FLOODED WITH MEMORIES

Diocese showing strong signs of recovery one year after natural disaster

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Thad Bridges and brother, Jimmy, lived many years in their same homes in areas considered “flood free” zones. But they, along with thousands of other residents throughout the region, watched in shock and disbelief as the bayous and rivers in southeast Louisiana demonstrated they are free to stretch their boundaries and go where they will, flooding their homes and wreaking havoc in their communities during the historic flood of August 2016.

Thad Bridges, and wife, Mary, live in Greenwell Springs and Jimmy and wife, Sue, live in Denham Springs, which were among the areas in the Diocese of Baton Rouge hardest hit by the flood.

As the first year anniversary of the flood approaches, the Bridges are thankful that in the midst of many things going wrong, many things went right during the event that changed their life and the lives of many others.

The first right thing to happen was that they got out of their homes as the waters closed in.

The first clue for Jimmy and Mary that something was different during this time of heavy rain was when they saw their next door neighbor rushing around, and he told them he was putting things up on bricks in his house.

“He said, ‘I think we’re going to get it,’” said Mary.

But the Bridges “stayed right where they were,” and then the waters rose rapidly from both sides of their subdivision off Frenchtown Road. People were leaving in airboats.

Thad Bridges got an old pump from a swimming pool they had filled in and tried to keep water out of the house, but it could not keep up with the rushing river waters.

When it was clear that their home would be taking on water and roads were impassable, the Bridges wondered what they were going to do when Ed White, a “knight in shining armor”

Pictured is Mary and Thad Bridges neighbor’s home, with a view of the Bridges’ driveway in between, as the couple left their home in a boat the afternoon of the flood. In the driveway is a fire log from a neighbor’s yard being pushed by the rushing waters. Photo provided by Mary Bridges

Community’s spirit, resiliency lasting memories for Acaldo

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Michael Acaldo’s indelible memory of this past summer’s historic flooding will not be that of surging waters crippling communities, nor will it be watching his St. Vincent de Paul Society staff scurry from shelter to shelter assisting thousands of displaced families.

Certainly those days and months will forever be a part of his own fabric, but time has a habit of diluting memories.

Rather, what Acaldo will remember is an intangible, the spirit of a community that refused to feel sorry for itself, refused to surrender to Mother Nature and a community that quickly began to rebuild, even before the waters had receded.

“I think the memory that is going to hit me is the amount of devastation but the thing that mashed it was the...
Behind the Collar

... with FATHER PATRICK HEALY SSJ, St. Augustine Church, New Roads

As one who likes photography, are some of your favorite pictures of people, places or things you have taken?

I got interested in photography while serving as an active duty Army Chaplain stationed in Egypt near the Gaza Strip. I was able to lead many pilgrimages of our troops to the Holy Land sites in Egypt and Israel where the opportunities for photography were unsurpassed. This was also a wonderful opportunity for some remedial religious education of many young soldiers. It’s difficult to say which photos are my “favorites” as every country has its unique features. That being said, the most spectacular landscapes are in the Andes mountains of Chile and the Himalayas in Asia. My prime interest now is focused on portraits of people in many countries.

What are the unique features of Kathmandu that make it one of your favorite places to visit?

God works in mysterious ways! In 2011, while on a tour of central Asia, I was visiting many of the ancient temples and shrines when I

Catholic Education in Baton Rouge

By Renee Richard

Father August Martin, pastor of St. Joseph Church from 1846-1849, exhibited great zeal and enthusiasm for the spiritual welfare of his parish and its missions. It was his tenure in that the first Catholic school in the city of Baton Rouge was established in 1847.

The Daughters of Charity sent six sisters from Baltimore to Louisiana in January 1847. Three sisters were assigned to New Iberia and Bishop Antoine Blanc made arrangements with Father Martin for the other three sisters to come to Baton Rouge. Work began quickly to find and remodel a home. Parishioners made them linens and $250 was collected within the first few weeks with another $100 in pledges.

The sisters arrived in Baton Rouge in late February. St. Mary’s Academy opened its doors in March of that year at the residence of Thomas Gibbs Morgan at the corner of Florida and Church (now Fourth) streets. Elementary school tuition was $6 per month and for the advanced grades it was $9 per month.

Within two months, enrollment was 40 students. In addition to running St. Mary’s, the sisters began a catechism school for girls on Sunday mornings and a class for slaves on Sunday evenings.

During his tenure, Father Martin spoke with Bishop Blanc about asking the Society of Jesus to staff the church parish. This would facilitate the establishment of a permanent Catholic school for boys in the city. There were already two Jesuit colleges in Louisiana, in New Orleans.

Mountaintop minutes

By Dina Dow

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” – Mt 17:5

We celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord and the 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time filled with awe and wonder. The unveiling of Jesus’ divinity of empowers his disciples to become witnesses of truth. Herein are three realities of faith: to understand God’s glory, to have confidence in Jesus, and to remain attentive to the Holy Spirit.

The Transfiguration of the Lord is one of those moments where one may say, “I wish I could have been there.” As foretold by the prophet Daniel and testified by St. Peter, Jesus’ moment of transfiguration reveals God’s omnipotent glory. Imagine being one of the three chosen apostles to climb the mountain with Jesus, thinking it would be time for quiet talk. What happened dropped them face down in fear because of the powerful presence of God the father (voice), the son (radiant white) and the Holy Spirit (glory cloud).

God clearly identifies Jesus as the beloved son, the model of holiness. Jesus Christ radiates in the love of God as the Holy Spirit wraps those atop the mountain in the glory of the moment. Standing with them are Moses and Elijah signifying Jesus’ fulfillment of the law and message of the prophets, as he is the model for the Beatitudes and the norm of the new Law: “Love one another as I have loved you. The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods.” (Para. 460, Catechism of the Catholic Church)

We are made able by God’s grace and our faith to encounter Christ, similar to the transfiguration, in “mountaintop minutes” where we are completely overwhelmed by his presence and love to the point where our legs give-way in humility and fear, falling “face-down” in reverence. At that moment we are literally face-to-face with God.

But why climb a mountain for such a moment? All we have to do is to go to Mass, participate in holy Eucharist and kneel in praise.

Are there some important lessons that your sibling sister has taught you?

My sister, Maureen, is my inspiration. As a daily communicant, she is not only deeply committed to the Church and evangelization but seems to have unlimited energy caring for her children and grandchildren, for various charitable projects, for the homeless and for underprivileged children.

You are handy at fixing things around the church. What was one of the most challenging projects, and what has been one of the most gratifying to complete?

The most challenging project was renovating our old St. Augustine convent which went unused for decades. It was restored to become the new Novitiate House for the Josephite Fathers and Brothers. With the help and support of many parishioners we were able to create a beautiful home for young men studying for the priesthood. Our parishioners have been enriched by their presence. In fact we celebrated the profession of our first novice, Bro. Joseph Kikanda, last Sunday (July 16, 2017) during our 11:00 a.m. liturgy.

Other than family members, who is one of your favorite role models?

The role models that inspire me are two of our newest saints – Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa. Both of them lived the Gospels and gave of themselves without hesitation.

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Faith helps resident survive turbulent waters

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

When people ask Edwin Serpas why he is rebuilding his flooded house in Springfield, he simply says, “It’s my home.”

Home is a 1400-square foot house on the banks of the Natalbany River, but Serpas has not lived in it since this past August and he’s not going anywhere. Currently, he is staying in a borrowed camper in his front yard and working on repairs when he can.

“I’m about 55 percent done,” he said. “I’m hoping to be in the house by the end of September.”

Springfield was among the hardest hit areas when a slow moving storm wreaked havoc on lives, properties and communities in South Louisiana last year. Phil Grigsby, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Slidell, says that from Aug. 11-13, more than 20 inches of rain fell in the area.

“The last measurement of the Natalbany River at flood stage was over 22 feet,” he said. “The gauge stopped working at that point but it was forecasted to continue rising to 24.3 feet from all of the water.”

Minimal flood stage for the Natalbany River is 16 feet.

Serpas, who turned 60 in May, was already wading through rough waters last summer before the rains came.

“I’m a recovering alcoholic,” he said. “I had just gotten out of rehab in June and I was going through a divorce after 38 years of marriage, then it started flooding.”

Like so many others, Serpas says he lived in an area that had never flooded before. When the water began to rise, there was not much he could do but watch.

“I did have my boat hooked up to the fence post so I knew I could get out if I had to,” he said.

In the end, he had 20 inches of water in his house.

Still, he stayed sober throughout the ordeal and credits his faith for his strength.

“A nurse invited me to Mass at St. Helena (Church in Amite) and (pastor) Father Mark (Beard) just blew me away. When I walked in there, it was like ‘I’m going to get your attention and I’m going to keep it,’ Serpas said.

“And, that was part of my problem. I had broken away from the church and I couldn’t find what I was looking for,” he added.

“Archbishop (Alfred) Hughes (of the Archdiocese of New Orleans and former bishop for the Diocese of Baton Rouge), who is a friend of my parents, and Father Mark and Father Jamin (David, pastor at St. Margaret, Queen of Scotland Church in Albany and St. Stephen the Martyr Church in Maurepas) all gave me encouragement,” he said.

Serpas, a barber, commutes to his job in New Orleans where his client list includes the retired archbishop and many seminarians from Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans.

“I think Ed was a strong person in his faith before the storm arrived,” said Father David. “When difficult times arise, it can sometimes test a person’s faith, and I think he’s definitely won that battle.”

“After the flood, the seminarians and some Tulane (University in New Orleans) Catholic students came over and helped me with the major demolition work,” Serpas said.

Now, he’s getting help from his brother, one of his sons and a friend to rebuild and remodel his 1959 house.

“I’ve opened up the kitchen and added a sitting area to a bedroom,” he said. “And, it’s gone from a three bedroom house to a two-bedroom.”

Rebuilding for Serpas means more than just a home. He’s reconnecting with his three grown children and 10 grandchildren, and he’s re-established relationships with his three siblings. Next, he wants to go back to school.

“At the age of 60, I want to get an associates degree in social sciences so that I can help others,” he said. “A lot of people don’t understand what I’ve been through and it just makes me that much stronger.”

“God works in mysterious ways,” he added. “I’ve always been told that things are going to happen and they’re happening for a reason. And, I know God and Jesus are with me all the time. Psalm 37 says ‘be patient and wait and good things will come.’ And good things have come.”
nearby Interstate 12 to fully grasp the crisis that was realized it was not just us but the greater Baton Rouge with flooding issues. We turned on the television and small armada of volunteers. No one could have possibly predicted what the next few days and even months would entail, and such snappy terms as “I-12 Ministry” and “Home Starter Kits” would seep into the church parlance.

“It happened so fast,” Father David said. “(On Aug. 13) we noticed some of our neighbors starting to deal with flooding issues. We turned on the television and realized it was not just us but the greater Baton Rouge area.”

He and his volunteers only had to steal a glance at the interstate.’ But it was a gut feeling.”

Lentless rain that would continue for several days had left the church parish on a virtual iceage. What a difference a year can make.

Water and use the facilities.

Livingston Parish civil officials chipped in and dropped off additional food and necessities. In a span of 48 hours, more than 1,500 people were fed, able to get water and use the facilities.

“Most people would never think, ‘Let’s open our doors and help people that need to go to the bathroom off of the interstate.’ But it was a gut feeling.” Once waters receded from I-12, relief efforts shifted to St. Thomas the Apostle Chapel in Springfield, where Father David is also pastor. On a sultry morning, and under a broiling August sun, 1,500 plates of jambalaya supplied by Zatarain’s were served to area residents, who formed a traffic line around the block to pick up the plates.

From that point, families who did not flood began cooking for families who were either flooded or doing remediation on their homes. Father David said at least 50 to 100 partnerships were developed.

As the focus shifted to recovery, Father David and then-Deacon Ryan Halford, who was spending his diocesan internship at St. Margaret, collaborated on an innovative concept that would garner national acclaim.

The pair developed the Home Starter Kit program, offering flood victims the opportunity to select pre-determined furniture packages from Olinde’s Furniture in Baton Rouge, which was offering the furniture at the store’s cost. Father David said 350 people took advantage of one or more of the options that included a couch, dinette set, mattresses and bedding, coming to a combined total of $350,000.

“(Olinde’s) wanted to help the community get back as quickly as they could,” he said. “As a matter of fact, their quote was ‘as much as you need, however long you need. I think it is a work of mercy.”

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Immaculate Conception finds unity in flood

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Being in “the same boat” during the flood of summer 2016 has united Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs and its parishioners in one heart and mind about its mission, according to pastor Father Frank Uter.

An estimated 70 percent of homes in Livingston Civil Parish and 90 percent of homes in Denham Springs flooded this past summer.

“In some ways we wish we could be where we were (before the flood), in terms of parishioners being back in their homes, in terms of parish finances,” said Father Uter, noting “on the other hand” the entire domestic, church parish and community family experienced God’s graces by facing the challenge together.

“One thing that strikes me is that from day one after the flood our parish campus was in the same boat as parishioners in terms of rebuilding and trying to get back on track. It’s something we shared in a special way,” said Father Uter. “It’s unfortunate in one way, but it’s good that we could share it and do it together.

“When all is said and done, I think it will make the parish stronger.”

The extent of the flood became apparent when ICC prepared to send out its Christmas cards to parishioners.

“You wouldn’t believe how many parishioners had changes of address that were out of state, in Baton Rouge and New Orleans,” said Father Uter. The church received notes from those who said they still wanted to be considered parishioners.

“That made me feel good,” said Father Uter, noting many have returned.

Far from “going under” during the toughest of times last summer, ICC immediately worked to get the church operational as soon as possible so Mass could be celebrated and staff could be situated. The church also became a flood relief site for a flood grief support group hosted by Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

“The bond between Immaculate Conception and Denham Springs Elementary also grew as the school located its temporary campus on the church grounds.

Repair work to the sanctuary is among the last that needs to be done, according to Father Uter. Cabinets will be installed.

“After having a sanctuary with no cabinets and working lavatory, it will look strange to see a cabinet,” said Father Uter.

He said, for him, the reconstruction process after the flood is different than average renovation projects.

“We usually think of reconstruction in terms of painting and fixing up, but this is different in terms of we had to tear down before painting and fixing up,” said Father Uter.

Before the flood, ICC was focused on improving things around the campus, Father Uter said.

“But the real shift was focusing on person-to-person ministry. It brings you back to your mission,” said Father Uter. “The construction projects we were envisioning were good, but a lot of that has been put on the back burner. Focusing on serving people continues to be on the front burner.”

He said the council of ministries recently met and wants to focus on the parish being even more welcoming than before the flood. They would have people welcoming and answering questions from people coming to Mass.

Father Uter noted signs of rebirth and growth in the church. While the RCIA inquiry session is not slated to begin until Aug. 10, as of July more than 20 people had signed up for the inquiry session.

“I think that’s wonderful,” Father Uter said. “…You might think with people suffering, their thoughts might not be on their relationship with God. This shows that they might be going in that direction.

“I think there was an initial shock, but over the months, people have grown beyond that. Perhaps with God’s grace they are better for it spiritually.”

As far as the church, Father Uter said it was hard to establish communications immediately after the flood.

“But now it’s back and better and stronger,” said Father Uter. “Things were good before, but that doesn’t mean they can’t be better … So many people have been involved. It made me appreciate it even more.”

Father Uter said the church will “definitely do something” to mark the one year anniversary of the flood, but details were still being worked out.

In looking up the Gospel passage for that anniversary, Sunday, Aug. 13, Father Uter noted the Gospel reading will be the passage in St. Matthew in which the disciples are tossed around in a boat in a storm until Jesus gets in the boat with them and calms the waters.

“You better believe it,” said Father Uter when asked if the passage is generating some good homily ideas.

St. Alphonsus in recovery

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

St. Alphonsus Church in Greenwell Springs is “building strength” as it regroups from the flood of August 2016 that wreaked havoc for its church and school family and the surrounding Central and Greenwell Springs communities, according to Jo Ann Stein, executive director of St. Alphonsus.

She said some people are coming back slowly and some are still working on their homes. Even those who are close to recovery are still unpacking boxes.

She said the involvement in church and attendance at Mass is still good because people are recognizing the church plays an important role in the spiritual healing in their lives after such a devastating event.

“We are all coming through it together. We’ve been very supportive of each other,” said Stein.

She said the support helps offset the frustration some people feel as they deal with FEMA, insurance and contractor issues as they try to get their lives back together.

She said welcoming with open arms people who are suffering all kinds of stress and distress helps them to “come through it as a family.”

While there were lots of calls and cries for help, there a lot of people reaching out to them, even though they themselves may have lost everything, said Stein.

“The people of St. Alphonsus are very resilient and patient,” said Stein. “People saw another side of the parish. Unless you are in need you don’t see that. The church did an amazing job. No matter what, we were here every day.”

In large parishes, such as St. Alphonsus, people may not know each other very well. The flood changed all that, said Stein.

“In this day and age people don’t know their neighbor. Everyone stepped up. Everyone was impacted in one way or another. Those whose homes weren’t flooded helped those who were,” said Stein.

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Health & Fitness

Special Section
The Catholic Commentator
September 1

There are so many choices today about exercise programs, preventive care, nutrition plans and medical advice, but, how do we know what is the best one for us to live a fuller, happier, healthier life – physically and mentally? “Health & Fitness” will focus on these and other related topics.

The Catholic Commentator prints some 40,000 copies and distributes throughout in the Diocese of Baton Rouge – the 12 civil parishes of

• Ascension • East Baton Rouge • Pointe Coupee
• St. James • St. Helena • West Baton Rouge
• East Feliciana • Iberville • West Feliciana
• Tangipahoa • Livingston.

For advertising opportunities in Health & Fitness call 225-387-0983 by August 23.
Our coffee group wants to know why, when a divorced couple wants a church annulment, both parties need to apply. If a marriage is annulled, isn’t it over and done with for both the husband and the wife? Is it just for the money, we wonder, that each of the two former spouses must apply? (Omaha, Nebraska)

Please let your coffee group know that they are wrong on two counts. First, only one of the former spouses needs to apply. And yes, when an annulment is granted, the marriage is “over and done with” for both spouses.

When an application is submitted, the other spouse is notified by the diocese and offered the opportunity to give his or her own “take” – what led up to the marriage, any special circumstances (pregnancy, family pressure, faulty views of marriage, etc.) and what “went wrong” with the relationship.

Often enough, that second spouse chooses not to respond, but the case still moves forward on the testimony of only one spouse.

As for it being “just for the money,” it is true that in the past most dioceses attached a rather nominal fee – particularly when there was a need to cover the cost of hiring professional psychologists or lay canonists to evaluate the testimony. That fee was regularly waived in cases of financial difficulty.

In 2015, Pope Francis recommended that the annulment process be completely free of charge, and many dioceses have implemented this – even (as my own diocese has done) swallowing the expense of bringing in outside experts.

Has the Catholic Church ever considered for canonization an individual who had not been a Catholic? If not, why not? Are we still suggesting that only Catholics go to heaven? (Heber Springs, Arkansas)

Let me answer your last question first. The Catholic Church’s teaching is most clearly expressed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Quoting from the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, “Lumen Gentium,” the catechism states: “Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience those too may achieve eternal salvation” (No. 847).

This was not a new idea dreamed up by the fathers of Vatican II; St. Paul had taught in the Letter to the Romans (2:6-7) that God “will repay everyone according to his works: eternal life to those who seek glory, honor and immortality through perseverance in good works.”

As to the question of the church’s proclaiming non-Catholic saints: Theoretically, the church could do that, could declare its firm certainty that a particular non-Catholic is in heaven – but it has not done so to date.

Why not? Well, the church formally canonizes saints (normally after a lengthy study) when it declares that the person’s life has demonstrated extraordinary virtue and that miracles can be documented following that person’s death. In making this declaration, the church is offering to the Catholic faithful a model worthy of imitation. It may seem unlikely that a non-Catholic faith community would acknowledge the Catholic Church’s authority by submitting one of its followers to this rigorous Catholic scrutiny, and for the Catholic Church to seize this role on its own might be resented as an overreach. But in theory, it is possible.
O’Neill restores history through the magic of piano

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

One of the first things you notice when you sit down to talk with Baton Rouge piano dealer Raph O’Neill is his energy. He has a lot. Ask him about the August flood, you’ll see even more of it. That’s because what O’Neill and his employees did during that catastrophic event took a lot of energy – and expertise.

“No one knew it was going to be that bad.” O’Neill, a member of St. George Church in Baton Rouge, recalled a phone call that alerted him to the situation.

“On Sunday (Aug. 14), I get a call from one of our piano teachers in Denham Springs. She has two grand pianos and an upright and she was in tears. One of the grands was only six months old and there was water in the house and it was rising. It got up to the legs but not in the piano,” O’Neill said. “I knew we had to get those pianos out. A piano is not just a piece of furniture, it’s like a member of the family. And, in this case, they were heirlooms that she wanted to pass down to her kids.”

With the store’s delivery truck broken down at a repair shop in Denham Springs, O’Neill had to wait until early the next morning to jump into action.

“I called Ryder as soon as they opened and got the last truck in town. Then, I went with my driver and a helper and we couldn’t get to Denham Springs because of all of the flooding. So, we had to go to Greenwell Springs Road and the aftermath was just horrendous,” he said.

Employees Abraham Rogers and Cedric Wilson moved the pianos from the house to the truck, but O’Neill had to figure out where to take the instruments. Average grand pianos are five feet six inches long and weigh 800 pounds. They need a lot of space.

“I rented five climate controlled storage units, it was all they had, and I went into the piano storage business,” O’Neill said. “I had more than 40 grands within two weeks.”

O’Neill also emailed 138 piano teachers with tips on what to do with an upright piano that has been through a flood: elevate it, remove the bottom board and put fans on them to dry them out. Grand pianos are salvageable if the sound board had not gotten wet. The legs are replaceable. After the email, O’Neill said he received hundreds of calls asking for help.

“A piano is the third most expensive item in a house. First, it’s the house, then the car, then the piano. So, you’re talking about thousands of dollars in an investment,” he said. “The estimate is that in every 100,000 homes, 3 to 5 percent have pianos in them. So, if 100,000 homes flooded, you’re talking three to 5,000 pianos. That’s a lot of pianos. I saw hundreds on the curb that were ruined.”

After the waters subsided and hundreds of pianos assessed for damage, O’Neill found his work was far from over.

“It’s really a God thing,” he explained.

O’Neill was contacted by Mary Grace Gelekano, a one-armed piano player from Denham Springs who travels and plays for her ministry.

“She had lost her piano in the flood and says if you run across one salvaged from the flood please let me know,” he said.

That request started a new journey for O’Neill. He said that on many of the grand pianos he assessed the digital piano player mechanism attached below the keyboard was destroyed by floodwater. However, the piano itself was salvageable.

“So, we were able to get new legs on one of the pianos and donate it to Mary Grace,” he said.

About 10 more salvageable pianos were donated to students. And, a monetary donation, teamed with a price cut from one piano company, allowed O’Neill to help get students back to their lessons with digital pianos.

“There were displaced students living in FEMA trailers and they didn’t have room for a piano,” he said. “But, the portable digital piano is much smaller and has a collapsible bench. We were able to provide 28 digital pianos to students whose families lost everything. We were trying to help these students keep some normalcy in their lives.”

O’Neill has 15 pianos left in three storage units. He doesn’t know how long they will be there. The owners are still waiting for their homes to be repaired. But, he’ll be ready for delivery as soon as he gets the call.
The Catholic Commentator  August 4, 2017

MARGARET ▼
From page 4

said, adding that even when backorders occurred, it worked out for the best because of the time difference between victims having their houses completed and ready for delivery. “I think it is the Holy Spirit.”

Although there remains much work to be done, Father David said the majority of the 60 to 80 percent of St. Margaret and St. Stephen parishioners who flooded are back in their homes in varying stages. Unfortunately, he said some families have not been able to touch their homes, still awaiting insurance claims, dealing with contractors or coping with other delays.

“There are great signs of recovery which is a blessing but for those who have not had that blessing yet it’s pretty horrific,” said Father David.

Despite the catastrophic circumstances, he said a blessing to arise from the carnage was the unification of the St. Margaret and St. Stephen communities. He also noted how some families left their own flooded homes to assist others.

He said he was proud of the effort and that for a small parish that had the majority of its parishioners flood to be able to outreach even outside of its own boundaries to assist the greater Baton Rouge area is awesome.

“It brought people together that would have never crossed,” Father David said. “It was neighbor helping neighbor.

“It’s left some scars in our community, but at the same time it has left a lasting impression that not only Catholics but non Catholics saying St. Margaret did a lot for us and we appreciate that. And I think it solidified the reputation of St. Margaret for the Albany-Springfield community that they are one of the leaders not only with flood recovery but matters of a spiritual nature because they are intertwined together. I think people will remember that.”

ALPHONSUS ▼
From page 5

She said St. Alphonsus threw out a wide net to bring in as many helpless and suffering people as possible.

“Everyone knew they could come to St. Alphonsus, whether they are a parishioner, Catholic or not,” said Stein.

The parish will commemorate the first anniversary of the flood during its 4 p.m. vigil Mass on Saturday, Aug. 19. The Mass will be followed by a reception with a slideshow presentation featuring short stories, blessings, updates and pictures.

Volunteers from St. Margaret, Queen of Scotland Church in Albany and St. Thomas the Apostle Chapel in Springfield helped distribute 1,500 plates of jambalaya provided by Zatarain’s after flood waters had receded. File photo by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator

St. Bonaventure Indian Mission & School

The St. Bonaventure Indian Mission and School, which dates to 1974, is a Catholic agency providing the people of the Eastern Navajo Indian Nation in New Mexico the opportunity to develop self-sufficiency through education, employment, housing and outreach services that make available food, water, clothing and other social services.

St. Bonaventure has provided critical survival services to the Navajo Nation, which is the largest Native American tribe in the United States.

The mission also operates a pre-kindergarten through 8th grade school primary for area Navajo children. All of the more than 200 students are on scholarship, because the mission staff believes education is a way to break the cycle of poverty.

Most of the Navajo nation remain without running water and many students live too far off of paved roads to qualify for public school transportation. Water has been trucked in regularly in 110 gallon trips. In May cisterns monthly were finally installed to get 1200 gallons monthly.

St. Bonaventure, which is entirely funded through donations, needs your thoughtful and financial support help to continue this valuable and much needed ministry.

“We are asking for your prayers for without them, our programs have little meaning.

There are several avenues for financial assistance, including making a donation to the mission on a one-time basis, joining our Good Shepherd Circle, taking out an annuity, making a donation of appreciated stock or remembering the mission in your will.

Donations can be sent to St. Bonaventure Indiana Mission & School
P.O. Box 610
Thoreau, NM 87323
or visit stbonaventuremission.org.

Visa and Mastercard are accepted.

For more information, call (877) 989-4100.

“In imitation of our Master, we Christians are called to confront the poverty of our brothers and sisters, to touch it, to make it our own and to take practical steps to alleviate it.”

Pope Francis

Volunteers from St. Margaret, Queen of Scotland Church in Albany and St. Thomas the Apostle Chapel in Springfield helped distribute 1,500 plates of jambalaya provided by Zatarain’s after flood waters had receded. File photo by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator
Community helps couple return to normalcy

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

Bill Abbott Jr., 75, of Port Vincent remembers events surrounding the flood as if it were yesterday.Abbott, the bookkeeper for St. Joseph Catholic Church in French Settlement, was at work when he learned that things were going to get really bad.

“Here at the office on that Friday (Aug. 12) you heard it was going to be a foot higher than the 1983 flood which surprised me,” he recalled. “By Saturday, it was becoming evident. Sunday we had water coming in the house, so my wife and I left before dark.” Abbott and his wife, Carol, gathered up a few clothes, then walked a quarter of a mile to their son’s boat waiting for them on the road.

The couple stayed with a family member for two months before tackling the reconstruction process. “I wanted to make sure everything was good and dry so we didn’t start rebuilding until October.” The Abbotts received a FEMA trailer in January and now split their daily routine between the trailer and their home. “We can cook in the trailer and we have cots and fans in the house, so we’ve been pretty comfortable.”

Abbott and his wife have done most of the work on the house themselves, along with their son and husband of co-workers. “My wife is a good painter,” he said. “But, it hasn’t been easy. It’s a mess. I hate to sound so gloomy. It takes away from your routine and the things you enjoy doing. It’s something you don’t want to go through again, even though we had flood insurance. It’s like giving up your free time for a year.”

One thing that did impress him, though, was the outreach from others. “You can’t imagine the help that the church and community received from around the country. One man from Alabama was going to Grand Isle for a fishing trip when he heard about it and he stopped to help and got friends of his in Alabama to help out and donate. It kind of reminds you of how small we are as individuals.”

In total, approximately 350 pallets of food and other aid were delivered to St. Joseph, allowing nearly 350 tons of aid to be disbursed to the community.

Meanwhile, the Ladies Altar Society and Catholic Daughters at St. Stephen had also mobilized, and at one point Father Palermo said each of the parish halls resembled a virtual “Sam’s Club” where people would walk in, find clothes, cleaning supplies, water, get fed, and even, if one desired, do some MRE shopping.

In two months, more than 100,000 meals were served out of St. Joseph. In its one month of operation, St. Stephen served approximately 5,000 meals.

Father Palermo cited the Salvation Army, the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank, the Red Cross and St. Aloysius as being the parish’s biggest allies helping serve food. Additionally, volunteers came from areas as far away as Orlando, Florida and Mobile, Alabama to help cook.

“At the end of the day, when our volunteers could not serve any more food, had emptied the pot onto the last plate, one of the things we all understood was that God gave us exactly what we needed to serve those who needed to be fed,” Father Palermo said. “It was providential and an affirmation that we needed to continue doing this.”

Combined, the relief efforts of St. Joseph and St. Stephen are staggering. Besides the meals, the parishes also distributed more than $500,000 in financial aid, either through checks or gift cards, donated by the Diocese of Baton Rouge, the St. Vincent de Paul Society of St. Joseph and St. Stephen and the Baton Rouge Area Foundation.

Today, Father Palermo said about 80 to 85 percent of parishioners are back in their homes to varying degrees.

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The current church was completed in 1930, more than 1,000 feet away from the levee. The first Mass was celebrated July 6, 1930.

Through all of the changes, however, St. James has remained a spirit-filled church with dedicated parishioners who profess a deep love of their church.

The historic St. James cemetery sits among a stunning grove of live oak trees across the Mississippi River. At 95, he offers a unique snapshot into another era, a time when young people made their ‘Little Communities’ and he and the rest of the African-American community attended what amounted to a school with one or two teachers through eighth grade before attending high school in New Orleans.

But through it all, Octave, even when commuting to New Orleans for a job, never left his beloved St. James. And always at the center of his life, along with generations of other Catholics, has been St. James Church.

“The parish means a lot to me and this church so a whole is very important to this community,” said Octave, who used to have to walk six miles one way to attend Sunday Mass. “It had to mean plenty to us to stay in the church that many years.”

Octave joined several hundred parishioners on July 30 to help St. James, one of the oldest church parishes in the Diocese of Baton Rouge, commemorate its 250th anniversary during a Mass celebrated by Bishop Robert W. Finn of St. Louis.

“This is a special day, a special day for you and for our parish,” pastor Father Matthew McCaughey said during his homily. “It’s such a momentous occasion.”

By Richard Meek
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Camp provides students insight into forensics

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

A “detective’s rush” often overcomes people watching their favorite forensics crime show. A homicide victim’s photo flashes across the TV or computer screen, morsels of information are given from the investigation file, the suspect(s) are lined up, and forensics separates lies from facts. The show concludes with the arrest of the murderer, who many viewers claim they knew did it all along.

Fifth- through eighth-grade students attending a forensics camp at St. Michael High School on July 17 learned homicide investigations aren’t as quick and tidy as these shows indicate by getting a flesh, blood and bones look at the science.

Led by St. Michael forensics teacher and certified death investigator Alana Lyons, students analyzed fingerprints, DNA, blood splatters, bones and more.

Most students attending the camp want to know how to identify someone once they are dead or how to identify a killer based on evidence at a crime scene, according to Lyons.

One of the myths that Lyons dispelled for them was that crime scene investigation is quick, neat and easy.

“I am able to explain that crime shows portray the investigation of crimes at a much quicker rate than in actuality. Apprehension and prosecution of criminals takes years as opposed to one hour on a TV show,” said Lyons, whose past experience includes working as a death investigator for West Baton Rouge Civil Parish.

She also demonstrated how forensics utilizes many different areas of science. Students learn about biology, entomology, anthropology, histology, etc.

One of the students’ favorite activities was taking a pile of bones from a hog that had been buried in a wooded area behind St. Michael the previous year and lining it back up into its skeletal form, similar to putting together a puzzle. This exercise helped them to learn about the hog.

“I learned how to identify whether a pig is male or female by their skeletal remains,” said Tori Baudry, a rising sixth-grader at St. Alphonsus School in Greenwell Springs, who explained that male skulls are generally larger and thicker than the females, and males have larger brow ridges, with sloping, less rounded foreheads. She said one can also tell how old they are by examining their growth plates.

Baudry said she also enjoyed the “blood splatter” experiment in which they created a mock crime scene by splattering red paint as blood on paper with the outline of a human on it.

The size and shape of these blood droplets tell detectives about how the person lost the blood. From a blood spatter, detectives can determine what type of weapon was used, how many times a person was hit with it, if the bad guy was right or left handed, the position of the victim and how they moved during the attack, how long ago the crime was committed, and how long the person lived after their injuries.

“Blood splatters can tell you if a victim was stabbed or cut to death,” said Baudry, adding, “I’m learning that you can learn so much by blood and bones.”

Tyler Guidry, who will be in eighth-grade at St. Jean Vianney School in Baton Rouge, said he learned there were three different types of finger prints that can be recovered from a crime scene: patent, which are visible prints that occur when a foreign substance on the skin of a finger comes in contact with the smooth surface of another object (“blood on his hands” evidence); plastic, visible, impressed prints that occur when a finger touches a soft, malleable surface resulting in an indentation; and latex, which are usually invisible to the naked eye and are the result of perspiration derived from sweat pores found in the ridges of fingers.

“If a person does something bad to another person, you can see if there is something unique about the fingerprints and find that person,” Guidry said.

JP Bourgeois, an eighth-grade home school student and Carson Lewis, a rising eighth-grader at Most Blessed Sacrament School, enjoyed the maggot experiment, in which the students left raw meat in containers outside and let nature take its course.

“It (the size of the larvae) can tell you how long a person has been dead,” said Bourgeois ...

“It’s been fun, but it’s been kind of disgusting. You see all the flies swarming,” Lewis said he has always enjoyed science, but looking at death has breathed a new life of possibilities of what he may be able to do as he continues his studies.

“I’m learning so many new things,” said Lewis.

The blood spatter experiment showed how blood drops can give detectives a wealth of information about how a person died.

Are you called to serve others?

If you believe God is calling you to serve others and you wish to explore a religious vocation, we welcome you. We invite all women who feel called to religious life to contact us. We will help you with your spiritual journey. We are praying for you, and that you may find the answer to God’s special call.

FRANCISCAN MISSIONARIES OF OUR LADY NORTH AMERICAN REGION

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Call (225) 922-7443
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Gulino calls youth the church’s ‘greatest treasure’

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

The Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry of the Diocese of Baton Rouge is developing its efforts to enter into the mysterious world of “what makes young Catholics tick” in their spiritual lives and journey with them, according Olivia Gulino, new associate director of youth and young adult ministry.

Gulino said, “Thinking of my own experiences as a high school student and young adult, there was that drive of wanting to be a person who can help others who want to know the Lord better every day.

Especially with young adult ministry, I am a young adult. It’s an easy mental jump from what I experienced as a parishioner and member of the diocese to what I can do to minister to people like me. I think it helps because I’m close enough to that generation to know what things in a language that’s easy for them to understand.”

In order to reach young adults, Gulino said it’s important to be approachable. “Being young helps, but to also extend an invitation to them so we can journey together and I can be someone to accompany them on that journey,” Gulino said. “And that’s what I want to do.”

For youth, that means getting into the teenager mindset and helping them to bridge the gap between their experiences and what the faith can answer for them, said Gulino.

For many, the teenage mindset can be a shroud of mystery. “Their world is different and keeps changing so rapidly even than previous generations. We want to incorporate those realities in what we can do in ministry,” said Gulino. “We want to ask them questions and make sure they know we are involved in our ministry by informing ourselves about what they need and doing everything we can to meet those needs.”

Such support will help teens find meaning in their lives, said Gulino. “A part of the teenage experience is looking for a place where you can find meaning, a place where you can contribute something that is not only meaningful for the world but also has personal meaning and that you feel like you are doing God’s will for you,” said Gulino. “One of the hard parts of being young is figuring out what that is and where your place is where you fit most.”

For young adults, the challenge is to be in a transitional mode of going to college, getting jobs, possibly marrying and starting a family and deciding where to live. Their faith life may be put on the back burner or left behind all together.

“That’s the main challenge as young adults. We will be doing what we can to re-engage our young adults, maybe people who have left the church for whatever reason, as young adults, or in college or high school, to go after everyone. To evangelize everyone.” Young Catholics today are in a world where there are a myriad of options, from a morning cup of coffee to important decisions that will impact their faith life.

“There’s an option overload and they are living in a world where there’s so may opportunities and experiences and so it can be overwhelming to make decisions especially about faith, beliefs and Catholic practices of that faith,” said Gulino. “The basic challenge is to make our faith meaningful in life.”

The drive for success and to be productive can make things more complicated for people than it needs to be, which requires getting back to basics, Gulino noted. It is also important for people to remember that they are not perfect, which is the beautiful point made in the sacrament of reconciliation that God’s grace is available to them, she said.

As Gulino assesses what directing the youth and young adult ministry will take, she said young Catholics are a bright spot. “There’s such a drive for compassion and I think that youth today more than before have such a global perspective—not only of the suffering in our local communities, but nationally and internationally. That is a great gift and it’s something I want to foster more — what to do with that drive to love and be loved and to help other people.”

Those who serve in youth ministry at the local church parish level bring inspiring possibilities for Gulino. “There’s so much good happening in our diocese and especially with all the people who are involved in youth and young adult ministry. They are our greatest treasure,” said Gulino.

Her ultimate goal for youth and young adult ministry is to form young missionary disciples who, out of their own close relationship with God, invite others to have their own encounter with Christ, leading them to the relationship God wants with them.

“That is something I want to focus on. Helping our teenagers and young adults look at their gifts. Not just practical and workplace gifts like professional skills, but the gifts that God has given you and how they can be employed for the greater good for his kingdom,” Gulino said.

Child Nutrition Program

Diocese of Baton Rouge
3300 Hundred Oaks Ave., Baton Rouge, LA 70808
Phone: 225-387-6421 • Fax: 225-387-1413
Email: cnp@diobr.org • Web Site: www.cnpbr.org

Welcome to the 2017-2018 school year! The Diocese of Baton Rouge Child Nutrition Program staff is looking forward to serving your children the highest quality, nutritious and great-tasting meals that support their achievements in school and promote healthy lifestyles. All of the Child Nutrition Staff members are trained to deliver exceptional customer service where everyone is welcomed, valued, and appreciated. We will go the extra mile to serve you with a smile.

Healthy for Life is our commitment to create healthier environments and communities, by providing comprehensive nutrition and wellness education. This year we will continue to expand the program with more freshly prepared meals to better serve our students and their families; and this year as part of this expansion, we have updated the program design to better reflect the sophisticated tastes of today’s students.

For your students, we offer a variety of meal choices with one goal in mind: to provide outstanding service and high quality “child-friendly” meals that meet or exceed the latest federal and state requirements. Our School menus are designed to ensure that students receive a balanced meal, consisting of foods from all major food groups in the right proportions to meet calorie and other nutrient needs. The products and the cooking methods we use conserve food quality and nutrients, while limiting the addition of fats. So although you may see popular items like pizza and chicken smackers on our menus, be assured that your child’s meal selections contain healthy grains and are lower in fat and salt than what you find in grocery stores or restaurants.

We will also be offering some different foods that your child may not have tried before: Handmade Cheesy Buns, Chicken Tetrazzini, Fresh Fried Louisiana Catfish, Lasagna, Handmade Meatball Subs, and Gumbo, just to name a few; so please encourage your child to taste these items. They just might become a new favorite! Also, we invite you to have lunch with your child so you can try these tasty foods together.

### FEDERAL ELIGIBILITY INCOME CHART FOR SCHOOL YEAR 2017-18

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Each additional person +$7,733 +$645 +$323 +$298 +$149

Sincerely,
Ms. Lynda Carville
CNP Director

Phone: 225-387-6421 • Fax: 225-387-1413
MOVIE REVIEWS

USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting classifications:
A-I – General patronage
A-II – Adults and adolescents
A-III – Adults
A-IV – Adults, with reservations
L – Limited adult audience
O – Morally offensive

Dunkirk
Warner Bros.

Compelling historical drama, set in the spring of 1940, recounting the surprisingly successful evacuation of hundreds of thousands of British and French troops from the port of the title following their rapid defeat and encirclement by the forces of Nazi Germany. Taking an everyday man’s view of the situation, writer-director Christopher Nolan follows the exploits of three ordinary soldiers (Fionn Whitehead, Aneurin Barnard and Harry Styles), the owner of a small yacht (Mark Rylance) who, like hundreds of others, answers the call for civilian vessels to join in the rescue, and a duo of RAF Spitfire pilots (Jack Lowden and Tom Hardy). The perils of the desperate operation are fully exploited for dramatic tension, and the questionable measures resorted to by some characters in their efforts to survive are balanced by a general sense of heroic pluck and by incidents in which humane justice and generosity of spirit are upheld. While not for the faint-hearted of any age, the film’s educational value makes it probably acceptable for older teens. Intense stylized combat violence, brief gore, a couple of uses of profanity, at least one instance each of rough, crude and crass language. A-III; PG-13

The Exception
A24

During the opening stages of World War II, a Jewish maid (Lily James) working in the Netherlands household of exiled German Emperor Wilhelm II (Christopher Plummer) spies on him for the British, then both confounds and cavors with the Wehrmacht officer (Jai Courtney) dispatched to ferreth out the espionage. There’s a glutinous quality to their romantic encounters. But director David Leveaux’s screen version of Alan Judd’s 2003 novel “The Kaiser’s Last Kiss” quickly returns to the conventions of a historical thriller. The result is an exceptionally well-crafted, gloriously over-the-top piece of kitsch. Brief graphic nonmarital sexual activity with flashes of male and female nudity, fleeting rough language. L; R

Girls Trip
Universal

Libidinous raunch is the evident lure in this story of four middle-aged women (Queen Latifah, Jada Pinkett Smith, Tiffany Haddish, Regina Hall) renewing their college friendship and reevaluating their lives during a visit to New Orleans. As directed by Malcolm D. Lee from a script by Kenya Barris, Karen McCullah, Tracy Oliver and Erica Rivinoja, the quartet somehow keep their dignity when sober, but the New Orleans nights give them an excuse to cut loose. There’s a solid structure and wrap-up to the proceedings. But the drunken and sometimes distasteful goings-on are certainly not for everyone. Rare male nudity, scatological imagery, drug use, sexual banter, several descriptions of sexual activity, some rough language. L; R

War for the Planet of the Apes
Fox

Monkey business turns deadly serious in this climactic installment of the rebooted film franchise based on the work of French science-fiction author Pierre Boulle (1912-1994) and directed in 3-D by Matt Reeves. An epic battle is under way between the super-sentient simians and what’s left of the human race after a devastating epidemic. When the erudite ape leader (Andy Serkis) suffers a personal tragedy, he puts aside his peace-loving ways to seek revenge on the leader (Woody Harrelson) of the human army. Accompanying him on his journey are a trusted orangutan advisor (Karin Konoval), a mute human girl (Amiah Miller), and a clownish ape (Steve Zahn). Regrettably, the spiritual messages are mixed; while the apes espouse winning Christian values of peace, love, and family, there’s an anti-Christian theme in the evil human leader, who wears a cross around his neck, displays one in his quarters, and gleefully announces that he is waging a “holy war.” Frequent stylized violence, two uses of profanity, and a subtle anti-Christian message. A-III; PG-13

Wish Upon
Broad Green

Low-budget Faustian fable has a teen girl (Joey King) coming into ownership of a Chinese “wish box” that can grant her seven wishes, enabling all her dreams of wealth and popularity to come true but at the price of grisly deaths for all the friends and relatives she holds dear. Director John Leonetti and screenwriter Barbara Marshall make the best of what they have, but each plot point and their resolution are telegraphed so blatantly, there’s no suspense, and the lead character is not so much morally bereft as she is dismitten. Fleeting gore, fleeting rough language. A-III; PG-13

The Emoji Movie
Columbia

Light hearted animated comedy set within the smartphone of a high school student (voice of Jake T. Austin). When an icon (voice of T.J. Miller) meant to express only indifference malfunctions by registering a strange mix of emotions, he becomes an outcast condemned to be deleted. So he goes on the run, and joins forces with a high-five hand symbol (voiced by James Corden) out to regain the popularity he once enjoyed with the device’s owner and a rebellious code-breaker (voice of Anna Faris) whose skills can get the pair to the internet Cloud, where their problems can be solved and where she hopes to remain. Tech savvy viewers will especially enjoy the wacky proceedings, though moviegoers of all stripes will appreciate themes of loyal friendship and faithful romance. Potty humor and some peril may make director and co-writer Tony Leondis’ film a less than ideal choice for the youngest patrons, however. The feature is preceded by an eccentric, enjoyable short called “Puppy!” Characters in jeopardy, mild scatological humor, a suppressed crude expression, a slightly crass term. A-II; PG

Atomic Blonde
Focus

Aspiring to be edgy and stylish, this espionage thriller, adapted from the graphic novel series “The Coldest City,” matches sometimes tasteful bawling with exploitative scenes of abberant sex. The result is not only degraded but tedious as well. In the weeks leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, a British operative (Charlize Theron) is dispatched to the still-divided metropolis to retrieve a vital dossier. She gets unreliable help from the jaded station chief (James McAvoy) and unexpected aid from a novice French spy (Sofia Boutella) with whom she rapidly winds up in bed in more ways than one. Told in flashbacks during a debriefing in which a CIA agent (John Goodman) joins her superiors (Toby Jones and James Faulkner) as she tells her tale, the plot of director David Leitch’s film is as convoluted as its tacky soundtrack. There’s no suspense, and the lead character is not so much morally bereft as she is dismitten. Fleeting gore, fleeting rough language. O; R

Motion Picture Association of America ratings:
G – General audiences; all ages admitted
PG – Parental guidance suggested; some material may not be suitable for children
PG-13 – Parents are strongly cautioned to give special guidance for attendance of children under 13; some material may be inappropriate for young children
R – Restricted; under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian
NC-17 – No one under 17 admitted

In 1850, the Daughters of Charity were instructed by their superior to leave Baton Rouge due to the greater needs of the sick and poor in New Orleans. Archbishop Blanc asked the Madamesses of the Sacred Heart to take charge of St. Mary’s. Upon arriving in Baton Rouge, they wrote, “On the morning of Feb. 8 (1851), a band of fifty children came to greet us … They were friendly Southern children, whose acquaintance was easily made, and they were quite willing to begin school the next day.”

A severe yellow fever epidemic in August 1855 eventually resulted in the closing of both St. Mary’s Academy and the College of Sts. Peter and Paul. The buildings and site of the college were sold to a well-known Catholic teacher, who opened a school for girls that continued until 1862, when it was damaged in the Battle of Baton Rouge.

Following the Civil War, the Christian Brothers Institute for boys opened in 1868. However because of financial difficulties, it was only in existence for three years. An orphanage for girls was also established in the early 1860s, and in 1868 the Sisters of St. Joseph of Medaille arrived in Baton Rouge to take over the orphanage. It was re-named St. Joseph’s Academy in 1870.

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Medaille also opened a boys’ school in 1877. The sisters operated the boys’ school until the Brothers of the Sacred Heart opened St. Vincent’s Academy in 1894. It would eventually become Catholic High School.

Although the sisters had been teaching religious education to the African Americans of the city, there were no schools available for them. Father Delacroix, pastor of St. Joseph’s in 1881, asked the Sisters of the Holy Family, an order of black religious founded in New Orleans, to come open a school. They started St. Mary’s Academy for Negros, but were forced to leave the school after one year because of racial prejudice. The Sisters of St. Joseph accepted the administration of the school and ran it for the next 12 years. In 1894, with the financial help of St. Katherine Drexel, the Sisters of the Holy Family returned to Baton Rouge and renamed the school Holy Family Academy.

In 1899, the non-territorial parish of St. Francis Xavier was established under the care of the Josephite Fathers and Holy Family Academy was renamed St. Francis Xavier School. It continues today.

Richard is assistant archivist for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Photo courtesy of “A History of the Catholic Church” by Frank Uter
The Trinity is the key to everything

I have been watching a 10-part television series on the life of Albert Einstein on the National Geographic channel called “Genius.” It traces not only Einstein’s personal life, which is quite interesting, but also his passionate pursuit of why the universe is the way it is and what forces keep it so “finely tuned.” This leads him to redefine Newtonian physics with his theory of relativity and then to struggle to the end of his life, without succeeding, to discover the “Theory of Everything.” If Einstein had been studying theology along with his physics, he may have had more success. Although, I don’t see how the Trinity could be described in a mathematical equation.

A contemporary of Einstein’s, a Jesuit priest, Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, wrote that all of God’s creation, and especially Earth, pointed towards the evolution of our species, homo sapiens. We evolved to the top of the chain of living beings because of the complexity of our minds, which allowed us to be conscious of ourselves, of others, and even of God. Like Einstein, Teilhard was mocked, called a pseudo scientist, and not a good theologian. Yet today, he is quoted by the Church: to evangelize, to communicate, to educate and to give the grace to dance better and faster.

Another Perspective
Father John Carville

So God is personal. But, as Jesus tells St. Philip, this God whom he calls father cannot be seen. Therefore, this God must be a spirit. Jesus also claims that he and the father are one, so Jesus somehow shares God’s nature. His resurrection proves his claim, and St. John in his Gospel begins with the explanation that Jesus is the word who from all eternity has been with God and is God, and this word became man in Jesus. In the first verse of the Bible, God is also pictured as a “mighty wind” or “a wind of God” or “a spirit of God” sweeping over the waters at earth’s creation. At the Last Supper Jesus promises to ask the father to send “another advocate to be with you (his disciples) always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you and is in you” (Jn 15:16-17). There we have the Trinity Father, Son and Holy Spirit about whom St. Paul speaks often in his epistles.

Even though Jesus speaks of God as remaining with us and in us, we do think of God as a divine monarch, and creation as the pyramid with humans just below. God as his highest creation and animal life below us and fish below them, and plants below them, with the inanimate water, stone, and dirt of earth down at the bottom of the pyramid. But God is not like that at all. He, she, it (Spirit) is like the vulnerable divine infant in the manger and the God-man Jesus on the Cross. St. John in his first epistle says that God is love unending, eternal love. And love is creative, hence the big bang, the universe, our blue, green and hospitable earth, with its evolving life and everything it needs to sustain it. Life on our planet didn’t begin top down, it literally began bottom up, from the bottom of the sea, and in pools and rivers of emerging land masses. Life began in the simplest of living things, single celled creatures. It evolved over billions of years. Life evolved in a direction: toward consciousness, toward community and toward love. Humanity and all of creation which sustains it reflects to different degrees its God, its creator, whom St. Thomas Aquinas defined not vertically but in a circular manner, as “subsistent relationship.” That means an unending exchange of giving and receiving to and from each other all that the three divine persons have and are. The ancient church fathers, in what is now Turkey, thought of the Trinity as a “divine dance” of love.

Father Rohr wrote in his daily blog a year ago, “Trinity shows that God’s power is not domination, threat or coercion ... all divine power is shared power and the letting go of autonomous power ... There’s no seeking of “power over” in the Trinity but only “power with” a giving away, a sharing, a letting go, and thus an infinity of trust and mutuality. This should have changed all Christian relationships: in marriage, in culture, and even in international relations.”

But even though God inspired the prophet Isaiah tried to teach servant hood to the Jews with his four “servant songs” (Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12), and St. Paul taught the same as the whole meaning of Jesus, who “though he was in the form of God ... emptied himself, taking the form of a servant ... becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:6-8). Father Rohr says that “we Christians, like the Jews before us, have “preferred kings, wars and empires instead of suffering servant hood or leveling love.”

Well, we are made in the image and likeness of God. God has his own theory of everything. Maybe, we are just at the beginning of a long evolution. But we can pray that the God within us will give us the grace to dance better and faster.

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 johnnyearville@gmail.com.
Spirituality, in virtually every major religious tradition, at least in its popular conception, has seemingly said the opposite. Spirit has classically (and sometimes almost dogmatically) been affirmed as above the senses, as higher, superior, a needed guard against the senses. Sensual pleasure, except for how it was occasionally honored in the realm of aesthetics, was perennially denigrated as furtive, superficial and a hindrance to the spiritual life. We took St. Paul’s admonishment that the “flesh lusts against the spirit” in the Greek, dualistic sense where body is bad and spirit is good.

Today, in the secularized world, the opposite seems true. The senses resoundingly trump the spirit. Secularized angels, unlike the religious angels of old, make the same option as Seth. The seeming vagueness of the spirit is no match for the reality of the senses.

So which is more real? At the end of the day, it’s a false dichotomy. Our senses and our spirit both offer life, both are very important, and neither operates without the other.

As Christians, we believe that we’re both body and soul, flesh and spirit, and that neither can be separated from the other. We’re both mammal and angel, and in our search for life, meaning, happiness and God, we should not forget that we are both. Our spirit is open to life only through our senses, and our senses provide depth and meaning only because they are animated by spirit.

We all know the few things that man, as mammal, can do, William Auden once wrote. He’s right, but we’re not just mammal; we’re equally part angel and once we add that to the equation then the very limited joys that mammals can enjoy (animal pleasure) can become unlimited joys for us as human beings in what we can experience in love, friendship, altruism, aesthetics, sexuality, mysticism, food, drink, humor. Our senses make these real, even as our spirit gives them meaning.

And so a healthy spirituality needs to honor both the senses and the spirit. The ordinary pleasures of life can be deep or shallow, more mystical or more mundane, depending upon how much we honor what’s spirit and what’s angel within us. Conversely, our spirituality and our prayer lives can be real or more of a fantasy, depending upon how much we incarnate them in what’s sensual and what’s mammal within us.

This holds true in every realm of our lives. For example, sexuality can be deep or shallow, more mystical or more mammal, contingent upon how much of it is soul and how much of it is merely sensual; just as it can be disembodied, sterile, and merely fantasy, contingent upon it also being body and not just soul. The same is true of our experience of beauty, that in our seeing, hearing, touching, tasting or smelling. Any sensual experience can be deep or shallow; depending upon how much soul is in it, just as any experience of beauty can seem unreal and imaginary if it is too divorced from the senses.

Some years ago, I was attending a seminar in anthropology. At one point, the lecturer said this: “What psychology and spirituality keep forgetting is that we are mammals.” As a theologian and spiritual writer (and celibate) the truth of his words hit me hard. He’s right! How easily do we forget this in religious circles. But religious circles are right too in consistently reminding us that we are also an angel.

Poor Seth, the tormented angel of City of Angels, he shouldn’t have had to make that choice.

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 through his website ronrolheiser.com or facebook.com/ronrolheiser

Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin?

Father’s knowledge.

As I read those words, I thought of my robin’s nest. What kind of God do we have, who is conscious of a little robin? What kind of God permeates our lives and our world with such love and awareness? With such a God, how can I ever feel unloved or unappreciated?

Often, like most people, I want to be acknowledged, to be recognized for my gifts, my aches and pains, my needs. Instead, I realize my own smallness and lack of importance in this world.

On better days, I turn this realization toward an awareness of others, of their pains, their needs, their effort. I seek compassion rather than honor. I rest in the assurance that as God watches the sparrow, God watches me.

But why would someone want to buy two sparrows for a small coin anyway, I wondered. A little research augmented my best guess. Poor people might find a sparrow or two could cheaply supplement a meager meal with a little protein. Similarly, in a world where offerings were made at the temple – pigeons, for example, or a lamb or larger animal if you were wealthy – two sparrows might be a sacrificial offering from the poor.

So, the little sparrow of which the Creator is so aware meets his end just like all of us. It’s not that we believe in a God who saves us from everything we fear. It’s that we believe in a God who is with us through all things, and therefore we should fear nothing. There’s a big difference there, and it’s where we make our leap of faith.

Years ago, I interviewed a good friend who was part of a program called “No One Dies Alone.” He was on call to come to the hospital or hospice if someone was in imminent danger of death and had no loved ones. Perhaps homelessness or distance prevented anyone’s presence.

My friend witnessed many a death, sometimes saying a rosary with a dying Catholic, sometimes merely holding a stranger’s hand as he left this life. But we happen, I wondered. What is this mystery of death?

“I don’t know,” responded my friend.

“All I know,” he said with certainty, “is that I see people fall into the hands of a merciful God.”

The honors and attention and wealth of this world fade away. But we believe the presence and mercy and love of God remains. This belief sustains us through life’s storms.

in Exile

Father Ron Rolheiser

For The Journey

Effie Calderola

S everal years ago Hollywood made a movie, “City of Angels,” about an angel named Seth whose job was to accompany the spirits of the recently deceased to the afterlife. On one such mission, waiting in a hospital, he fell in love with a brilliant young woman surgeon. As an angel, Seth has never experienced touch or taste and now, deeply in love, he longs to physically touch and make love to his beloved. But this is his dilemma: As an angel with free will he has the option to let go of his angelic status and become a human person, but only at the cost of renouncing his present immortality as an angel.

It’s a tough choice: Immortality, but no sensual experience, or, sensual experience, but with all the contingencies that earthly morality brings – diminishment, aging, sickness, eventual death? He chooses the latter, renouncing his status as an immortal angel for the pleasure that earthly senses can bring.

The vast majority of people watching this movie, I suspect, will laud his choice. Most everything in our hearts moves us to believe that it’s cold and inhuman not to make this choice. The overpowering reality of the senses, especially when in love, can make everything else seem unreal, ethereal and second best. What we experience through our senses, what we see, hear, taste, touch and smell is what’s real for us. We have our own version of Descartes. For us, the indivisible is: I feel, therefore, I am!

Violent windstorm ripped through my town the other night, the kind that leaves you mesmerized yet humbled at your own powerlessness. A tornado wreaked damage nearby, with 76,000 homes left without power, and 80 mph winds were the norm.

We were lucky at my house. Some bushes were partially uprooted, but we were able to sink them back into the soil and they’re doing well.

The morning after the storm, I strolled to the elm tree to check on a robin’s nest I’d been watching. Expecting it to have vanished in the maelstrom, I was amazed to see the mother robin sitting there, resolutely doing her duty.

How much wind could this nest take?

Effie Caldarola

In Exile

Father Ron Rolheiser

Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin?
Willows Woods Married Couples Retreat — Couples wishing to enrich their marriage are encouraged to attend a Willows Woods Married Couples Retreat Saturday, Aug. 26 – Sunday, Aug. 27, at the Archdiocese of New Orleans Retreat Center, 5500 St. Mary St., Metairie. Suggested donation is $275. To register and for more information, call Jason Annette at 504-830-3716 or visit willowswoods.org.

Mass Honoring God the Father — Msgr. Robert Berggreen, pastor of St. Mary of False River Church in New Roads, will celebrate a Mass honoring “God the Father of All Time” Monday, Aug. 7 at St. Agnes Church, 749 East Blvd., Baton Rouge. Confessions will be held at 3:30 p.m. and Mass will be celebrated at 6 p.m. For more information, call 225-383-4127.

STM Bible Study — St. Thomas More Church, 11441 Goodwood Blvd., Baton Rouge, will hold a Bible study focusing on the Book of St. James, “James: Pearls for Wise Living,” Mondays, 6:30 p.m. beginning Aug. 21, and Tuesdays, Aug. 22, 9:30 a.m. beginning Aug. 22, through Monday, Nov. 13 and Tuesday, Nov. 14. For more information, call Sarah Neau at 225-275-3940 or email sarah@sttmchurch.org.

Divorce Healing Program — The Divorce Healing Program of St. Alphonsus Church, 14040 Greenwell Springs Road, Greenwell Springs, will begin meeting Tuesday, Aug. 8, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m., at St. Francis Room C of the church. There is a $20 one-time registration fee. For more information, call 225-275-9340 or email sarah@sttmchurch.org.

Charismatic Jubilee Celebration — Catholic Charismatic Renewal of the Diocese of Baton Rouge will hold a “Jubilee Celebration,” Saturday, Aug. 12, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m., at the Our Lady of Mercy Parish Activity Center, 445 Marquette Ave., Baton Rouge. Bishop Sam Jacob and Andi Oney will be the guest speakers. Lunch is provided. For more information, call 225-636-2464.

Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites — The Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites welcomes all who are interested in developing their prayer life according to the Carmelites saints. The next meeting will be Sunday, Aug. 13, 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.

Pro-Life Mass — A monthly pro-life Mass will be celebrated Tuesday, Aug. 8, 5:30 p.m. at St. Agnes Church, 749 East Blvd., Baton Rouge. All are invited. For information, call 225-383-4127.

Interfaith Health Fair — An interfaith health fair will be hosted Saturday, Aug. 5, 9 a.m. – 2 p.m., at Immaculate Conception Church, 1565 Curtis St., Baton Rouge. Other participating churches include Greater Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, Allen Chapel AME and Camphor Memorial United Methodist Church, all of Baton Rouge. For more information, call 225-777-7067.

That Man is You! — That Man is You! Program at Our Lady of Mercy Church in Baton Rouge, 445 Marquette Ave., Baton Rouge, will meet Wednesdays, 6, 7:30 a.m., beginning Aug. 23 at the church’s Parish Activity Center. The interactive program focuses on the development of male leadership in the world will explore the church’s vision of love and marriage in the “Unveiling of Love” series. For more information, email Richard.grant@olomchurch.com or call 225-926-1883.

Aloyisus Church, 2025 Stuart Ave., Baton Rouge. Tickets are available at eventbrite.com.

Men’s Conference — The Men of the Cross of Holy Rosary Church, 44450 Hwy. 429, St. Amant, invite all men ages 18 years and older to the 17th annual Men’s Conference, “He Who Overcomes” Saturday, Aug. 12, 7 a.m. – 6 p.m. Holy Rosary pastor Father Josh Johnson will be the keynote speaker. There will be prayer, music, food and workshops. Registration deadline is Tuesday, Aug. 8. To register and for questions, call Tim Lessard at 225-715-5103 or email Don Scioneaux: doncno@eatel.net. Details can also be found on holyrcsc.org.

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FAMILIES ▼

From page 1

riding in a boat rather than on a horse, came to their house and urged them to get in. They were his last stop for the day, and he told them once they got to his truck on drier land, he would take them to wherever they wanted to go. He took them to a friend’s house in Baton Rouge.

Jimmy and Sue, also narrowly escaped.

Their daughter, Tiffany, who lives in Brusly, called Sue early that morning and told her to get in her car and for her and her other daughter, Jennifer, who lives not far down Hwy. 16 from them, to meet her at Interstate 12 at Juban Road. From there they would go to her home in Brusly.

Before leaving, Sue took her religious items, such as crosses, rosary, etc., which proved handy to keep her strong.

Sue, Jennifer and her three children inched their way to Interstate 12, where Tiffany was waiting.

Water was over the bumper of Sue’s car as they drove on the interstate.

“Shortly after we got on the interstate there, they stopped all traffic. We barely got out,” said Sue.

Jimmy stayed behind and put things up and loaded the truck. He couldn’t get to the interstate so he went to Jennifer’s house and stayed with her husband. Luckily, Jennifer’s home was spared from the flood, one of a couple homes in her neighborhood that did not flood.

Because of phone service being down, it took a few days for Sue and Jennifer to get into contact with their husbands. It was an anxious time.

“We didn’t know if they got out or if they were safe,” said Sue. Her brothers living in the Brusly and Plaquemine vicinity came to help calm her.

When Thad and Mary and Jimmy and Sue returned to their homes, they were struck by the damage caused by the flood.

“It looked like an earthquake had hit it,” said Jimmy. Floodwaters toppled over appliances and scattered and damaged furniture and other items.

Thad’s house was also extensively damaged. Items they placed in plastic containers toppled into the water and were ruined.

Thad and Jimmy checked on each other after the flood, shared their common stories and kept each other encouraged by agreeing, “We will survive.” They came from a family whose belief was “You do what you got to do and get on with it.” Each was mired in their own situation for months.

During the grueling recovery effort, another “right thing” to happen for the Bridges is that family, neighbors and friends stuck together and worked as quickly as possible to restore their homes.

For Thad, friends were on the scene the next day and then family members came. While Frenchtown Road was closed, they gained a “backdoor entrance” through property owned by a neighbor who opened up his gate to allow people to get back to their homes.

Thad jumped in and worked alongside his helpers and wound up in the hospital from dehydration.

“I told the nurses I need to get home, I have too much going on,” said Thad, who worked to get released as soon as possible.

In Denham Springs, people from Brusly and Plaquemine, including the Plaquemine High School football team, descended on Jimmy and Sue’s house and started the reconstruction process.

Another thing that “went right” was that the Bridges let loose of their grip on material things.

“The first thing you have to do is determine you lost everything and move on,” said Thad.

Mary and Thad had their 50th wedding anniversary on April 15. Mary said the flood ruined their wedding photos and other early marriage keepsakes.

“Thad said, ‘Don’t worry, we have each other,’” said Mary.

She noted St. Alphonsus Church in Greenwell Springs blessed them in regard to their lost wedding memorabilia. Before the flood they had turned in to the church a copy of their wedding photo for a celebration for couples celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary. JoAnn Stein, executive director at St. Alphonsus, made a copy of the Bridges’ photo, framed it and gave it to them.

“That’s one of the most important things that anyone has ever done, it’s very touching,” said Mary.

Sue said after the flood two people she knew were murdered, one a seven-year-old child, and the other a 20-year-old woman.

“A house is a material thing, my heart breaks for them,” said Sue, who said those tragedies and initially not knowing if her husband was okay after the flood, crystalized her belief that family and friends matter most.

The work on Jimmy’s and Thad’s homes are mostly complete, and the brothers are back playing golf. They and their wives are thankful that the “gains” have ultimately overcome the “losses” following the historic flood.

Mary said, “I am grateful to all who provided shelter, food, taxi service, friendly ear, family and great neighbors tearing out sheet rock and packing up what could be saved, the entrance into our property and especially the prayers. Without each we could not have made it through each day.”

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generosity of the community and the people coming out," Acaldo said. "They have a spirit that is amazing, just uplifting and is a Louisiana ingredient to the gumbo of humanity.

"People were very resilient and they have such a good attitude."

"It’s very real and it’s very intense," he said. "People grounded in their faith. You can tell that’s how they got through those initial times when you lose everything. And you remember with your faith some of these materials things are not that all important."

St. Vincent de Paul, as is its tradition, assumed the lead in the relief effort. Initially, those efforts were centered on distributing much needed supplies, such as blankets, toiletries and other items to the River Center and Celtic Center in Baton Rouge, which both served as temporary shelters. Once the shelters began closing, the task was helping fund housing for the impacted families. Since August, Acaldo said his organization has assisted nearly 500 families or individuals, including some who were homeless even before the flood, find either emergency shelter or an apartment, not an easy task considering the area’s rising rents.

"We take (families) in here and try to figure out a housing solution," Acaldo said.

"People have settled in, but it will be a long time before it gets back to anywhere near where it was," he said. "We take (families) in here and try to figure out a housing solution."

St. Vincent de Pau also provided more than 5,600 meals in flood affected communities to more than 1,500 people in the immediate aftermath of the flood. Although the demand has leveled off, Acaldo said he still expects the dining room in Baton Rouge to set a record in 2017 by serving more than 250,000 meals. And that is not including the homeless shelters.

Besides assisting in relocating families, the organization also distributed more than $34,000 worth of cleaning supplies and clothes in the first few weeks following the flood. Included in the distribution was a truckload of new apparel that came from New Jersey via a phone call to Bishop Robert W. Muench.

"We were glad to get it," Acaldo said. "Some of it was like dress clothes, slacks, nice dresses for women."

Additionally, the organization collaborated with the East Baton Rouge School Board to help secure uniforms for 1,242 students who had lost everything and teachers who were unable to return to the classroom because the flood waters had claimed their clothes.

St. Vincent also sent staff members to flooded areas to meet with families and determine their own needs, often helping to pay rent or utility bills.

"We felt that personal touch was real important," Acaldo said.

One of its more successful relief offerings was a furniture and appliance replacement program that mirrored one started at St. Margaret, Queen of Scotland Church in Albany. The program, which was facilitated by the generosity of Olinde’s Furniture and Sherwood TV and Appliances, both in Baton Rouge, has already assisted 1,100 households for a combined total of $700,000 worth of merchandise.

The Diocese of Baton Rouge also contributed $300,000. "It’s amazing the generosity of everyone that came together," Acaldo said. "We just thank them for working with us and providing us the opportunity to help so many people."

Turning toward the future, he said St. Vincent de Paul will continue its mission of reaching and serving the most vulnerable in the area, a ministry that has taken on increased importance in the past year. As part of that effort by the end of 2017, construction of an addition that will double the size of the Bishop Stanley J. Ott Sweet Dreams Shelter for Women and Children should be completed.

"Going from 36 to 72 beds will put us in a better position," Acaldo said. "There are some families still in hotels.

"I believe we are going to continue to see people who can’t pay rents end up being evicted and have to turn somewhere. For us, that’s either single men or moms with kids. Those extra 36 beds will fill up very quickly because of that."

Even a year after the worst natural disaster in Baton Rouge history Acaldo remains awed by staff members and volunteers who were severely impacted leaving their own homes to reach out to others.