a final quality that I and others experienced in Mike, one of which many of us may not even be aware. It has to do with us as priests. Mike and I have had many visitors in and out of the Sacred Heart rectory the past few years. It didn’t matter who you were. He always made everyone feel welcome. My family, his family, the leaders of our college sharing group and college students, the Brothers of the Sacred Heart, who would visit from time to time (and) parishioners and staff.

Many of you don’t know this, but Mike certainly loved you. He once referred to you as his family. Others of your family – Mike often called them his family. Many of you a trillion miles away. But Mike, through his daily this past year, right up until he was tired. He did not want to have the surgery. It took those who loved him the most to urge him to do so. But he was tired. I share this with all of you, because, in his illness, Mike showed us how to rise again in a new way. He showed all of us what it meant to find Jesus our shepherd in those moments when we hurt the most. Mike was very fond of that image of Jesus (printed on the cover of your program today), especially the fact that there is no door handle on the outside of the door. “The handle is only on the inside of the door,” he would say, “reminding us that it is up to us as to whether or not we will let Jesus in.” In his illness, Mike showed us in a new way how to do this.

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with you. But, as I listened often to him speaking of you, I could tell that he felt safe and secure with you. We thank you – I thank you – for providing him this security and hope, especially during his final months.

May I share with all of you a brief history of my personal relationship with Mike. My family and I first met him when I was 11 years old, when he served as associate pastor at our parish of Our Lady of Mercy. Yes, it’s true, I served Mass for Mike when I was a kid – and I took every opportunity to remind him of that. Then, little could I have known then that, not only would I be ordained a priest, but would also come to serve as his associate pastor where he lived a role.

And it did not stop there. One day in 2011, having served almost two years as pastor myself at St. Jude, I received a letter in the mail one day, with the return address of Most Blessed Sacrament Church. Right away, even before I opened it, I could tell that it was from Mike. How? His handwriting! Now, those of us who have known Mike – and especially those of us who have worked with him – know that his handwriting was unique, to put it nicely. To be direct, it was, simply bad. There’s no other way to put it. He could have definitely been a doctor. It was so bad, that, one day, after he had moved in with me, the conversation went like this:

“I didn’t know you wrote in Gaelic.”

He said to me, “tis English, you idiot.”

I said, “the King’s English” to which he responded, “No, thank ya very much, fah-ther, I’m from the Holy Land!”

This went on between Mike and me for a while. And then one day, he returned to St. Jude in retirement to his mother. In his letter to me that day, he had asked if I would be open to him moving in and living with me and helping out. I told no one, except my mother. She asked me, “What does the letter say?” I told her, “I think he’s asking if he could retire here.” She said, “What do you mean, you think?!” I said, “I can’t read the damn thing!” Moments later, after asking me what I was going to do, I told her, “I think I’m going to take some time to think and pray about it.” Without hesitation, she said, “What’s there to think about?!” Shortly thereafter, he moved in. Moving out was a matter of needing to see close up and personal why many called him “the white tornado!”

I and many of us could share story after story. And we would, no doubt, laugh. But most importantly, we must give thanks for his love of Jesus the Good Shepherd, the Eucharist, and the many ways in which he showed us who Christ was and what it meant to trust him. One of my seminary professors from my years in New Orleans, the late Father Warren Archary, wrote a prayer entitled, “Prayer of a Priest,” in which he asked, “Jesus, shepherd of my soul – live in the soul of your shepherd.” Truly, THE shepherd lived in THIS shepherd. He loved and was humbled by the people he served, stating in a 2011 interview for The Catholic Commentator: “People are living in a complicated world. Their priest needs to be loving, forgiving, compassionate and patient. It humbles me to see the faith people have when they face the issues in their lives and actually minister to me.”

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Holy Family Bear Fair – Holy Family Church, 335 N. Jefferson Ave., Port Allen, will host its Bear Fair Friday, March 31, 5 p.m. – 11 p.m.; and Saturday, April 1, 10 a.m. – 11 a.m. On Sunday, April 2, beignets and other specialty breads will be sold from 8:30 a.m. – 11 a.m. and chicken plates will be sold from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the Holy Family School cafeteria. For more information, call 225-383-1838.

Day of Prayer – The Marian Servants of the Eastern will hold a morning of prayer, “Pray Like Pope Francis: A Guided Ignatian Prayer Experience,” Saturday, April 1, 8:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., in Room 124 of the Ministry Building of St. Jude Church, 9501 Highland Road, Baton Rouge. For information, email ms@marianservants.com.

Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites – The Secular 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, April 9, 1:30 p.m., at Our Lady of Mercy Parish Activity Center in St. Gabriel’s Room, 444 Marquette Ave., Baton Rouge. For more information, call 225-343-3191 or 225-803-3391, or email robertwhite436@att.net.

Hispanic Apostolate Way of the Cross – Live Way of the Cross, Good Friday, April 14, 5 p.m. on the St. Pius X Church grounds, 6380 Hooper Road, Baton Rouge, followed by the Adoration of the Cross in St. Pius X Church. Everyone is invited.

Espanol – El Apostolado Hispano le invita al Via Crucis en Vivo el Viernes Santo 14 de abril de a las 5 de la tarde en la Parroquia. St. Pius X, 6380 Hooper Road, Baton Rouge, seguido por la Adoración a la Santa Cruz en la Iglesia St. Pius X. Están todos cordialmente invitados.

St. Louis King of France Spring Fling – St. Louis King of France Church, 2121 N. Sherwood Forest Dr., Baton Rouge, will host a spring fling Saturday, April 1, 5:30 p.m. Tickets will also be sold at $100 each for a chance to win $10,000. For more information, call the parish office at 225-275-7280.

Pro-life Mass – Tuesday, April 11 at 5:30 p.m., St. Agnes Church, 740 East Blvd., Baton Rouge. For more information, call 225-383-4127.

Downtown Way of the Cross – Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge and St. Joseph Cathedral are hosting their annual Downtown Way of the Cross on Friday, April 14, 9 – 10:30 a.m. in downtown Baton Rouge. For more information, call 225-336-8700 or visit CatholicCharitiesBR.org.

Festival of Two Rivers – St. Alphonsus Church, 14040 Greenwell Springs Road, Greenwell Springs, will host its Festival of Two Rivers, “Building Through Faith,” Friday, April 28 – Sunday, April 30. A spaghetti supper will be served on April 29 at 5 p.m., and barbecue chicken dinners will be served on Sunday, April 30, starting at 11 a.m. For more information, call 225-261-4650.
St. Thomas Aquinas announces new principal

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Charles (Pat) Sanguinetti, a longtime Catholic educator, has been chosen as incoming principal at St. Thomas Aquinas Regional High School in Hammond.

Sanguinetti, who has served as principal at Cathedral School in Natchez, Mississippi for the past 15 years, will begin at STA on July 1, according to Dr. Melanie Verges, superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

“We are very happy to welcome (Sanguinetti) to the STA family,” Verges said. “He has diligently guarded, promoted and enhanced academic, athletic and spiritual growth throughout his tenure (at Cathedral), resulting in the community’s respect and trust.

“His commitment to Catholic education, personal qualities and exceptional skills fully qualify him for the position of principal.”

Sanguinetti, who received his undergraduate degree from Ole Miss and his masters from William Carey College in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, has 31 years in experience in public and Catholic schools, serving as teacher, assistant principal, principal and administrator.

“I am excited about the opportunity to be principal at St. Thomas,” Sanguinetti said. “I look forward to meeting the students and teachers as well as becoming deeply involved in the Hammond community.”

Sanguinetti replaces interim principal Ashley Chitwood, who stepped in at the beginning of the school year when former principal Jose Becerra left unexpectedly.

“(Chitwood’s) flexibility and calm demeanor have helped the school year be a successful one,” Verges said. “In addition we are proud of faculty members, staff members and students.”

Verges said many applications were received and that she and vicar general Father Tom Ranzino identified three candidates to be interviewed. She added the interview committee consisted of a parent and STA board member, a principal and diocesan board member, an STA faculty member and a diocesan priest.

John V. Sanguinetti, a longtime Catholic educator, has been chosen as incoming principal at St. Thomas Aquinas Regional High School in Hammond.

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JOY ▼
From page 1

Celebrating St. Joseph’s Day, with altars, is another favorite Lenten saints-related tradition for Father Palermo.

He has warm childhood memories of doing his homework in the home of Paul and Jean Zito in Plaquemine, as the Italian and Sicilian ladies baked cookies for the St. Joseph Altar and Paul Zito made muscadine wine. As the altar was set up in the three-story parish hall of St. John the Evangelist Church in Plaquemine, Father Palermo explored the building, with its stairwells and classrooms. He also rang the church bells when it was time to seat the saints on the day of the altar.

“St. John had the bells that would carry you off the ground when you would ring them,” said Father Palermo.

Keeping with the solemn tone of Lent, Father Palermo said some joys come only through sacrifice, including shedding pounds as he fasts.

“During Lent we give up a lot of things. I keep going because of the goal, because there’s something worthwhile at the end of Lent.”

Which, continues after Easter Sunday with a 50-day Easter season, stressed Father Palermo.

“The church doesn’t want us to be in the sorrows of Lent indefinitely. It teaches us we have to celebrate Easter longer,” said Father Palermo.

Our Diocesan Priests give to us everyday.

They help keep our churches open and provide us with the sacraments of our Catholic Faith.

On Easter Sunday remember them and all they have done.
Please give generously in the second collection to help provide them with a retirement with grace and dignity.
OLOL announces residents on Match Day

Sixty-five new residents will be serving their residency during the next year at Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center, hospital officials announced.

The residents were revealed at the hospital’s Match Day celebration, in which Our Lady of the Lake joined other academic medical centers around the country in learning which residents were matched to different graduate medical education programs nationwide.

Our Lady of the Lake is the largest academic medical center in the region. Each year, more than 260 residents and 300 medical students train on the hospital’s campus.

The 62 residents matched March 17 filled all available residency slots at Our Lady of the Lake. They will be coming to Baton Rouge from as far away as San Francisco, Michigan and Nebraska, as well as close-to-home institutions including LSU-New Orleans, LSU-Shreveport and University of Alabama at Birmingham.

“Match Day is a rite of passage for graduate medical students who will spend the next stage of their training getting hands-on experience in a specific field of study,” said Dr. Lauren Caloge chief academic officer at Our Lady of the Lake.

“The graduate medical education program at Our Lady of the Lake brings the brightest and most talented doctors to our community, which is significant for Baton Rouge because research shows physicians tend to stay and practice medicine in the state where they trained.”

“Match Day celebrates the future of medicine and the next generation of physicians,” said OLOL chief of staff Dr. P. Michael Davis. “As an academic medical center, Our Lady of the Lake is honored in its role in transforming Baton Rouge into a hub for medical research and new technology.”

The residents will join the following residency programs in pediatrics, psychiatry, emergency medicine, internal medicine, surgery and ear, nose and throat.

MIKE ▼

From page 17

him. They made him laugh. And he was always willing to go to their parish and help out. And, so, I would like to say to my brother priests here today that which we already know: we need each other, possibly now more than ever, and we need to be the best priests we can be for other. We are already trying, very hard. But now, I suggest, we need this more than ever. Mike's example, the love that he showed me and the courage that he instilled in me, leads me to share this with you of myself. I know that I haven't always gotten this right. I have, at times, fallen short. For those moments, I say to you, I am sorry. The bond that we share means that much to me. I pledge to you my commitment to be as good of a brother to you as I can be. During recent years, our entire diocese has been focusing on what it means to be more “our church... all of us... together... one family, one Body of Christ.” You are, indeed, good priests. We are good priests to each other. Thank God for this.

On Saturday of the first week of Lent, Mike moved back into the rectory at St. Jude. So much for the quiet! He preached at all of the Masses — without breaking a sweat, I might add — because he wanted to thank the people of the parish for their love, support and prayers. He challenged us all, as he spoke of the springtime that will be Easter and the need, between now and then, to work on “getting rid of the weeds in our life.” He reminded us of the words of Ash Wednesday, “... to dust you shall return...” and told us that God must not have been ready for him to return to dust yet. Then, he ended his homily in what many of us felt was a very “non-Mike way.” As one of our deacons, James Morrissey, later told me, “it was actually more like a press conference than a homily!” He ended it by saying:

“And, so, my good people... that's all I have to say... here I am... there you have it... ... any questions? And immediately, without hesitation, at EVERY MASS, the entire assembly rose and gave him one of the loudest, happiest ovations any of us had ever heard.

We miss you, Mike. We love you.

Thank you for helping us to know and follow the Good Shepherd.

Indeed, pray for us in God's perfect presence, as we will always pray for you.

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

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

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

These agents of mercy are true heroes, people who have heard a call to action and responded with no expectation of rewards, honors, or accolades. In the graphic, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, founder of St. Vincent de Paul, is depicted with a basket of bread, rushing toward someone in need as St. Vincent de Paul watches over him. Sometimes, the villains in life aren’t criminals, but dangers just as real — poverty, hunger, homelessness, and illness.

Every St. Vincent de Paul supporter is an agent of mercy. Thousands of volunteer hours, financial support, and donations of food enabled our Dining Room to serve a record 255,446 meals last year. For people like Connor and his mother, our Bishop Ott Shelter is a safe haven and a chance to start over. Last year, we provided over 30,000 guest nights of shelter to homeless men, women, and children. The most vulnerable segment of the homeless population is women and children, and we just broke ground on an expansion of our Sweet Dreams Shelter to better meet that growing need. At our Community Pharmacy, mercy is dispensed with every prescription we fill. In 2016, we filled over 22,000 prescriptions worth an estimated $2 million.

During this holy season, we are especially grateful for the people who make our work possible. We hope you will become an agent of mercy and support our efforts by making a financial gift to make a difference in the life of someone who desperately needs a helping hand-up.

My gift of $_________ is enclosed.
Name ____________________________
Address __________________________
City, State, Zip ____________________
Make your check out to: St. Vincent de Paul and mail to P.O. Box 127, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-0127 (or give online at: www.svdpbr.org)

Become an Agent of Mercy by making a gift by check or give online at svdpbr.org!