Bishop calls for healing

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Bishop Robert W. Muench and two members of the diocesan Racial Harmony Commission are calling for healing and prayer in the wake of the Department Of Justice's decision not to press charges against two Baton Rouge police officers involved in the shooting of Alton Sterling this past summer.

On May 3, the DOJ wrapped up a 10-month investigation into the shooting of the 37-year-old Sterling and concluded there was insufficient evidence to prove the officers had “acted recklessly or with negligence or by mistake,” acting U.S. attorney for the middle district of Louisiana Corey Amundson said in a press conference in Baton Rouge.

“We must dedicate ourselves to work for racial healing and transformation in Baton Rouge,” Bishop Muench said in a statement released shortly after the DOJ press conference. “While recognizing the universal respect we should have for those whose duty is to ensure our public safety, we must work together for law enforcement and criminal justice reform, economic development in all parts of the city, access to health care for all, and job skills. They will provide a safe haven for female victims under the age of 18.

The home will house 16 girls who will be home-schooled as well as taught life skills and job skills. They will also be allowed to stay as long as necessary.

“We need to recognize this crime against humanity and to combat this crime,” Bishop Sanchez-Sornondo, who along with being the pope’s point man on human trafficking is also the chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences in Rome, said at the dedication, which drew more than 50 supporters on a sunsplashed spring day. “I think this is a grace of God to do all we can do to resolve and eradicate this form of slavery.”

“If call upon Catholics of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, members of all faith communities, and people of good will to seize this opportunity to bring about healing and change,” the bishop said. “This moment calls for conversion of mind, heart, and spirit that is both personal and systemic.”

Father Tom Clark SJ, pastor at Immaculate Conception

Shelter safe haven for trafficking victims

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Pope Francis has targeted eradication of human trafficking as one of his papacy’s highest priorities, and the popular pontiff is hoping the solution runs directly through the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

As testimony to the importance he places on what he calls modern “human slavery,” the pope dispatched one of his top advisers, Bishop Marcelo Sanchez-Sorondo, to Baton Rouge for the April 26 dedication of Metanoia Manor, a one-of-a-kind shelter for young trafficking victims.

The home, which will be staffed by four Hospitaler Sisters of Mercy and is the vision of St. John the Baptist Church in Zachary pastor Father Jeff Bayhi, will provide a safe haven for female victims under the age of 18.

The home will house 16 girls who will be home-schooled as well as taught life skills and job skills. They will also be allowed to stay as long as necessary.

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Father Tom Clark SJ, pastor at Immaculate Conception

Mary a mother to all

By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

For many non-Catholics, and even for some who practice the faith, Mary's role in the church has often raised confusion.

These questions, which include “Why is Mary so special?” and “Why do some people call her mother?” take on new significance this month, especially as Americans prepare to celebrate Mother’s Day and the faithful across the world plan special activities for the centennial anniversary of the first apparition of Our Lady of Fatima.

Dina Dow, director of the diocese's Office of Evangelization and Catechesis, said Mary has been seen as the Mother of God, the “Theotokos,” which is Greek for “God-Bearer” or “Mother of God”
Weathering the storm

The most dreaded words in south Louisiana lexicon is rapidly approaching: hurricane season is near.

From June 1 through the end of November residents never stray far from mobile devices, apps or the television, wary of any breaking weather developments. And who can blame them, especially after an unnamed storm this past summer inflicted the worst damage in Baton Rouge in its long history.

As with most events that affect our lives, there is a patron saint of all storms. St. Medard was born in Picardy, France in 456, and gained acclaim as a noted bishop, preacher and missionary.

In 530 St. Medard was chosen to succeed Bishop Alomer of Vermand. He was chosen because of his exemplary piety and his knowledge. Although he was originally rejected, he found himself obliged to accept the responsibilities and devoted himself to the position.

St. Medard became one of the most honored bishops of his time, and he became the hero of numerous legends. According to one legend, it is believed that if the weather is good on his June 8 feast day, it will continue for the next 40 days. However, if it rains on his feast day, one can expect the next 40 days to be soggy.

He was often depicted laughing with his mouth agape, and because of that depiction, he is also considered to be the patron saint of toothaches, which seems to be an ideal parallel with hurricane season.

St. Medard appears to be the perfect patron saint for weather because as legend goes, it is said as a child he was once sheltered by rain from an eagle hovering over him. He is also said to protect those who work in the open air. St. Medard died in 545.

May God continue to carry them close to his heart.

You are described as a “bundle of energy” in your daily work and interaction with people. How do you get that “cup of motivation” in the morning?

One of the greatest gifts my lovely-beloved gave me was to know that every day was a gift from God and that he can’t wait to use us to improve someone else’s life. What’s not to be excited about?

You recently had the privilege of baptizing a granddaughter and giving a grandson his first Communion. How has your background as a husband and father before you were ordained as a priest after your wife passed away been beneficial in ministering as a priest?

Behind the Collar

… with FATHER EDDIE MARTIN, parochial vicar, St. Thomas More Church in Baton Rouge

Q As one who dabbles in artwork, are there a couple of your pieces at St. John the Evangelist Church in Prairieville where you served as deacon. Can you tell us about them and what inspired you to create them?

A I’ve always had a willingness to serve the church in any manner deemed useful and believed that whatever talents we have are God-given and belong to him. Two Easters have seen my ‘12 by 18’ (painting) attempts at a risen Christ in the sanctuary of St. John’s. The first saved my business by convincing a loan officer, who by the grace of God received a healing through it from having lost a son, to give me a loan. The second (set at first light) allowed me to make a theological statement with a smiling Jesus stepping into the tabernacle. There is an image of the Holy Spirit on his stomach in the form of a dove – totally unplanned and unknown to me until a parishioner pointed out what a nice and subtle addition it was! This image still hangs in the education center of St. John’s. The statue of St. John was a challenge as I went round and round with the sculptor (the eagle still looks more like a duckbill platypus to me!) I modeled for it in my driveway. My hair is cropped pretty close as it was just growing out from my shaving it to match my lovely-beloved’s (wife Jennie Martin, deceased) head from the chemo treatments. Although she was feeling pretty bad that day, she was the photographer that took the pictures for me. I used them to make to-scale sketches from all four views.

Q How were you able to put your skills and zest for mission work to use during the “great flood” of Baton Rouge and South Louisiana this past summer?

A The mission to serve one another and funneling the outpouring of love that our St. Thomas More community and friends provided was a pure pleasure. That flood showed us the best of mankind and continues to teach us the value of family over possessions. My heart will forever remember the two families who lost loved ones from our community in it.

The way, the truth and the life

By Dina Dow

Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you. – Psalm 33

The celebration of Easter continues as we hear more extraordinary readings these next two Sundays. The events described are filled with the work of the Trinity, as the father is known by the son; the son is the face of the father; and the Holy Spirit is the giver of life.

I Am the Way

Jesus clears the “way” for our journey to the father. He is the way of mercy, as he took on our sins, died to release us from bondage and was resurrected to give us a new life in the father through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the way of hope. He assures the Apostles (and us) that he will never abandon those who love him. In fact, he ascends to prepare a place for those who love the father through him. This “dwelling place” is our eternal home, our destiny, our heaven. Jesus is the way to the father. Those who see him, see the father. Those who know him, know the father. Those who love him and keep the commandments, love the father and honor his way. Through faith we see how Jesus’ entire life shows us the heart of the father and his love for the world. (CCC#516)

I am the Truth

Jesus is the truth. We read in the Catechism #2466, “In Jesus Christ, the whole of God’s truth has been made manifest. ‘Full of grace and truth,’ he came as the light of the world, he is the truth. ‘Whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.’” The disciple of Jesus continues in his word so as to know ‘the truth (that) will make you free’ and that sanctifies. To follow Jesus is to live in ‘the spirit of truth, whom the father sends in his name and who leads into all the truth.’” To his disciples Jesus teaches the unconditional love of truth: ‘Let what you say be simply ‘Yes or No.’”

I am the Life

“When the work of the son was accomplished the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that he might continually make holy the church, and that those who believe might have access through Christ in one spirit to the father. SEE GOSPEL PAGE 9

This (Catholic) Commentator has quite the circulation; my story there has attracted couples with marital issues and individuals who’ve lost their spouse from throughout the diocese to seek me out. But I’d like to champion the counseling skills of all our priests. The best parenting advice I have ever heard came from Father Vincent Dufresne, as he quipped … “In that confessional I hear both sides; the things they should be telling each other but don’t.”

Tell us something most people may not know about you.

A I’ve authored a book about my lovely-beloved’s faith, courage and our love as she battled cancer. It is titled, “The Last Dance.” My publisher is waiting on this artist to paint the cover image so it can move into production.

Behind the Collar

… with FATHER EDDIE MARTIN, parochial vicar, St. Thomas More Church in Baton Rouge
Young women taught to embrace their worth at conference  

By Debbie Shelley  
The Catholic Commentator

High school-aged girls said they were ready to confidently step into the role of womanhood as they received the message they can change the culture at a “Growing Up Gracefully” mother-daughter conference at the Catholic Life Center on May 2.

The program, sponsored by the Diocese of Baton Rouge Office of Marriage and Family Life and Woman’s New Life Center, looked at the physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of womanhood.

The youth said they saw their role as women in a new light as speakers presented comments coming from Catholic theologians and leaders. One popular remark with audience members was Archbishop Fulton Sheen’s, “To a great extent the level of any civilization is the level of its womanhood. When a man loves a woman, he has to become worthy of her. The higher her virtue, the more noble her character, the more she has to aspire to be worthy of her. The history of civilization could actually be written in terms of the level of its women.”

Sarah Denny, fertility care practitioner and speaker on authentic feminism and women’s healthcare, talked to the young women about their value as daughters of Christ.

Denny said as a freshman in college, she heard various opinions concerning relationships, sexuality and morality. This put her on a quest to discover the truth, which for her meant “freedom.”

One of the eye-opening resources she came across were writings of St. John Paul II, particularly Theology of the Body.

“I thought, ‘Wow, this is freedom;’” said Denny.

She said through this she came to know who she was as a woman and wants young women to do the same.

Denny then shared with them a quote from Edith Stein. “The world doesn’t need what women have, it needs what they are.”

“As women, we feel that to be of value we have to give something,” said Denny.

She said from the moment of their conception God’s treasures women as his special creation and desires for them to be in relationship with him.

Young women received affirming messages about what it means to be a woman during a “Growing Up Gracefully” mother-daughter program at the Catholic Life Center May 2. Photo by Debbie Shelley | The Catholic Commentator

Discussing the painting “The Creation of Adam,” by Michelangelo, Denny pointed out God appears to be protecting a feminine figure with his left arm and they and the surrounding angels appear to be enclosed in what appears to be a human brain. She said this shows God has always had women in mind.

Denny emphasized women are body and soul and urged the attendees to realize their bodies are good.

“You have pressure to live up to some rule. That will take away from the multi-faceted beauty of all that you here,” Denny said.

Next, Dr. Susan Caldwell, medical director of Hope Women’s Clinic in Metairie, spoke of the physical changes that occur as girls approach womanhood. She discussed the menstrual cycle and talked about how contraceptives harm women’s health.

According to Caldwell, regular menstrual cycles are a sign of a healthy body. She said contraceptives intentionally damages the female reproductive system, treats fertility as a disease and does not heal any disease in the process.

It also terminates pregnancy, which is something “that went very well” with the reproductive system, Caldwell said.

Particularly for teens, the brain is learning how to communicate with the reproductive system during menstruation, and contraceptives disrupt that. She urged the audience to respect their bodies as temples and vessels of God by not using contraceptives.

Next, Caitlin Brown gave her personal testimony to motivate the girls to wait until marriage to have sex.

Now married and the mom of a two-year-old son, Brown said when she was a sophomore in college, she had a boyfriend in college who pressured her to have sex. He argued that sex was the way he showed he loved her and that it would keep his interest in her.

The boyfriend also contended that Brown’s faith made her feel guilty for having sex.

“I didn’t have any answers. I thought maybe I should give in and have sex with him and the problem would go away,” said Brown.

She discussed this with her parents, who, in struggling how much guidance they should give her and how much independence she should have at 20, said, “It’s your decision.”

The boyfriend wore down her resolve, and she had sex with him. That first experience was not special she said. Nevertheless, she continued to have sex with him, and due to the fact that sex hormones affected the neurotransmitters in the brain, a bond formed in her mind.

The feeling, however, that “something wasn’t right,” welled up within her, and she broke up with her boyfriend. She said the sexual bond with her former

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Papal envoy impressed with spirit of Louisiana; to convey message to pope

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Bishop Marcelo Sanchez-Sorondo was silent, reflecting on what had been a whirlwind visit to Baton Rouge.

The bishop, who is chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences in Rome as well as Pope Francis’ point person in an aggressive campaign to eradicate human trafficking, was in town to assist in the dedication of Metanoia Manor, a shelter offering a safe haven for trafficking victims.

Bishop Sanchez-Sorondo’s brief visit included dabbling in new culinary experiences and hobnobbing with state leaders, even spending one night in the governor’s mansion with Gov. John Bel Edwards, himself a devout Catholic.

But when pressed, Bishop Sanchez-Sorondo said what he will remember with great fondness and pass on to Pope Francis is the spirit of the people of Louisiana, their welcoming attitude and their realistic commitment to offer assistance to those most in need. “It’s impossible for me to understand that this (area) is one of the (areas) that has more problems in this question of trafficking because you find people here just the contrary,” the bishop said in an exclusive interview with The Catholic Commentator. “And you have a special humanity with all of the people we have contacted.”

“I want to say to the pope (at Metanoia Manor) we find a model, a model that we need to follow and we need to study more and that this model needs the support of all of the church and needs the support of all of the leaders,” Bishop Sanchez-Sorondo added. “And then I can say to the pope he needs to be happy because (in Baton Rouge) there are new solutions.

“I will bring him a message of hope and encouragement and really good things (regarding the people in Louisiana), not only (addressing) the problem but the solutions.”

Although the pontiff has made ending human trafficking one of the top priorities of his papacy, Bishop Sanchez-Sorondo said Pope Francis’ concern dates to when he was known as Father and later Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, ministering in his native Argentina. Bishop Sanchez-Sorondo, a fellow Argentinean, said the pope was first introduced to the horror of human trafficking when he was a pastor and began actively working to find a solution. In his last year as Cardinal Bergoglio of Buenos Aires, Bishop Sanchez-Sorondo said the soon-to-be-pope would spend Sundays visiting hospitals, spending time with the poor, and speaking directly to trafficking victims.

After being elected pope, he moved quickly and true to his nature, Pope Francis did so in a humble manner, he wrote a hand-written note on the back of an envelope that contained an important Pontifical Academy official’s mail asking for their help in solving what they could to assist in his mission of education.

In the note Pope Francis simply asked for their help in solving trafficking, and he has been relentless in the past four years, raising the subject at least daily, and occasionally at least twice during a day, according to Bishop Sanchez-Sorondo.

“I think it’s very personal (for the pope) because of his experience as pastor,” he said. “For the pope it’s really the center and he speaks (on it) many times and in the more special moments (when speaking) of the sounds of humanity and the wounds of Christ.”

Bishop Sanchez-Sorondo said he is confident Metanoia Manor will help diffuse the impact of human trafficking, and added that he hopes to see the model expand not only nationally but also internationally. The vision of Father Jeff Bayhi, pastor of St. John the Baptist Church in Zachary, the shelter, with the help of four Hospitaler Sisters of Mercy nuns, will home school the young victims as well as help them heal emotionally and spiritually.

The goal is to teach the girls life skills so that they can transition back into the mainstream.

“I am very impressed,” said Bishop Sanchez-Sorondo. “I have a great impression of the complete participation of the people (in Baton Rouge) in this work. We can see parish people, of course Father Jeff who is really the soul, but also they have other priests and collaborators.

“This was really the work of the community and this is the things we need to do. And this is the model we need to do. “It’s great work.”

Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge
Associate Director for Youth & Young Adult Ministries

General Statement of Duties
The Associate Director for Youth and Young Adult Ministries in the Office of Evangelization & Catechesis of the Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge seeks to foster within all young people and those who minister to them a deeper, life-giving relationship with Jesus and minister to them a deeper, life-giving relationship with Jesus and pass on to Pope Francis.

Education and Experience Requirements
• Master’s degree in Theology, Pastoral Ministry, Religious Education or a related field required.
• Minimum of five years direct experience at the parish or diocesan level working with youth ministry programs, adolescents, young adults, and adults who minister to youth.
• National certification in Youth Ministry preferred.
• Demonstrated knowledge of the United States Catholic Bishops’ document “Renewing the Vision” and pertinent documents and their application in ministry with young people in the United States is required.
• Due to the nature of this position, it is required that the incumbent be a practicing Roman Catholic who is registered and active in a parish and possesses a working knowledge of Catholic teachings and doctrine.

Other Requirements
• Ability to relate to the catechizing and evangelizing component of youth and young adult ministry in collaboration with the Office of Evangelization & Catechesis.
• Ability to exercise good judgment in handling difficult and/or sensitive situations, with ability to maintain strict level of confidentiality and discretion as required by diocesan policy and legal requirements.
• Ability to effectively recruit, train, and support the youth, young adults, adults who minister to young people, and parishes/schools of the Diocese of Baton Rouge.
• Ability to develop, plan, coordinate, and implement training programs to teach leadership skills.
• Ability to teach, facilitate online courses, and train others to facilitate online coursework.
• Technological, organizational, analytical, and problem solving skills required.
• Strong knowledge and understanding of the Charter for the Protection of Young People.
• Large-scale event planning, record keeping/administration and attention to detail required.
• Requires working weekends and evenings regularly.

Please submit letter of interest, resume, and references to hr@diobr.org
Application Deadline is Friday, May 26, 2017.

Bishop Marcelo Sanchez-Sorondo, a top adviser to Pope Francis and the pontiff’s point person on human trafficking, speaks at the dedication of Metanoia Manor on April 26. Bishop Sanchez-Sorondo said he was impressed with the welcoming attitude of the people of Louisiana and their commitment to reach out to those in need. It’s a message he said he will convey to Pope Francis. Photo by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator.
Bill repealing death penalty headed to full Senate

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

A bill repealing capital punishment in Louisiana easily sailed through a Senate committee and is headed to the full floor for discussion.

Fueled by testimony from Bishop Shelton J. Fabre of the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, SB 142, sponsored by Sen. Dan Claitor of Baton Rouge, was approved 6-1 by the Senate Judiciary Committee on April 25. The bill calls for eliminating the death penalty for any offense committed after July 31. Currently the 74 inmates on death row would not be affected.


Bishop Fabre, a native of New Roads, told the committee he was appearing not as a politician or in the name of any political party but as a pastor of souls. He said there are many reasons to abolish the death penalty but added he was there emphasizing that chief among those reasons is the unique beauty and sacredness of all human life, from the first moment of conception to the time of natural death.

"Recognizing that all human life is sacred, I therefore raise my voice along with my brother bishops in stating the importance of abolishing capital punishment in our state, in our nation and in the relatively few places it remains practiced in our world," Bishop Fabre said, referring to a recent endorsement of the bill by the Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops. "In the circumstances of this time in history, and with the availability of other options, such as life imprisonment, the Catholic Church considers the death penalty an offense against the holiness of human life.

"Therefore, the use of the death penalty is unnecessary and unjustified in our time and in our circumstances. It, sadly, simply perpetuates the cycle of violence in a culture of death that must be transformed into a culture of life."

Bishop Fabre said it was with a heavy heart and great concern that he is admittedly horrified by the uptick of violence and is also aware of the anger, pain and agony felt by families whose lives have been broken by the violent death of loves ones. He said the church stands with those families and offers assistance in finding hope in spite of their suffering in their search for justice.

However, he said the death penalty can be sought for the purpose of revenge and not justice.

"We should never equate the value of a person's life and their human dignity with the worst thing they have ever done, no matter how heinous the content of their worst action," the bishop said. "We must remember that a person's human dignity is a gift given to them by God and is not something earned or lost through their behavior, no matter how good or bad."

"For the Catholic community ending the death penalty is not about public policy or even public opinion for that matter. Ending the death penalty in the state of Louisiana is essential in rejecting a culture of death and building a culture of life."

Committee members spent more than two hours hearing testimony from both sides but appeared to be swayed by some alarming statistics revealed by capital punishment opponents. Rev. Gerard Robinson, pastor of McKowen Missionary Church in Baton Rouge, noted that in the past 40 years, 82 percent of the death penalty cases have been reversed in Louisiana, a number backed up by death penalty lawyer Nick Trenticosta.

Trenticosta said of those reversals, very few prosecutors elected to reseek the death penalty, instead opting for a life sentence, second-degree murder or manslaughter in the subsequent retrial.

Robinson and Trenticosta said Louisiana has the country's highest number of death penalty reversals in the country. Trenticosta said the state has also sentenced more innocent men to death per capita than any other state.

He said there have been 28 executions in Louisiana since the death penalty was reinstated in 1977, but only one in the past 15 years and that was because the inmate waived his right to appeal.

Trenticosta cited judicial error, prosecutorial misconduct and ineffective assistance of defense counsel as the main reason for the 133 death penalty reversals.

"We now have a 40-year history of the death penalty," Trenticosta said. "Administration of the death penalty is plagued with problems, is totally ineffective and expensive. We can expect more of the same results if we continue using the death penalty in Louisiana."

Sen. Regina Barrow called the number of reversals "alarm ing," and said it adds to the importance of the issue.

"Eighty-two percent of error is not a good number, it is not acceptable," she said. "I am really truly overwhelmed."

Attorney James Dixon, a member of the Louisiana Public Defender Board, also cited the expense involving capital punishment cases. He said since 2008 the Public Defender Board has spent more than $94 million in defending capital cases, including trial defense, the appellate process and post conviction.

He said that number does not take into account the costs for the prosecution, law enforcement, court, the municipalities and the Department of Corrections, which has to foot the bill for the additional expense of maintaining inmates on death row.
Difference between priest and monsignor/Passion Sunday and Palm Sunday

Q Could you explain for me the difference (if any) between “priest” and “monsignor”? Under what circumstances is a priest given the title of “monsignor”? (Burke, Virginia)

A “Monsignor” is a title bestowed on a priest who has distinguished himself by exceptional service to the church. It is a title granted by the pope typically, upon the recommendation of the priest’s diocesan bishop. It is a purely honorary title and has no effect on the priest’s duties or ministerial assignment.

Nearly 50 years ago, the Priests’ Senate in my own diocese passed a resolution asking that our bishop no longer name any priests as monsignors. As I recall our discussion, we felt that it was a medieval and inappropriate title (it derives from the Italian words meaning “my Lord”) and that its bestowal could cause hard feelings not so much with priests who were passed over, but among parishioners whose own pastor had not been so honored.

So it was with some satisfaction that I noticed, in January 2014, that Pope Francis had instructed the bishops of the world that diocesan priests would no longer be awarded the title before reaching the age of 65. No reasons were published for the pope’s decision, but Pope Francis has often cautioned priests against careerism and personal ambition.

He seems to have long felt uncomfortable about ecclesiastical titles. When he was a bishop and later a cardinal in Argentina, Pope Francis always asked people to call him “Father.” And notably, while he served as archbishop of Buenos Aires (1998-2013), not once did he petition the Holy See to have one of his priests named a monsignor.

Q When I was growing up, we celebrated Passion Sunday and the statues in church were covered with purple cloths. (As I remember, that symbolized Jesus’ hiding himself from the view of those who would soon crucify him.) Then, a week later, it was Palm Sunday, and we received the blessed palms.

A The following weekend, we celebrated Easter. But for several years now, our parish has marked Passion Sunday and Palm Sunday on the same day, one week before Easter – and the statues are no longer covered.

So my question is this: When did these two Sundays become one, and why? (Indiana)

The purpose of the change, as I understand it, was to be able to devote the first five weeks of Lent, as it was in the church’s early history, to the preparation of catechumens for entrance into the church at Easter.

One vestige of the former calendar remains: Beginning on the Fifth Sunday of Lent, the practice of covering crosses and images in the church is permitted. (Note that it is “permitted,” not mandated; discretion is given to the local pastor.)

Images (statues of saints, for example) are uncovered after the start of the Easter Vigil; crosses are unveiled on Good Friday, when the faithful are invited to venerate the cross.

I have never heard the explanation you propose for veiling the cross – namely, that Jesus is “hiding” from those who would crucify him. The reason most commonly offered is that the veils represent a sort of “fasting” from the sacred depiction of what ultimately led to the glory of our salvation.

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 askfat herdoyle@gmail.com and 30 Columbia Circle Dr., Albany, NY 12203.

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Marian Servants assist searching souls to find comfort through faith

This is the final article in a series of secular religious institutes in the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Members of Marian Servants of the Eucharist in Baton Rouge are “workers in the vineyard” and companions guiding wounded, searching souls to the healing touch of the Holy Spirit and nurturing embrace of the Blessed Mother as they journey to discover their mission in life, say its members.

The Marian Servants of Divine Providence, the mother community of Marian Servants of the Eucharist, started off as a Catholic charismatic community retreat ministry, according to Lisa Landry, director of the Marian Servants of the Eucharist. As people flocked to these retreats, the Marian Servants of Divine Providence created the Our Lady of Divine Providence School of Spirituality in Clearwater, Florida. It is associated with Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio and the Institute for Priestly Formation. The teachings of the Marian Servants are approved by the Vatican. It focuses on the exercises of Ignatian spirituality.

People from the Diocese of Baton Rouge attending the retreats and school believed such a community “praying and working together” belonged in the diocese.

“We are a prayer community first,” said Landry. The style of prayer of the Marian Servants is contemplative, according to Mary Tauzin, spiritual director. There are opportunities to attend a 30-day retreat. Knowing everyone is not able to get away for a 30-day retreat, people can meet weekly with spiritual directors for approximately 8-9 months.

Ignatian Spirituality is not a “floating on puffy white cloud” form of prayer, stressed Tauzin and Landry.

“St. Ignatius was a soldier,” said Tauzin. “His whole perspective was fighting evil. It was combat.”

One of the “war manuals” in spiritual combat is Scripture, she noted.

“We pray for grace, read the Scriptures and use it as a platform to see and understand how the Lord is speaking to us,” said Tauzin.

“The word is alive,” said Landry. The messages coming from Scripture can be challenging, a “double-edged sword,” according to Landry.

“It will convict you. If you sit with Scripture it will prick your heart,” she said.

Tauzin agreed, saying “We get ahead of ourselves.” When we open up and let the Lord speak to us and put ourselves aside, it removes the scales from our eyes and we see with the truth rather than what we have been telling ourselves.”

But if the word “cuts” it also provides a healing balm and direction for life. That is where spiritual direction helps provide a clearer path for those navigating through their spiritual life, said Landry. That is why many Marian Servants of the Eucharist attend the school of spirituality in Clearwater to become spiritual directors to help people going through difficult times.

“Maybe they have been hurt as a child,” said Landry. “You start with Scripture and something that is in it may bring something out of the dark into the light.”

“We go to God by meditating on Scriptures in order to heal,” said Tauzin. “We share our stories, we share our suffering and we deal with the pain. The Lord then brings us back to faith.”

Landry pointed out, “Many people today are taught, ‘Don’t cry, don’t do it.’ St. Ignatius said be aware of these emotions and bring them to the Lord.”

Then you are invited to St. Thomas More Church, 11441 Goodwood Blvd., Baton Rouge to continue the celebration beginning at 4 p.m.

Rosary, Mass, a film about Our Lady of Fatima and an educational display.
Blind musician finds the color of life through his love of Jesus

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

“You can see what colors look like, I told Jesus. I’m curious and fascinated with what that might look like,” said Neil Blanchard, his voice brimming with inquisitiveness about what it would be like to see.

Blind from birth because of too much oxygen in his incubator as a newborn, Blanchard said Jesus, whom he affectionately calls “Chief,” reassures him that what he will see in heaven will surpass his wildest dreams. For now, he uses the eyes of his soul – his sorrows, frustrations, whimsical moments, joys and surrender to his friend (Christ) rolling out with melodic beauty as he strums his guitar in liturgical and social gatherings.

Sister Dorothy LeBlanc presented Blanchard with his first guitar in 1979. “I could smell the newness of it,” said Blanchard. “Sister said, ‘I don’t know how to play it, but if you promise me you are going to serve the Lord, I’m going to give it to you.’ I said, ‘I don’t know how it’s going to work, but I’m going to do it,’” said Blanchard.

The guitar case became dilapidated, and St. Elizabeth Church and School in Paincourtville, where he has played for Friday school Masses for the past 38 years, bought him a new one. But the guitar has held up nicely.

“To help Blanchard become as self-sufficient as possible, his parents enrolled him in the Louisiana School for the Blind in Baton Rouge in 1958, when it was on Government Street and located about three blocks from St. Agnes Church.

“My parents didn’t (like) leaving me, but they knew they had to do it,” Blanchard said.

Attending the school until he graduated in 1974 was a trying time for Blanchard, but he made good friends.

His love of music also developed through the years. Playing the guitar brought him many hours of joy with his musically-inclined family and friends.

Blanchard played the guitar for people as often as he could. When he was young, he was part of a band of family and friends called “Combination Five.” They played in the Battle of the Bands in Pierre Part, where they took second place playing such songs as “In A Gadda Davida” by Iron Butterfly.

“Man we extended that as long as it would go. We loved it,” said Blanchard.

They also played songs such as “Venus” by Shocking Blue.

Blanchard’s family was one of the biggest fans at the various venues they played. “Our mothers would pass around the collection basket. We thought it was a big thing if we made $22 a night,” Blanchard quipped.

He and his cousin Morgan Blanchard also formed the musical duo, “BJ and the Bear” (inspired by the television series).

“I was the bear of course,” Blanchard quipped.

A self-proclaimed “Christian ladies man,” Blanchard wrote songs dedicated to women who have a special place in his heart. One of the songs is “Julie,” which is dedicated to a woman who now lives in St. Louis. The song starts off with sad, minor chords as he “cries her out of his system” after she goes away. “Happy notes” then trickle in and skip along as she comes back into his life, only to return to the minor chords as she is gone again.

“It ends on a happy note because she said, ‘Neil be patient, we will see each other again in time,”’ said Blanchard.

True to his promise to Sister Dorothy, Blanchard answered God’s call, extended through Father Tom Ranzino, then pastor of St. Joseph the Worker in Pierre Part, to use his talent to serve God. He particularly enjoys playing the Divine Mercy Chaplet after Tuesday Masses and during Lent at St. Joseph. He has also played at weddings and funerals and other occasions.

Through braille resources provided by the St. Francis Xavier Society for the Blind, Blanchard lectors at St. Joseph.

“Neil comes from a very gifted and blessed family, all, or most of all, whom are singers,” said Father Al Davidson, pastor of St. Joseph. “He is doing his best to bring people in (to the faith).”

Father Davidson noted that Blanchard provided a moment of spiritual enlightenment when the church completed its renovations in 2014. The crucifix was taken down during the renovations, and before it was remounted, Father Davidson asked Blanchard if he would like to touch it. He said the expression on Blanchard’s face as he did so deeply touched those who witnessed it.

“For everyone who saw it, it opened our eyes in a very special way that we were blind to before,” said Father Davidson.

Playing for the Friday Masses, and particularly playing for the living Stations of the Cross at St. Elizabeth is something Blanchard looks forward to.

“That (the stations) is a beautiful thing for me,” said Blanchard.

Other important musical “bookings” include playing for residents in the nursing home and patients at the Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center in Baton Rouge, where his sister, Marlene, who died about three years ago, was treated for multiple myeloma.

Blanchard said music has brought “many people into his life” and he has high aspirations of what he would like to do with it, including playing on EWTN.

Even though he does not have physical eyesight, Blanchard said there are many things he can picture in his “minds eye.”

When at a Fourth of July fireworks display he pictures how beautiful the colors of the fireworks must be, or whether they are a “dud,” by the sound of the “booms” and the “oohs and aahs” coming from the crowd. An avid LSU fan, the play-by-play announcements and roar, or quietness, of the crowd tells him how the game is going.

He also pictures things in the spiritual realm as well.

“Mary is super cool. I know what her voice is like,” said Blanchard. “I’ll ask her, ‘Mamma, are you short or tall? What does your hair feel like?’”

He also pictures what it will be like to meet Jesus.

“I picture myself putting my hands in his side and touching his ribs,” said Blanchard.

Other things he would like to see are more Catholics coming home to the faith.

“Jesus founded this religion, it’s more reason to be aware of this and honor him through this,” Blanchard said.

As he waits the glory of heaven to come, he does all he can to express his devotion to Jesus, particularly through his music. He played a sample of “This One Goes out to the One I Love,” by R.E.M. The name of the beloved he inserts into the song, however, is Jesus.

“I hope he likes it,” Blanchard humbly said. “I try to show him I love him.”
He is the spirit of life, the fountain of water springing up to eternal life. The father gives life through him. He guides the church in the way of all truth, in unity, in works of ministry and renewing and protects her in perfect union with Jesus.” (Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, para. 4) Through the Holy Spirit Jesus breathes life into his church, calling us to an intimate union with the father. Empowered by this life, we are renewed and transformed. This new life comes to us in a most particular way through the sacraments.

Keeping God’s commandments

How do we follow Jesus’ way? First of all, we pray. We ask the Lord to show us his way. The early Apostles movement to gather the church as one was called “The Way.” Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Apostles shared the good news of Jesus’ way by praying, telling their experiences with Jesus and participating in “the breaking of the bread.” Sound familiar? Yes, the early church, “The Way,” celebrated as we do today an early form of the Mass. They opened their homes as small communities. They handed on the faith. They broke the bread and sung praises to God. Mass is relevant, important, powerful and most of all life-giving!

Do we live in the truth of our Lord? Are we freely sharing the truth to others with humility, love and mercy? How to we come to know the truth? What is truth? The best place to begin is to ask God to help you discover the truth. A good place to start is with the Bible with a good commentary to help reveal the truth of God’s word.

Do we embrace the gifts of the Holy Spirit which gives more life than any vitamin, physical exercise or medicine can offer? Ask the Holy Spirit to increase in your life the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, fortitude, wonder, good counsel, understanding and piety. Added to these are the fruits of the Holy Spirit: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity, which further strengthens us to keep God’s commandments and love ever-more deeply. The closer we are to the Holy Spirit the more we come to know the father through Jesus Christ. Come Holy Spirit, come!

Dow is director of the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

HISTORY MAKING MIRACLE - Ascension of Our Lord Church in Donaldsonville produced a “Roots of Faith” play concerning the history of Ascension Catholic schools on April 28 and 30 as part of its “Restore the Convent” fundraiser. This scene depicts Sister Mary Austin, of the Daughters of Charity, played by Kristen Landry, and Father Verrino, played by Father Joseph Vu, parochial vicar, Ascension of Our Lord, beside Marie Roux, played by Clotilde Cantin, in a coma in her bed along with children mourning over her illness—a 1853 yellow fever epidemic that struck more than 10,000 in the greater New Orleans area. Her healing took place on December 8, 1854, the proclamation and feast day of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Photo by Debbie Shelley | The Catholic Commentator

Send your church parish, school and organization news and photos to Richard Meek, editor, at rmeek@diobr.org.

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the people's prayers rise up, reaching the throne of God. The altar to signify that Christ's sacrifice ascends to God as an odor of sweetness and also to signify that **Church blends old with new**

**By Rachele Smith and Richard Meek**

The Catholic Commentator

The new church is defined by a 27-foot high altar, purchased from Holy Trinity Church in Syracuse, New York, which is now closed. The altar showcases statues of St. Ambrose and St. Athanasius dating to the late 1800s along with statues of St. Peter Julian Eymard and St. Peter Canisius. Hanging over the altar is an 18-foot crucifix. Father Bayhi said there are plans to add an adoration chapel, although the funding still needs to be raised to reach that goal.

Father Bayhi said that he hopes parishioners feel a sense of reverence and prayer as well as a sense of community as they gather together for the holy mass. The new church cost is $7.5 million, a price tag that quickly swelled after plans to build a new church for the growing parish were completed in 2017. A year later, when a building campaign was launched under the leadership of then-pastor Father Kenneth Lornet, the projected cost of construction was estimated at $3.75 million. However, the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 dramatically raised that number. “Where we think about this church and reflect on the building of it, (we understand) it will serve this community for the next 100 years,” Father Bayhi said, adding, “We are called to serve God and this is what we hope we are doing in building this type of church.”

Hospitaller Sisters of Mercy opened in part as the consecration of the church. The ceremony was burned on the altar to signify that Christ's sacrifice ascends to God as an odor of sweetness and also to signify that the people’s prayers rise up, reaching the throne of God.
By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

Laughing at one point that she was “preaching to the choir,” Sister Martha Ann Abshire FMOL encouraged the more than 150 people gathered for the Diocesan Home & School’s annual awards luncheon to continue to manifest their faith by deeds.

“Live your faith in a very real way that is not just by words but actions that will teach because children learn by being witnesses to actions,” she said.

As the guest speaker for the 2017 event honoring the diocese’s students of the year, distinguished educators and Mother Seton award winners, Sister Martha Ann explained how her own personal experiences growing up, which included watching and learning from her parents’ deep faith and multilayered actions, not only guided her childhood but ultimately nourished her vocation to religious life.

“My vocation is really a gift because I didn’t do anything to merit this gift,” she said, adding some time ago she was mediating on “this gift” when she realized it was meant for her parents.

“For all of my heart, I believe that. They stuck it out; they lived the faith and they believed and they believed deeply,” Sister Martha Ann explained.

“I am a witness to their deep faith,” she added.

Dr. Melanie Verges, superintendent of the diocese’s Catholic School Office, also addressed those attending the luncheon on April 25.

Verges expressed gratitude to all of the volunteers in Catholic schools throughout the diocese.

She also offered a recap of student achievement, noting that students attending Catholic schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge continue to demonstrate effectiveness in the classroom as evidenced by key metrics, including the high school ACT composite score of 23.9 for the Class of 2016, well above the state average of 19.5 and the national average of 20.8.

In addition, Verges noted student scores on the Assessment of Catechesis and Religious Education (ACRE) test, which measures faith knowledge, were also above the national norm for 2015-2016, when scores were most recently available.

Students, however, are not just knowledgeable about their faith, they also “walk the talk,” according to Verges.

She said, in 2015-2016, schools across the diocese reported a total of more than 260,000 hours in service to the community.

Additionally, Verges reported that in January, at the annual Mass celebrated during Catholic Schools Week, students donated items totaling about $16,000 to Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Bishop Robert W. Muench was the last to speak to the group, which included priests, principals and representatives from almost every Catholic school in the diocese.

The bishop praised Catholic schools, noting they make a difference, not just in the personal and academic success of students but also in their spiritual growth.

“And that is something we contribute to our society and to our church,” he said.

Before offering a final blessing, Bishop Muench also shared words of encouragement, reminding all in attendance that they are making a difference and are representing God and the church.

“God is counting on us to minister for God in a very special way in our own places and particularly in the opportunities to educate and help form our young people,” he said.

Earlier in the program, Renée Tullier, president of the Diocesean Home & School Association, honored the various award winners, including students of the year: Joseph DiGiovanni, a fifth-grade student at Holy Ghost in Hammond; Anna Eagleton, an eighth-grade student at St. Aloysius in Baton Rouge; and Emma Grace Woodruff, a senior at St. Joseph’s Academy.

Tullier also presented special awards of appreciation to the 2017 Distinguished Educators of the Diocese of Baton Rouge: Roslyn Landry, a teacher at Most Blessed Sacrament in Baton Rouge and the Distinguished Catholic School Educator; Paula Fabre, principal at St. Francis Xavier in Baton Rouge and the Distinguished Catholic School Administrator; and Father Cayet Mangiaracina OP parochial vicar at Holy Ghost Church in Hammond and the Distinguished School Clergy member.

In addition, Mother Seton Award honorees received special awards for their exemplary service to their individual schools. They were Todd Landry, Ascension Catholic in Donaldsonville; Jenny Ridge, Catholic High in Baton Rouge; Monica Trepagnier, Catholic of Pointe Coupee in New Roads; Rhonda Webber, Holy Family in Port Allen; Desiree Street, Holy Ghost in Hammond; Mariettas Coslan, Mater Dolorosa in Independence; Jason McCann, Most Blessed Sacrament in Baton Rouge; Dawn Mailet Beale, Our Lady of Mercy in Baton Rouge; Trisha Rawlinson, Sacred Heart of Jesus in Baton Rouge; Kelly Lewis, St. Aloysius in Baton Rouge; Veronica Craven, St. Alphonsus in Gretna Springs; Lauren Mattingly, St. Elizabeth in Poinciana; Debbie Ray, St. Francis Xavier in Baton Rouge; Dena Balart, St. George in Baton Rouge; Lowell Hebert, St. Jean Vianney in Baton Rouge; Love Rodriguez, St. John Interparochial in Plaquemine; Kim Reeves, St. Joseph in Ponchatoula; Tim Moran, St. Joseph’s Academy in Baton Rouge; Joanne Grantham, St. Jude the Apostle in Baton Rouge; Dean Hooker, St. Louis King of France in Baton Rouge; Simone Hamilton, St. Michael the Archangel in Baton Rouge; Paul Beier, St. Peter Chanel in Paulina; Alan Marrero, St. Theresa Middle/ST. John Primary in Gonzales/Prairieville; Lauren Sampey, St. Thomas Aquinas in Hammond; and Jennifer Harris, St. Thomas More in Baton Rouge.

Sister Martha Ann Abshire FMOL shares thoughts on faith and action at the annual Diocesan Home & School Luncheon honoring the diocese’s students of the year, distinguished educators and Mother Seton Award winners. Photo by Rachele Smith | The Catholic Commentator
May 12, 2017

The Catholic Commentator

13

Class of 2017

A Special Section of
The Catholic Commentator

A keepsake special section is designed to honor graduates from the Diocese of Baton Rouge naming each graduate from the Catholic high schools in the diocese with pictures of the valedictorians and salutatorians. Graduates from Franciscan Missionaries Our Lady University will also be included. This is a great opportunity to say congratulations to the graduates and/or promote your school’s accomplishments, or promote your business to these young future leaders and their parents.

Issue date: May 26
Advertising deadline: May 17
The premise of this action comedy is that a single extended gunfire can sustain an entire film, provided the participants in the showdown keep making incongruously funny and morbid remarks. The setup involves a deal to buy assault rifles that quickly goes bad. So the two sides represented, most prominently, by would-be gun buyer Brie Larson and arms dealer Sharlto Copley spend the rest of the run time pulling their triggers and reloading while attempting to retrieve a briefcase. But the breathtaking cinematography, together with the total absence of anything objectionable, makes the film well worth the price of admission. A-I; G

Phoenix Forgotten

Dull, though mostly harmless, sci-fi-themed horror tale in which, 20 years after they disappeared, the now-grown younger sister (Florence Hartigan) of one of a trio of teens (Luke Spencer Roberts, Chelsea Lopez and Justin Matthews) who vanished without a trace in the Arizona desert explores the connection between that event and a well-publicized (real-life) UFO sighting over the skies of Phoenix that took place shortly before. With the protagonist making a documentary about her search, and her subjects having left a videocassette tape of their activities behind, the tired “found footage” conceit is brought to bear. But even the immediacy ideally produced by that device could not alter the fact that the virtually bloodless proceedings in director and co-writer Justin Barber’s feature debut fail to intrigue. Some parents may feel that the absence of gore apart from the sight of some ravaged wildlife makes the film acceptable for mature adolescents despite the vulgar vocabulary into which the characters sometimes lapse, especially when frightened. At least one use of profanity and a milder oath, frequent crude and occasional crass language, unsettling images of dead animals. A-III; PG-13

The Circle

Spirited sci-fi follow-up in which the hero (Chris Pratt) of the 2014 original encounters his long-lost father (Kurt Russell), a demi-god who created, and rules over, his own paradise-like planet. Though the two quickly bond, all is not as it seems. Family troubles also dog the alien (Zoe Saldana) the protagonist would like to make his girlfriend as she pursues her longstanding rivalry with her scheming sister (Karen Gillan). In between these clan conflicts, the group of the title its membership rounded out by a tacitless musclebound extraterrestrial (Dave Bautista), a raccoon (voice of Bradley Cooper) and an undersized tree-like creature (voice of Vin Diesel) does battle with an array of adversaries, one band of them led by the space pirate (Michael Rooker) who raised Pratt’s character after his human mother died. In continuing to adapt a series of Marvel comics, writer-director James Gunn maintains a jaunty atmosphere but adds an interesting allegory about the dangers of selfishness. Maturity is required to sort through the movie’s mythology, however, as well as Gunn’s somewhat amoral, though incident, use of religiously-themed music and imagery. Mostly stylized combat violence with little gore, some sexual humor, a few mild oaths, occasional crude and more frequent crass talk. A-III; PG-13

Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2

Screwed sci-fi, follow-up in which the hero (Chris Pratt) of the 2014 original encounters his long-lost father (Kurt Russell). A demi-god who created, and rules over, his own paradise-like planet. Though the two quickly bond, all is not as it seems. Family troubles also dog the alien (Zoe Saldana) the protagonist would like to make his girlfriend as she pursues her longstanding rivalry with her scheming sister (Karen Gillan). In between these clan conflicts, the group of the title its membership rounded out by a tacitless musclebound extraterrestrial (Dave Bautista), a raccoon (voice of Bradley Cooper) and an undersized tree-like creature (voice of Vin Diesel) does battle with an array of adversaries, one band of them led by the space pirate (Michael Rooker) who raised Pratt’s character after his human mother died. In continuing to adapt a series of Marvel comics, writer-director James Gunn maintains a jaunty atmosphere but adds an interesting allegory about the dangers of selfishness. Maturity is required to sort through the movie’s mythology, however, as well as Gunn’s somewhat amoral, though incident, use of religiously-themed music and imagery. Mostly stylized combat violence with little gore, some sexual humor, a few mild oaths, occasional crude and more frequent crass talk. A-III; PG-13

The Promise

Open Road

The relatively little-known 1915-22 genocide of the Armenian people by the Ottoman Turks is brought into sharp focus in this epic drama. Director and co-writer (with Robin Swicord) Terry George melds a high interest lesson with a tender love story. In 1914 Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul), an idealistic medical student (Oscar Isaac) falls for an American artist and fellow Armenian (Charlotte Le Bon) who is seeing a firebrand American journalist (Christian Bale). As Turkey enters World War I and embarks on a campaign of ethnic cleansing, the pair faces arrest, prison and, potentially, death. So, too, does the reporter after he attempts to inform a world about the killings. Remarkable courage, perseverance and their unwavering Christian faith sustain the survivors against all odds. Given its potential to raise awareness of a historical tragedy, the film is probably acceptable for mature adolescents. Scenes of wartime atrocities and violence, a nongraphic, nonmarital sexual encounter, brief crude language. A-III; PG-13

For more Movie Reviews, visit thecatholiccommentator.org and look under ENTERTAINMENT.
HEALING ▼
From page 1

Church in Baton Rouge and a member of the Racial Harmony Commission, said he was not particularly surprised with the DOJ decision, noting the narrow focus of the investigation because it was for a civil rights violation. Father Clark, among others, pointed out the standard on a civil rights violation is much higher and that few indictments or further actions arise from that.

However, he was quick to add that the material in the DOJ investigation revealed what he called the “first real information about the case in such detail.”

“I think what was striking about (the DOJ) report was all of the additional information we received,” he added. “In fact, the details of the incident was very hard to hear because there were some very difficult things to hear about the languages, the tones (of the officers). I guess the reaction would be of real concern.

“And that certainly seems to say that there are a lot of things that the state can investigate as the focus now shifts to the (Louisiana) Attorney General’s office for investigation.”

AG Jeff Landry said his office is sending the investigation to the Louisiana State Police to determine if any criminal charges will be filed against Officers Blane Salamoni and Howie Lake II.

Father Josh Johnson, the lone African-American priest in the Diocese of Baton Rouge and also a member of the Racial Harmony Commission, said many people have told him they are praying for Landry’s office will “carefully look at all the evidence, including some critical evidence that was not referenced in the (DOJ) report.”

“What the outcome, however this sad tragedy continues to evolve, whatever the fates of the two police officers are destined to be, we still have a serious problem in Baton Rouge,” Father Johnson said in a statement that was echoed by Bishop Muench and Father Clark.

“Why? We are living in a racially divided city.

“In many ways this racial divide exists because of institutions and systems that offer access and opportunities to some and not to all because of their race, perceived race and or their socio-economic status. These systems perpetuate the racial divide between peoples. We have got to figure out a way to close these widening gaps between human beings, all of whom are made in the image and likeness of God.”

Bishop Muench noted that the Racial Harmony Commission, which he established last year in reaction to this past summer’s violence, is working on ways as to how the diocese can respond and to build bridges of dialogue, understanding, respect and action.

Father Clark, whose church parish is located in the heart of one of the city’s troublesome areas, also pointed out the racial divide and said he is continuing to work for change.

“This is what our responsibility and our challenge to do right now, to keep on working to bridge that divide,” he said.

“Since last summer there have been some really good initiatives. I think people all over the city, including the diocese, have wanted to do something. They have realized that divide and wanted to bridge it. Little steps have been taken.”

Father Johnson said the first step for healing includes the community working for personal reform and for reform of (institutions and other systems) for reform.

“Here is the thing, we are all in need of reform,” he said. “How do we experience this personal reform? I suggest we experience personal reform by spending more time with Jesus and our brothers. The more time we spend with Jesus, who is perfect, the more opportunity we have to recognize the areas in our lives where we are inviting us to be purified and grow in virtue.”

Father Johnson explained that what has given him hope are reforms being put in place by new Baton Rouge Mayor/President Sharon Weston Broom reforms he said can ultimately help ensure the safety of law enforcement officials as well as protecting “our civilians who have an inherent right to be respected and protected in their interactions with the law enforcement.”

He also believes it is imperative to begin looking into laws and policies that both accommodate and alienate groups of people based on the color of their skin in the criminal justice system, health care and education.

CONFERENCE ▼
From page 3

boyfriend haunted her for a while.

Brown said the church’s message not to have sex before marriage can sound restrictive, but it makes way for something better.

“Rather than having sex at the wrong time with the wrong person you are saying ‘Yes’ to the right person at the right time. You are saying ‘yes’ to something in the future,” Brown said.

The mothers and daughters separated for group discussions, then returned and asked the speakers questions.

The attendees said they valued their time together at the conference.

“It helps us see the beauty of being a woman,” said Monica Chasuk, a ninth-grade homeschooled student who was there with her mother, Patti.

Monica said the program helped her see the importance of people having respect for each other in a relationship and not having a “What’s in it for me?” attitude.

Patti said it can be challenging for mothers to talk to their daughters about issues presented at the conference because everyone is caught up in “daily” living. She said some connections and ideas for future dialogue were opened up during the event.

St. Michael High School senior Emily Casselberry took up an invitation from a theology teacher, Emily Froeba, to attend the conference with her mother, Amber.

Emily Casselberry said the conference showed her options for women rather than having sex with boyfriends who pressure them. She said many of her peers don’t realize there are such options.

“It gave me more strength and self-worth,” Emily said.

Amber said she enjoyed hearing three different viewpoints of womanhood from the speakers.

“Mr big thing is modesty,” she said in reference to a talk about the importance of dressing appropriately.

Those who moms and daughters looking for ways to dialogue about womanhood can email info@womansnewlife.com, said Caldwell.

Solution on page 18

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U. S. immigration policy: Self-interest or charity?

John Garvey is the president of The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

A short essay of his on what should guide our immigration policy in the April 3, issue of the Jesuit magazine, America, made me think of my own past experiences on both sides of the border between our country and Mexico. Then I read Pope Francis’ homily this year for the Easter Vigil Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica. Immigration is definitively one of our greatest moral challenges today.

It is a challenge not only to our country but also to the countries of Europe and the Near East. As Pope Francis said, in this Easter season we have walked with Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to the tomb of Jesus. “We see them there before the tomb, filled with grief and justice incapable of accepting that things must always end this way … We can also (in their faces) see the faces of those who are greeted with contempt because they are immigrants, deprived of country, house and family … In their grief, those two women reflect the faces of all those who are greeted with contempt because they are immigrants, deprived of country, house and family …”

From 1974 until the present I have crossed almost all of the bridges on the Rio Grande from Brownsville north to Eagle Pass, Texas with friends who lived along the border, with missionaries and sometimes alone. Last year in November, as I was driving to a mission in Allende, Coahuila, my truck broke down on a Sunday afternoon in Eagle Pass. Four hours later it was repaired and running again, thanks to a Mexican-American named Carlos Curi in his back yard repair shop. The driver of the Triple-A tow-truck told me that Mr. Curi would probably help a priest on Sunday. In many of the Texas border towns, Americans are more often Mexican than Anglo. It is a different culture, but loyally American, and amazingly “ameable,” (kind and generous).

In the 1970s I became friends with a family in Brownsville named Webre. The father was originally from Louisiana, the mother was born and raised in Cuba. She was head of the Brownsville Red Cross. Juanita, herself a refugee from Castro’s Cuba, took me to a refugee camp that had been opened in Brownsville during wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador. These people had fled for their lives. It took a long time for them to be “processed” and allowed to make a new home in the United States. None seemed to be a threat to anyone, but security was important back then also. At least, no one was trying to send them back to civil war.

Pope Francis has often said that in our terribly violent world we should be building bridges to bring refugees to the safety we enjoy, not walls to keep them out. I believe that walls along our borders are a threat to both what America stands for, and also, they would be a waste of time and money.

Most of the undocumented foreigners in America came here legally on work visas and just stayed after the visas expired. They didn’t swim across the Rio Grande or jump a wire fence in Arizona or New Mexico. They came as needed labor for jobs that Americans didn’t apply for. This has been particularly true in California and Florida from where so much of our winter produce comes.

We in Louisiana also know another source of Mexicans among us, flooding as in Hurricane Katrina and the flood of August, 2016. Huge natural disasters call for so much clean up and repair that we simply cannot go on with our lives without outside help not available except from our neighbors to the south. At such times, we usually do not ask to see work visas.

Many Mexicans who work in Louisiana are documented with work visas. I needed grass planted in my back yard two years ago. I hired a young American landscaper. He showed up for the job with an all-Mexican crew. They worked quite fast, and I asked the contractor what was the rush. He said that their work visas were for only six months. He had one Mexican crew for January through June and another for July through December. Their visas were about to expire and the other crew was about to arrive. They wanted that paycheck to help support them for the rest of the year.

As Garvey wrote in America, nations are moral actors and their laws and actions can be judged as good or bad. A major principle that has recently guided our national policy on immigration has been enlightened self-interest. We ask: What can immigrants do for the United States? Current law admits 140,000 people each year as permanent immigrants if they hold advanced degrees or are multi-million dollar executives or persons of extraordinary ability in the arts or sciences, or if they will invest $500,000 in an enterprise that will hire U.S. workers. We also admit temporary agricultural workers on H-2A visas if there are not enough U.S. workers to harvest crops.

We need security, and it is not immoral to hunt for talent. But there is another option with regard to motives for allowing immigration. The Catholic Church commends to rich nations like ours that we also practice the virtues of charity and hospitality. It makes a nation good to “welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church – no. 2241). There is a statute in New York harbor that celebrates our past goodness for having opened our doors to the tired, the poor who have come to us in search of freedom and in search of a policy is costly in the short term and never without some risk.

To not do so, however, is to reject living the mystery of Easter. As Pope Francis preached at the Easter Vigil, “In our hearts, we know that things can be different, but almost without noticing it, we can grow accustomed to living with the tomb, living with frustration. Wrong, we can even convince ourselves that this is the law of life, and blunt our consciences with forms of escape that only serve to dampen the hope that God has entrusted to us. So often we walk as those women did, raised between the desire of God and bleak resignation. Not only does the master die, but our hope dies with him.” Like the women, he concluded, “Let us go back to proclaim, to share, to reveal that it is true: the Lord is alive! He is living and he wants to rise again in all those faces that have buried hope, buried dreams, buried dignity. If we cannot let the (Holy) Spirit lead us on this road, then we are not Christians.”

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

Statement of Bishop Robert W. Muench on recent developments regarding the Alton Sterling case

The United States Department of Justice has handed down its decision. Whether one agrees or disagrees with the decision, one thing remains the same: there is a racial divide in our city that exposes a gap of access and opportunity.

We must dedicate ourselves to work for racial healing and transformation in Baton Rouge. While recognizing the universal respect we should have for those whose duty is to ensure our public safety, we must work together for law enforcement and criminal justice reform, economic development in all parts of the city, access to health care for all, quality education, and employment opportunities.

The flood of 2016 demonstrated the strength of our beloved city in times of crisis. We saw a self-sacrificing and compassionate embrace of those in need, regardless of color or ethnicity. Now that strength needs to be put into action to heal the wounds in our city.

I call upon Catholics of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, members of all faith communities, and people of good will to seize this opportunity to bring about healing and change. This moment calls for conversion of mind, heart, and spirit that is both personal and systemic.

The Diocese of Baton Rouge has established a Racial Harmony Commission that is working on ways that we as a diocese can respond to this challenge and build bridges of dialogue, understanding, respect, and action.

May God bless our city at this critical time! May God move our hearts and our wills to work for the establishment of His Kingdom of peace and justice on earth.
Becoming a holy beggar

Father Ron Rolheiser

In Exile

Bishop Fabe’s statement to Senate Judiciary Committee

Guest Columnist

Bishop Shelton Fabre

May 12, 2017

VIEWPOINT

The Catholic Commentator

17

with the exception of Scripture and a few Christian mystics, Christian spirituality, up to now, has been weak in presenting us with a vision for our retirement years. It's not a mystery as to why. Until recently, the majority of people died shortly after retirement and so there was no need for a highly developed spirituality of generativity after our active years.

What are our retirement years meant for, spiritually? What's our vocation then? What might generativity mean for us, after our work's been done?

Father Henri Nouwen, one of the first contemporary writers to take up this question, makes this suggestion: “There comes a time in our lives when the question is no longer: What can I still do to make a contribution? Rather the question becomes: How can I live now so that my aging and dying will be my final great gift to my family, my community, my church and my country?”

How do I stop writing my resume in order to begin writing my eulogy? Happily, spiritual writers today are beginning to develop a spirituality around these questions and, in doing that, I believe, we can be helped by some rich insights within Hindu spirituality.

In Hinduism, life is understood to have five natural stages: First, you are a child. As a child, you are initiated into life, you learn to speak, you learn how to interact with others, and are given time for play.

The second stage is that of being a student. In Hinduism, you're a student until you've married, begin a family and establish a career. As a student, your primary focus is to enjoy your youth and to prepare for life.

Then you become a householder. This, the third stage of life, begins with marriage and ends when your last child is grown-up, your mortgage is paid, and you retire from your job. As a householder, your task is family, business and involvement with civic and religious affairs. These are your duty years.

The fourth stage is that of being a forest-dweller. This period should begin when you are free enough from family and business duties to do some deeper reflection. Forest-dwelling is meant to be an extended period wherein you withdraw, partially or fully, from active life to study and meditate your religion and your future. Very practically, this might mean that you go back to school, perhaps study theology and spirituality, do some extensive retreats, engage in a meditative practice and take some spiritual direction from a guide.

Finally, once forest-dwelling has given you a vision, you return to the world as a sannyasin, as a holy beggar, as someone who owns nothing except faith and wisdom. As a sannyasin, you sit somewhere in public as a beggar, as someone with no significance, property, attachments or importance. You’re available to others for a smile, a chat, an exchange of faith or some act of charity. In effect, you’re a street-person, but with a difference. You’re not a street-person because you do not have other options (a comfortable retirement, a golf course, a cottage in the country), but rather because you have already made a success of your life. You’ve already been generative. You’ve already given what you have to give and you're now looking to be generative in a new way. You want to live in such a way that these last years of your life will give a different kind of gift to your loved ones, namely, a gift that will touch their lives in a way that in effect forces them to think about God and life more deeply.

A sannyasin gives incarnational flesh to the words of Job: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb and naked I return.” We come into this world possessionless and possessionless we leave it. A holy beggar incarnates that truth.

Imagine what a witness it could be if very successful people, doctors, bank presidents, athletes, journalists, teachers, business people, tradespeople, farmers and happily married persons who had raised children successfully, people who have all kinds of comfortable options in life, would be sitting, as holy beggars, in coffee shops, in fast-food outlets, in malls, on street corners and in sporting arenas. Nobody could feel superior to them or treat them with pity, as we do with the street people who sit there now. Imagine the witness of someone becoming a voluntary beggar because he or she has been a success in life. What a witness and vocation that would be!

But this concept, being a holy beggar, is obviously an idealized image that each of us needs to think through in terms of what that might mean for us concretely.

In the early centuries of Christianity, spirituality saw martyrdom as the final expression of Christian life, the ideal way to cap off a faith-filled life. Justin, Polycarp, Cyprian and countless others “retired” into martyrdom. Later, Christians used to retire into monasteries and convents.

But martyrdom and monasteries are also, at a certain place, idealized images. What, concretely, might we retire into?

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

Bishop Fabre’s statement to Senate Judiciary Committee

I consider it an honor to be present here among you today to speak in favor of abolishing the Death Penalty in the State of Louisiana. I want to emphasize that I come here today not as a politician, or in the name of any political party, but solely as a Pastor of souls, who comes before you in the name of the Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Catholic community in our great state. While there are many reasons to abolish the Death Penalty, I present to emphasize and to proclaim again that chief among these reasons is our understanding of the unique beauty and sacredness of all human life from the first moment of conception to the time of natural death.

Recognizing that all human life is sacred, I therefore raise my voice along with my brother Bishops in stating the importance of abolishing Capital Punishment in our state, in our nation, and in the relatively few places it remains practiced in our world. In the circumstances of this time in history, and with the availability of other options, such as life imprisonment, the Catholic Church considers the Death Penalty an offense against the holiness of human life. Therefore, the use of the Death Penalty is unnecessary and unjustified in our time and in our circumstances. It simply perpetuates the cycle of violence in a culture of death that must be transformed into a Culture of Life.

With a heavy heart and great concern, I willingly admit that I, too, am often horrified by terrible acts of violence and the deadly crimes present in society today. Along with the Catholic Community and as a Priest and Bishop, I am mindful and certainly aware of the anger, pain and great agony felt by families whose lives have been broken by the death of a loved one brought about by the hand of those who commit horrible murders. These families deserve the assistance and help they need to overcome such a great tragedy. We stand with them in their grief, and offer assistance in finding hope in spite of their suffering as they search for justice.

“However, standing with families of victims does not compel us to support the use of the death penalty. Often, these families are further violated by the legal processes and public attention that come with Capital Punishment. For many left behind, a death sentence offers the illusion of closure and vindication. No act, even an execution, can bring back a loved one or heal terrible wounds. The pain and loss of one death cannot be wiped away by another death.” (USCCB, A Culture of Life and the Death Penalty, 2005) Giving over to emotions, in many instances the death penalty is sought for the purpose of revenge, and not justice.

We should never equate the value of a person’s life and their human dignity with the worst thing they have ever done, no matter how heinous the content of their worst action. Even though we might want, for whatever reason, to deny the human dignity of others, we must remember that a person’s human dignity is a gift given to them by God, and is not something earned or lost through their behavior, no matter how good or bad. Laws of retaliation and retribution are found in many places in Sacred Scripture. However, we must always remember that these concerns in Sacred Scripture begin with God not slaying Cain for the death of Abel, and end with Jesus challenging us not to respond to violence with more violence.

Therefore, for the Catholic Community, ending the Death Penalty is not about public policy, or even public opinion for that matter. Though there are indeed many reasons to end the Death Penalty, for Catholics, ending the Death Penalty involves our faith, and the primary and most important reason to end the Death Penalty is because of our belief that all human life is sacred, and human dignity is a gift from God. Ending the Death Penalty in the State of Louisiana is essential in rejecting a Culture of Death and building a Culture of Life. Thank you.
Knights of Columbus Car Show – The Knights of Columbus of Immaculate Conception Church in Baton Rouge, 8618 Hatchel Lane, Denham Springs, will host a car show Saturday, May 13, 8:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m., in the ICC parking lot. Food and beverages will be available for purchase. For more information, call 225-590-4634, or email obhall31@yahoo.com.

Women In Spirit Meeting – Kathryn Grigsby, former CEO of Hospice of Baton Rouge, will speak on the topic, "My Mother: Plan B 1988," at the Women in Spirit meeting Thursday, May 25, noon, at St. Joseph Cathedral, Fourth and Main streets, Baton Rouge. Women in Spirit is an interfaith gathering for women looking for an opportunity for spiritual growth and to network. RSVP by emailing sjwomeninspirit@iad.com, or call the cathedral office at 225-387-5928.

New Orleans Retreat – Father Donald Blanchard will present a retreat, “Forgotten Among the Lilies: Learning to Love Beyond Our Fears,” Friday, May 19 – Sunday, May 21 at the Crescent Retreat Center, 5500 St. Mary St., Metairie. For more information and to register, visit retreats.arch-no.org or call 504-267-9664.

Sounds of CommUNITY – The Interfaith Federation of Greater Baton Rouge will present its 27th annual Sound of CommUNITY concert Sunday, May 21, 3 p.m., at St. Aloysius Church, 2025 Stuart St., Baton Rouge. This year’s concert will feature songs from the interfaith community, as well as ensembles of congregations who are in partnership through the Interfaith Federation’s Congregation to Congregation initiative. Freewill donations will be accepted, and a reception will follow. For more information visit idfgbr.org, or call 225-267-5600.

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, May 21, 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 225-343-3181 or 225-803-3391, or email robertwhite456@att.net.

Pentecost Healing Mass – Father Anthony Oddiong of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, and Father Juel Kadulina, parochial vicar of St. Philomena Church in Labadieville, will celebrate a Pentecost Healing Mass Sunday, June 4, at St. Joseph Church, 15710 Hwy. 16, French Settlement. There will be praise and worship at 1:30 p.m. and Mass at 2:30 p.m. Participants will have an opportunity to meet with members of the prayer teams. For information, contact Harold Sheets 225-571-2792.

Widow and Widowers Support Group – New Horizons Group for widows and widowers meet on the third Tuesday of the month. The next meeting will be Tuesday, May 16, 11:30 a.m., in Borders Dining Hall at the Bishop Robert E. Tracy Center, 1800 S. Acadia Thwy., Baton Rouge. Interested persons should call Milla Geronn, Marriage & Family Life Office, at 225-242-0323 if they wish to attend and RSVP if they would like lunch.
since the beginning of the church. It was Mary’s “Fiat” or her “Yes,” the giving of her complete self to God and his will in carrying Jesus, that Mary fulfills all that was promised to Eve, the original Mother, who chose her own path away from God, she explained.

“Mary was Jesus’ first disciple,” Dow said, adding, “Her ‘Yes’ was our salvation. It was our redemption fulfilled.”

Mary’s special place in God’s plan was also discussed by St. John Paul II.

In his last encyclical released April 17, 2003, “On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church” (“Ecclesia De Eucharistia”), the saintly pope conveyed the similarity between Mary’s “Fiat” at the Annunciation and the “Amen” of the believer who receives Communion.

“Mary became in some way a tabernacle, the first tabernacle in history, in which the son of God was adored by (St.) Elizabeth. And Mary’s gaze contemplating the face of the newborn Christ, creating, and developing. Dow noted that as Jesus’ children "we are born of faith through baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist, and (as such) Mary becomes our mother as well because we are heirs to him and to his kingdom."

"What mother doesn’t know her son?" she asked, in explaining why Mary is a great intercessor for her children.

"A lot of people say, 'If you want to get to know someone, ask his mom.' So, for us to truly understand Jesus and to know who he really is, we go to his mother and ask Mary and through her intercessions and prayers, we fully know Jesus through her," said Dow, noting how Mary will always be there for her son.

"Look at the rosary. It’s all about Jesus and reflecting on his life," she added.

By demonstrating her love for her son and her love for her children, which Dow explains was shown at the foot of the cross with Mary’s ability to forgive those who rejected her son, the Blessed Mother even uses her last words quoted in Scripture to continue to draw others to Christ.

Dow explains the last words Mary spoke were at the wedding at Cana. Here, she tells her son about the need for more wine, indicating her concern for the family. She then instructs others nearby by saying, “Do whatever he tells you to do,” words that have since been seen as directed toward all of her children.

Yet, while Mary’s prayers and her guidance are important, Dow explained, “We don’t adore Mary; adoration is only saved for our heavenly father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. We throw ourselves at him in adoration and praise. But we venerate Mary; we honor her out of respect because her yes was our salvation, and we ask her to pray for us and show us her son.”

Throughout the centuries, Mary has continued to instruct her children by appearing to believers in various places around the world.

On May 13, 1917, Mary appeared to three children in Fatima, Portugal. Dressed in resplendent white with a crown of gold, she urged the children to pray and say the rosary. She returned to the children over the course of the next six months, always on the 13th day. On her last visit in October, the “Miracle of the Dancing Sun” occurred to help non-believers understand the importance of Our Lady of Fatima’s messages, which included a warning of God’s threatened punishment and in-chalced three secrets.

During Mary’s visit at Fatima, the world was engulfed in World War I, yet many believe her appearances were a warning for the fallen to return to Christ and that her messages foreshadowed World War II and the spread of communism.

Today, many continue to follow Our Lady of Fatima adhering to her instructions to pray the rosary.

Father Maher explained that while it is good to listen to Mary’s messages, her apparitions are considered private revelations by the church, meaning they are not required to be professed in faith.

“The church holds on to the fact that the public revelation of Jesus is in the Scriptures. That is our salvation. So, even if we don’t follow the apparitions, it’s not like we are missing pieces of the revelation of God,” he said.

According to Father Maher, private revelations typically hold a message for one person or a group of people for a specific time or place. He noted Mary’s apparitions, which focus on prayer, fasting and saying the rosary, tend to be reminders for her children, similar to the way most moms remind their own children about daily chores and other activities.

Father Maher explained that his own devotion in honoring Mary began when he was a seminarian and noticed that Our Lady was just “always around.”

At the request of a fellow seminarian, he joined in a Marian consecration and since that time, has found joy in reflecting on the “eternity of Mary as the mother of my savior, (who is) my life, my hope, my salvation. She is the mother of my joy.”

If you would like to read more about the Blessed Mother, Father Maher and Dow recommend several books, including “Hail Holy Queen” by Scott Hahn; “Thirty Three Days to Morning Glory” by Father Michael Gaitley MIC; “Miracles of Mary” by Michael Durham; “Mary: The Church at the Source” by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI); and Hans Urs von Balthasar and St. John Paul II’s March 25, 1987 encyclical on Mary, “The Mother of the Redeemer” (“Redemptoris Mater”).
The Catholic Commentator  May 12, 2017

SHELTER ▼

From page 1

the problem.”

Human trafficking has become an international concern, Bishop Sanchez-Sorondo noted, forcing an estimated 50 million victims into prostitution, sex slavery and other abusive behavior. He said 80 percent of the $32 billion generated annually through human trafficking is rooted in prostitution, with some of the girls as young as 12- to 13-years-old.

“Can you imagine?” asked Mike Edmonson, who recently retired as superintendent of the Louisiana State Police, during a brief address at the dedication. “What does a grown person want to do with a small child?”

Edmonson pointed out how trafficking has mushroomed in the past several years, saying that prior to 2008 there were only five or six cases in Louisiana. However, since then the state police have worked more than 500 trafficking cases, and from 2014 to 2015 the agency reported an 86 percent increase in the cases it investigated.

Gov. John Bel Edwards said Louisiana has a special obligation to not only combat trafficking but to reach out to victims because it is such a significant problem in the state. He cited two reasons to its prevalence: the first is the interstate highway systems connecting Dallas to Atlanta in north Louisiana and Houston with Florida in the south.

Secondly, Edwards cited the large number of big sporting events that come to Louisiana, including the Super Bowl, NBA All-Star game and the Sugar Bowl, among others. Traffickers have a tendency to follow male dominated sporting events because men make up the majority of the consumers, research has proven.

According to recent statistics, the I-10 corridor from Texas to Florida has been identified as the busiest trafficking corridor in the United States. During the Super Bowl, which was played in February, Houston police made 214 arrests related to trafficking.

In Louisiana, an estimated 40 percent of trafficking victims are juveniles, and of that number, another 40 percent are being trafficked by their primary caregivers, such as parents or other relations.

“So we have a lot of victims that traverse our state,” Edwards said. “As perverse as it sounds and as ugly as it is, we just look at the reality where people gather these victims will be brought in. So we need to do what we can to end human trafficking and in the meantime do what we can to aid the victims, emotionally, physically and spiritually.”

“Of all of that is going to happen in this building.”

Metanoia Manor has been the vision of Father Bayhi for the past 12 years, first made aware of human trafficking several years ago while filming a television show in Rome. It was during that visit he was introduced to Sister Eugenia Bonetti MC who has made it her ministry to rescue girls who are being trafficked in Italy and help women escape the prostitution industry.

He has worked tirelessly with law enforcement officials, government leaders and others to help make his dream a reality and even donated money from Metanoia, a charity organization he found for the purpose of helping youth in Louisiana, to help establish the 12,000-square foot home.

“I think it’s important to realize human trafficking is a symptom,” he said. “We’ve been getting to this point. We get a kid that is 14 years old and has already performed over 4,000 sexual favors.”

“There is nothing left. It’s a brutal, brutal way of life.”

“Whatever scares me more is we are living in a society where people are willing to do that,” he added. “We have got to deal with this problem. We have to understand how we got here, how we became a society that now sees human life as a commodity, property or pleasure. When we start viewing human life like this there is something wrong.”

Father Bayhi noted that pornography is a $42 billion industry, with 98 percent of it tailored for consumption by men. He said pornographers and consumers are using other people for their pleasure, but more disturbing is that there are so many individuals willing “buy this stuff. The devaluation of every human person has gotten us to this point.”

The fact that the Holy Father sends a papal envoy to Baton Rouge underscores the priority he places on this societal scourge, Father Bayhi said.

“This is a great Ministry of the Diocese of Baton Rouge,” he said. “We need to make sure we are a shelter for children in need. We are not a Catholic shelter. It’s an opportunity to address children in need of services.”

Sister Normita Nunez SOM, who will direct the house, thanked Father Bayhi for his vision to reach out to the young girls so that they might have life and said he is the reason the shelter will soon be opening. She said the freedom of the young girls has been stolen, their innocence taken advantage of and their hopes and dreams shattered.

“Our vision is to provide under age survivors a home life environment, transition into healthy lifestyles, a place where freedom is gained, and souls are healed through love, schooling, social therapy,” Sister Norma said. “This is our hope and our mission to have God do all of this.”

Bishop Robert W. Muench blesses Metanoia Manor, which will serve as a safe haven for young girls who are victims of human trafficking. Several local and state dignitaries, including Gov. John Bel Edwards and Bishop Marcelo Sanchez-Sorondo, who is Pope Francis’ point man on trafficking, attended the ceremony. Photos by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator

Give your old clothing, furniture and household items to St. Vincent de Paul - one of our area’s oldest charities. We need your donations of clothing, furnishings, appliances and household items to help us in our mission of charity.

Last year, we helped over 12,000 people (free of charge) with their clothing and furnishing needs. Our volunteers and staff verify that their need is legitimate.

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5621 Government St.
1466 North St. (Stores Warehouse)

Brouss/Port Allen SVDP Store - 4171 Hwy. 1 South
Hammond SVDP Store - 824 N. Morrison
Gonzales SVDP Store - 1402 N. Burnside
New Roads SVDP Store - 710 Olinda Street

We gladly accept household items, furnishings and appliances in good condition. Call our pick-up service at (225) 267-5447 to make your large clothing, furniture or appliance donation.