St. Aloysius dedicates new center

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

“It’s been wonderful,” said Mary Dawson, director of development and communications at St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge.

That was her first response when asked what it’s like to work in the new Pastoral Services Center on the church campus. “In the past, the church staff had to work in three different locations on the church grounds, so it’s been wonderful for us all to be housed in one building. It’s so much more collaborative,” she said.

After Mass on Jan. 21, parishioners and staff at St. Aloysius followed pastor Father Randy Cuevas for the short walk from the church, across the parking lot to the front of the new building for the blessing of the facility. According to Father Cuevas, the first church office for St. Aloysius was built in the mid-1970s but eventually the staff outgrew the building and moved into the original convent of the Daughters of Jesus, who in turn took over the smaller office building. More remodeling and moves into multiple buildings continued over the years to accommodate the growing church to the point that “an off-campus residence in the neighborhood became the rectory.”

After prayers and petitions, Father Cuevas, parochial vicar Father Eddie Martin and Deacon Chauvin Wilkinson walked through the 9,958-square foot-administration building, blessing each of the offices with holy water. They were followed by parishioners, eager to see the new space.

“With the completion of our new Pastoral Services center, church staff are finally under one roof again, in a building specifically designed to better serve the pastoral needs of our parishioners and visitors, and enable our staff to efficiently and effectively function, communicate and coordinate the

Purgatory ‘cleans up the mess’

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Lent is a time to spiritually apply the principals of spring cleaning the house to spring cleaning the soul so we can be united with the resurrected Jesus at Easter. But struggle as we may to “clean up the mess,” we may have the uneasiness that we are not quite ready for heaven if we should die because we still attach ourselves to some sins or “dirt” in our souls.

Placing a soul in purgatory, therefore, is God’s merciful, loving act of final cleansing of the soul, so it can be perfectly purified and brought home to him in heaven, according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

“We might begin our reflection (on purgatory) by asking the question, ‘What happens when we die?’” said Father Miles Walsh, pastor of Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Baton Rouge. “The church teaches that when we die we are first of all judged by God, and at that judgment, which we call the particular judgment, we learn our eternal destiny: whether we will spend eternity apart from him in hell. And yet, even if we are destined for heaven, our Catholic tradition, including Scripture itself, attests that most of those who will go to heaven must first spend a period of time being purified of any and all attachment to sin, and we call this state of being purgatory. “This is what the Catechism of the Catholic Church has to say (1032): All who die in the state of God’s grace, i.e., in the state of friendship with him, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation, but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The church gives the name ‘purgatory’ to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned.”

Father Matthew Graham, administrator of St. Elizabeth Church in Pineville and St. Jules Church in Belle Rose, talked about references to purgatory in Scripture. He highlighted how St. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 that

SVdP receives $1 million grant

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

St. Vincent de Paul Society is on the move again.

Weeks before dedicating a 42-bed expansion of the Bishop Ott Sweet Dreams Shelter for Women and Children, executive director Michael Acaldo announced that St. Vincent de Paul received a $1 million grant from the city of Baton Rouge which will pave the way for a 36-bed expansion of the Bishop Ott Center and day room.

Baton Rouge Mayor Sharon Weston Broome announced the grant Jan. 29.

“We are so excited about being a part of the mayor’s vision of responding to the needs of the homeless, especially mothers and children who have no place to turn for help,” Acaldo said. “We
**Throat blessing**

Throat a bit sore lately? Hoarseness setting in?

No wonder, considering the wacky weather that has included snow and ice on two occasions since the calendar flipped to a new year.

Which makes the feast day of St. Blaise on Feb. 3, more commonly known as the blessing of the throats, perfect timing in an area where nary a family or workplace has escaped the ravages of the highly contagious strain of flu making the rounds this winter.

Not much is known about St. Blaise except what tradition has passed down. Historians are in agreement that he was the bishop of Sebaste in Armenia and martyred around 316. He was apparent-ly born into a rich family and eventually became a physician before being consecrated as a bishop at a young age. During persecution in his area, St. Blaise relocated to a cave and became a hermit. Legend has it that he healed wild ani-mals that were sick and wounded.

One reason for his popularity was his being called upon for intercession for diseases of the throat. During the Mid-dle Ages his popularity soared, be-coming one of the most popular saints during that era.

One story is that, St. Blaise is one day after Candlemas Day, which is also known as the Presentation of the Lord. Forty days after the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple for the rites of purification and dedication as prescribed by the Torah.

Because Jesus is the light of the world who came to dispel sin and darkness, Palm Sunday was designated as a holy day and the blessed candles were blessed at Mass on Feb. 2 to be used throughout the liturgical year, hence the day is known as “Candlemas.”

In many Eastern European countries, this day officially marks the end of the Christmas celebration. Noting that, St. John Paul II began the custom of keeping the Nativity up in St. Peter's Square until Feb. 2.

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**Jesus’ healing power**

By Dina Dow

“I turn to you, Lord, in times of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.” Ps 32

It is interesting the liturgical readings for the fifth and sixth Sundays in Ordinary Time are actual-ly preparing us for the season of Lent, which hap-pens to immediately follow these. The themes resonating from the Scriptures speak to the realities of challenges faced by many, including restlessness and rejec-tion. Yet, these challenges are over-come through the healing ministry of Jesus and the hope of salvation.

**Restlessness**

The Book of Job is an incredible sto-ry from the Old Testament detailing the experience of a man completely commit-ted to God, whose life is filled with utter tragedy and loss. He is strong in faith and persevere-ness, yet he asks questions that we too may ask out of hopelessness. He expresses restlessness, comparing it to a slave laboring for hours; longing for shade from the heat of the sun. Despair is creeping in. Job poses the question, “When shall I arise?” Ask yourself, “When have I been exhausted from the challenges, longing for peace? Is hope extinguished? Am I restless? If so, what is the root of this restlessness?”

**Rejection**

We also hear in the Book of Leviticus the origin of the law restricting those with leprosy to a life of exile and isola-tion. One can only imagine the despair of the people with leprosy, the sadness of their family and the outright rejection by the larger community. If a person touched another with leprosy, that per-son was deemed unclean. The reading it-self is quite descriptive, causing one to cringe. Understanding the terrible effects of such a disease, one may say, “Do you blame the Israelites for having extreme law?” But think of a time when people treated you as if you had a commu-nicable disease? Rejection is a fore-runner to the realm of hopelessness.

**Healing**

Yet within the storm filled with de-spair and isolation, there is hope and healing. Jesus, the holiest one, reaches and grasps what is drowning us. We, as living missionary disciples, are called to run into the storm and help. St. Paul re-minds us of the call to mission. Spread-ing the Gospel message is more than volunteerism. Rather, it is an enormous obligation for all baptized Christians to share in the hope of Jesus, especially when others are in need of healing.

Jesus’ healing ministry is seen throughout the Gospels, particularly in the liturgy of the coming weeks. We read, “He grasped the hand of Simon’s mother-in-law and helped her up. Then the fever left her…” (Mk 1:31) and upon the request from the man with leprosy, “Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, “I do will it. Be made clean” (Mk 1:41). We can easily embrace the first miracle, yet the second is more challenging. What’s easier, to touch someone with a fever or 

SEE GOSPEL PAGE 4

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**CLARIFICATION**

St. Gabriel Church in St. Gabriel was completed in 1776, dependent on the labor of new arriving Acadian exiles. Additionally, all of the archival evidence points to the fact that the church was built on its present tract of land, although it was moved back from the encroaching Mississippi River. In the late 1890s a New Orleans newspaper published a story that the original church was built on Bayou Manchac, which has perpetuated a myth that has now touched its third century.
Governor’s budget cuts millions for Catholic schools

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Gov. John Bel Edwards’ budget proposal to slash more than $16 million in funding to Catholic schools could have devastating effects, especially among low-income families, according to diocesan officials.

Edwards revealed what some tagged his “doomsday” budget on Jan. 23, a proposal that also looms off millions of dollars in TOPS and health care funding. Edwards said the draconian cuts are necessary to meet the looming $1 billion shortfall.

The governor’s proposal would eliminate funding for the school lunch program and reimbursement for required services for all private schools in the state. Currently, the school lunch program receives about $75 million in state funding annually and required services $8.7 million.

In the Diocese of Baton Rouge, the child nutrition program receives an average of $1.5 million annually from the state, a revenue stream that if severed would effectively shut down the program, said Lynda Carville, director of the Child Nutrition Program for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

“It would be devastating,” Carville said. “We would have parents and children who are (eating) free and reduced (cost) meals through the program. They would lose that.”

“(Parents) would lose the comfort of knowing there is a meal prepared at school to help nourish the children to support education. A hungry child can’t function.”

Carville said in many cases children from low-income families are eating breakfast, lunch and even a hot supper at school for free. She added there are currently four schools where 100 percent of the student body is receiving totally subsidized breakfast, lunch and dinner meals, accounting for a combined 600 students.

“If we don’t have funding, we would have no meals.” Carville matter-of-factly stated.

Rob Tasman, director of the Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops, said he was a bit surprised by the proposed cuts only because they account for such a small percentage of the deficit.

“When you’re dealing with a $1 billion deficit, one of the things that strikes me is these two streams of funding have been completely zeroed out and (accounts) for only one half of one percent of that entire deficit,” Tasman said. “It really does not make a lot of sense to go after these two streams of funding when private schools are providing an incredible service to the state in terms of educating its children at a very high capacity, not only just forming them academically but also forming them to be very successful human beings and active citizens who participate in the economy of the state and the culture of the state as well.”

Tasman agreed that eliminating the funding for the school lunch program would create hardships for the neediest of families. Acknowledging “that seems to be a dramatic statement,” Tasman said if the food service providers are not able to pay equitable wages to their employees, “there is no way you will be able to serve the food.”

“If you are able to maintain the workforce, you will have to raise the price of the meal to offset the cost and by doing that you are really pricing out certain families who could not afford the meal,” he added.

Carville said her office employs approximately 180 employees, and is responsible for maintaining equipment in all of the schools, purchasing of all the food, garbage collection and disposal and transporting food when necessary.

“The money is very well utilized,” she said.

The funding allocated for required services was established by the state nearly 30 years ago and reimburses nonpublic schools for collecting data in a number of different categories, including school attendance rates, bus transportation and who utilizes it, teacher certification and teacher development, Tasman said. He added that the law, as originally crafted, requires each school to be reimbursed 100 percent but in three decades that has not happened.

More recently, the reimbursement has come in around 29 percent.

“(The funding) trickles down because obviously that is money that comes in as a source of revenue to a school,” Tasman said.

“They receive that check and what they are able to do with that check is up to their discretion but is really used to fund critical programs, like academic programs or extracurricular activities. It’s also used for teacher and professional development.”

Tasman stressed that neither school bus transportation nor textbook funding for nonpublic schools would be affected under Edwards’ proposal.

In meeting with legislators in the days following Edwards’ announcement, Tasman said lawmakers have been receptive in understanding the importance of the funding to private schools but was quick to add that what remains a mystery is how and when the final resolution will play out.

No special sessions are scheduled before the March 11 start of the regular session, but being an even year no new revenue-raising taxes can be passed. Tasman said lawmakers will be only able to discuss potential solutions during the regular session but any action must be taken during a special session.

The legislature could paint its own conundrum if there is no resolution before the regular session begins because that would only leave lawmakers about three weeks to settle the issue from when the session ends in early June until July 1, when the new budget goes into effect.

“I am reaching out to key legislators in important committees like the House Appropriations Committee and Senate Finance Committee to communicate to them the importance of (continuing these funding streams),” Tasman said. “First, I am trying to raise the awareness of how we are impacted by this, second, how important these program are to us, and third, be available if there are questions or if (LCBB) can help participate in the solution.”

He noted that funding for required services has been slashed by nearly 40 percent in the past three years as the legislature has continued to struggle with budget deficits.
Men’s conference to feature ‘rock star’ lineup

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

An impressive lineup of presenters including a “rock star” author highlight the second Men of the Immaculata Men’s Conference scheduled Feb. 17 at St. George Church in Baton Rouge.

Included among the scheduled speakers are Father Mitch Pacwa SJ, who hosts his own show on EWTN; Matt Fradd and well-known author Dr. Scott Hahn, whom conference organizer Hunter Hardin calls a “rock star.”

“It will be a beautiful day to be a Catholic man,” Hardin said. “We are going to have 1,000 guys spending an entire day in fellowship, in formation, in catechesis, in encouragement, in worship. Deeper conversion for greater holiness.”

The theme of the conference, which is in its second year and shifts venue from Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Baton Rouge a year ago, is “A Call to Battle,” with an emphasis on formation, Hardin said. He added the focus will be on how men are forming themselves to be those “unique creations that God has put us here to be. What are we doing on a daily basis. What is our formation path?”

A number of topics to be addressed include the destructive nature of pornography, breaking down complex ideas of faith and the power of the Mass, specifically the Eucharist.

Hardin said Fradd’s special charism is the ability to attractively and reasonably package the content of the dangers and darkness associated with pornography. Hardin noted that the “capacity of lust is in every man and some men really struggle with it. And it absolutely destroys families, lives and marriages.”

He also said pornography’s destructive potential is not given enough of credit.

Hahn will discuss how the Mass, specifically the Eucharist, is a valuable piece in spiritual warfare. He said Hahn will explain how the Eucharist edifies and strengthens Catholics as they go forth in the battle.

Father Pacwa will break down the complexities of faith and make it approachable and attainable, which, Hardin said, is difficult to accomplish. Father Pacwa is also going to talk about the power of reconciliation as it relates to the formation of those in attendance.

“Our mission is greater holiness for every man,” Hardin said “The way to get that is deep conversion through Jesus Christ. That’s the whole point of formation, to get closer to the heart of Christ.”

Hardin said the response to the conference has been remarkable, making it even more amazing since it is only in its second year. But he said the success goes back to the decades of intercession and sacrifice for men to be hungry for this type of organized, group formation.

“Because of those years and years of intercession, the hunger, the wellspring that we are seeing come forth in this community is kind of shocking but kind of expected,” Hardin said. “When you lay that kind of table for the Lord, he’s going to bless it.”

Tickets are $60 for adults and $30 for students, who must be at least 16 years of age. Registration begins at 6:30 a.m., with the Invocation and Confession beginning at 7 a.m. Lunch, prepared by Chef John Polse, is included, and the day is set to conclude at 3 p.m.

To register, visit catholicmen-br.com.

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GOSPEL ▼
From page 2

to touch someone with leprosy? These are two powerful healings, and with one touch of Jesus, they are healed. “Jesus reaches across the divide and conquers the unclean by the great power of holiness.” (“Ignatius Catholic Study Bible, New Testament”) “Praise the Lord who heals the brokenhearted” (Ps 147).

The hope of our mission

There is hope in Jesus, who saves. We are called to share this hope of salvation with joyful hearts. St. Paul writes, “Do everything for the glory of God ... that they may be saved ... imitate Christ.” (1 Cor 10:31-11:1) The purpose of our life is to imitate Jesus through humble service. Our actions and words should point to the glory of God. As we ponder what to “do” or “give up” for Lent, consider healing and hope. First, where am I in need of healing? Have I received the sacrament of reconciliation to be healed from the burden of sin? Do I seek the holy healing from the divine physician, Jesus? Whom do I know that is either physically or spiritually ill? How can I invite them to the healing power of Christ?

Second, am I a voice of hope for all to hear? Do I share the hope of God with those who are struggling with isolation, rejection and despair? How can I reach across the divide and share the hope in our mission saying, “Jesus loves you. You matter. He wants to heal you.”

As we prepare for the season of Lent, let us joyfully thank God for our salvific hope in Jesus Christ.

*(Be on the lookout for “2018: The Light Is ON For You” media outreach during Lent. “How-to” resources and videos will be available to download and share.)
Diocese establishes committee to welcome new bishop

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

The Diocese of Baton Rouge is already making plans as to how to welcome whoever is appointed to replace outgoing Bishop Robert W. Muench, who sent in his retirement letter to the Vatican on Dec. 28, as required by Canon Law, on his 75th birthday.

A New Bishop Committee has been formed and recently held its first meeting, although the announcement of a new bishop, which will come from the Vatican on Dec. 28, as required by Canon Law, on his 75th birthday.

The new committee is addressing a wide range of issues traditionally associated with welcoming a new bishop. Among the topics to be covered include invitations, including design and who will be invited to the actual installation; logistics; communications; care of guests, which includes transportation of guests to and from the airports, hotel reservations, food and security; programs; the liturgy for the installation as well as vesters that would include the first meeting with diocesan priests before the installation; the coat of arms; an installation budget; and the new bishop's residence.

The installation, which traditionally has been celebrated at St. Joseph Cathedral in Baton Rouge, will not be open to the public because of space considerations, but the planning process also includes a reception where the new bishop will greet the public. The incoming bishop does have the option of choosing where to celebrate his installation, and could possibly include a larger venue.

A new priest's residence is currently under construction adjacent to the new archives building, which is being built at the same time. The new residence is expected to be completed in late May or early June.

Although Bishop Muench submitted his letter of resignation, he remains with "full power and authority" until his successor is announced, said Father Counce, judicial vicar for the diocese. Father Counce said the complex process would likely take several months. After the Vatican announces the new bishop, the transition is typically about two months, although circumstances, including if the person appointed is a sitting bishop, could alter that schedule one way or the other.

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Schools planning makeup days

Staff Report
The Catholic Commentator

Record low temperatures that brought an unusual mix of snow and ice on two occasions in January to south Louisiana also has school officials scrambling to make up unexpected days when schools were closed.

Dr. Melanie Verges, superintendent of Catholic schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge, said schools must have a minimum of 175 instructional days annually. However, schools traditionally schedule 178 instructional days at the beginning of the year, building in three emergency days.

Verges said schools are completing their revised calendars and resubmitting them to the CSO for review and approval.

Parents with questions should call their child’s school.
Dispensation from abstinence

Q Please settle a dispute I am having with a colleague. Our society’s annual St. Patrick’s dinner is normally held on a Friday during Lent. We therefore request a dispensation in order to serve steak that evening.

I contend that all we must do is to request that dispensation from the pastor of the parish in which the restaurant is located; my colleague, though, says that we need to go to the bishop of our diocese and that only a bishop can grant it. Who is correct?

(A went to a Jesuit college, St. Peter’s; he went to a non-Jesuit school, Seton Hall, and I would love to prove him wrong. Of course, if he is right, I probably won’t tell him!) (central New Jersey)

A Your question is a bit more complicated than you may have thought. The answer is that it depends on the diocese in which you are located. The church’s Code of Canon Law situates the authority with the bishop:

“A diocesan bishop, whenever he judges that it contributes to their spiritual good, is able to dispense the faithful from universal and particular disciplinary laws issued for his territory or his subjects by the supreme authority of the church” (No. 87).

A later canon clarifies that “a pastor and other presbyters or deacons are not able to dispense from universal and particular law unless this power has been expressly granted to them” (No. 89). That later canon does seem to suggest, though, that the power to dispense from abstinence may at times be extended by a bishop to his priests – and that is, in fact, both the law and the practice.

In 2017, when the feast of St. Patrick (March 17) occurred on a Friday, a statement from the Archdiocese of Detroit (to use just one example) said:

“All priests ministering in the archdiocese possess the faculty to dispense (remove) or commute (replace with something else) the obligation for an individual or family to abstain from meat on the Fridays of Lent. Therefore, those wanting to partake in a celebratory meal on St. Patrick’s Day that includes meat simply need to talk to a priest, who may grant this ‘for a just reason.’”

Generally, when a diocese on such an occasion lifts the obligation of abstinence, it stipulates that the person should choose some other penitential practice instead.

The Diocese of Dallas, for example, provided in 2017 that Catholics who chose to eat meat on March 17 should abstain either on March 16 or March 18. Creatively, the Dallas diocese offered still another option, viz., “for a person to offer a decade of the rosary for the plight of immigrants/refugees or for the intention of an increase in vocations to the priesthood.”

So the answer to your question depends on what your own diocese has provided for. (I recognize that my response does not resolve the Jesuit/non-Jesuit rivalry because both of you could be right!)

A Few years ago, I had a miscarriage early in a pregnancy. While my husband and I were sad, we never really felt a substantial loss perhaps because we quickly became pregnant again.

This is in stark contrast to the experiences of friends who suffered miscarriages later in pregnancy. They have been devastated and truly felt that they lost a person, not just a pregnancy. Are my feelings wrong or worse, sinful? (Cincinnati)

A Please don’t punish yourself. First of all, feelings are outside of our control; morally, we are not responsible for our feelings, only for our words, actions or omissions. Yes, the church does teach that a child in the womb is a person from the moment of conception. (And science would seem to support this: heartbeat at 24 days, brain waves at 43, etc.) But surely, a mother’s emotional link to the child grows as the pregnancy advances which makes it not surprising that a child lost later in pregnancy would prompt deeper pain. Thank God for the children who are with you now, and look forward, one day, to meeting the one who went to heaven early.

Question Corner

Father Kenneth Doyle

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Confession shines the light on spiritual healing

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

As the penitential season of Lent approaches, Catholics whose faith is sparked by the sacrament of reconciliation say it is not a dark moment of admitting and being sentenced for sins, but a “light bulb moment” when they are aware that God loves them.

“When I was a child growing up in the 50s, the sacrament of confession was viewed quite differently from how it is perceived today,” said Elaine Abadie, a member of Ascension of Our Lord Church in Donaldsonville and St. Francis of Assisi Church in Smoke Bend. “In my family; we usually went to confession every other week. And, before going, mama would always sit us down and tell us our sins and how many times we committed them. Going to confession was something to be feared because God was there judging us, so we had better be sorry.

“Once I reached high school, I went, along with the student body at Ascension Catholic, to confession once a month. Mama no longer told me my sins.”

An experience in the confessional compounded this fear for Abadie.

“I continued monthly confessions) in the early years of my married life until one fateful Saturday. After (my husband) Jimmy came home from work that Saturday, I went to church for confession. After confessing my sins to the new, young assistant priest, he asked me if that was all. I answered yes. Almost apologizing, I told him what a mistake that was.

How different the sacrament of confession is now (that the truth) has been revealed to me. Whereas early in my life I viewed confession strictly as a means to have my sins forgiven, I now know that this is a sacrament of mercy, love and grace.”

Abadie and fellow Ascension Catholic/ St. Francis of Assisi member Connie Schudmak’s appreciation for the sacrament grew after reading “The Seven Secrets of Confession” by Vinny Flynn. They are using the book as a tool to help bring others to the healing light of its presence.

“If you look for information in ‘The Catechism of the Catholic Church,’ You won’t find it (the sacrament of reconciliation) under ‘forgiveness’. You will find it under the ‘Sacraments of Healing’,” said Schudmak. “When I read this I was encouraged because I seem to confess the same sins time after time.

“If our culture would realize the richness of this sacrament, the line for confession would be out the door and out of sight. No wonder that the sacrament of reconciliation was my least understood sacrament and also many others too.”

Speaking of the sacrament’s healing power, Schudmak said, “I experienced more than God forgiving my sins and washing me clean in this sacrament. You see, I was a nail biter since childhood. It seemed that I tried everything to break this bad habit, even wearing fake nails. Amazingly, after making a commitment to confession monthly, I noticed that I was not even tempted to bite my fingernails any longer. I wanted to shout from the rooftops that I was healed. Yes, I eagerly claimed that healing of a 50-year plus habit. Praise God. We serve an awesome God who is filled with surprises and cares about all our struggles.”

Even more important than the physical healing for Schudmak was the spiritual healing of her soul, and the resulting peace that has stayed with her.

Such power of healing and peace comes from renewing our baptismal promises as we confess our sins, said Paula Fabre, principal of St. Francis Xavier School in Baton Rouge.

“Our life has been baptized and we sin, we have to return to that baptism,” said Fabre. “You know God is a forgiving God and we have an opportunity to begin anew.”

Fabre, who said going to confession is part of living out her faith, said she remembers how important the first sacrament of reconciliation was to her before she received her first Communion.

“Every time we go, it should be just like that part of first Communion,” said Fabre.
Stepmom prays stepson finds freedom through faith

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

Nickolos Marchiafava was recently granted his freedom by the Department of Corrections but human error landed him back behind bars.

Now, Nicks’ stepmother prays he finds freedom through faith.

“My prayer for you (Nickolos) right now is that after all of this, you’ll be able to see the good and God can lead you to do good to help others,” said Angela St. Romain, a parishioner of St. Thomas More Church in Baton Rouge.

After serving nine of the past 12 years on a variety of charges, Marchiafava was released Dec. 6. But 47 days later he was once again wearing the title of inmate after the DOC determined he had not served all of his time. Marchiafava's release date, according to DOC, was five months later.

“I haven't thought about it yet. It's a blow, it's a blow,” said Marchiafava, on break from his job at a local bakery. Every night, he must report back to the West Baton Rouge Detention Center.

The weight of the situation remains heavy on his mind. Marchiafava began his journey after his release Dec. 6, living on the streets of Baton Rouge. He spent his days looking for work. A tip led him to St. Vincent de Paul.

Marchiafava stayed at the St. Vincent de Paul overnight shelter and landed a job after stopping by to visit St. Romain at her job as manager of a Baton Rouge area bakery. On Christmas Day, he moved into the Catholic Charities' Joseph Homes, a temporary shelter for ex-offenders.

Marchiafava was trying to get food stamps, which are supposed to be expedited for newly released prisoners under Louisiana's new prison reform laws. That's where he was Jan. 19 when he learned police officers went to Joseph Homes looking for him.

Officials had contacted St. Romain to let her know that Marchiafava still had time to serve and should not have been released until May. After a weekend filled with anxiety, Marchiafava turned himself in on Monday, Jan. 22.

“It was a human error that we regret,” said Ken Pastorek, communications director of the Department of Corrections. “We're doing everything we can to help him out in this situation. He was living up to the conditions of his early release and he was doing well with his parole and probation. Unfortunately, it was a human error that caused this.”

Marchiafava, who is a skilled automotive paint technician, will continue to work at the bakery as part of his work release program, which he said takes 64 percent of his gross pay. And, he'll report to the West Baton Rouge Detention Center until April 22, 2018.

He plans to save up for a vehicle so he can get back to work in his former profession.

Linda Fjeldsjo, Coordinator of Prison Ministry and Joseph Homes for Catholic Charities, said calculating release times can be very difficult because it includes credit for good time and educational credits. “It’s very confusing,” she said. “But what really spoke to my heart was that Nickolos was going to do the right thing. Easily, he could have just walked away and not deal with it but he didn’t do that.”

Please Join Us

As the Lent approaches, we are preparing Our Annual Lenten Guide. This guide will include:

✞ RECIPES for Lenten meals
✞ Spiritual opportunities throughout the diocese
✞ Reconciliation
✞ Fundraisers and more

Send us your EVENTS and RECIPES to:
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By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

Every time Darryl Ducote hears one of his songs played during Mass, he is moved by emotion.

"Brings me to tears," said Ducote, from his office at the Diocese of Baton Rouge, where he serves as director of the Office of Marriage and Family Life.

"I've never had the experience of giving birth but it's similar," he laughed. "You created something and it takes on a life of its own because different people will express it in a different way, so it continues to grow, it continues to change, without you ever having any influence over it."

Ducote is an original member of the Catholic liturgical song group The Dameans. This month, the Dameans, comprised of Ducote, Paul Ceasar, Gary Ault, Gary Daigle and Mike Balhoff, celebrate their 50th anniversary as musicians, songwriters and friends. The group was responsible for composing scores of songs that can still be found in the Glory & Praise hymnal book. Among the most popular titles are "Look Beyond" and "All That We Have."

So, the seminarian students, called Notre Dameans, formed groups and, rotating weeks, wrote songs for Sunday Mass, setting the text of the antiphons to music. Ducote's group originally included Balhoff, Ault and two other seminarians. By January 1968, the group had reformed with Ducote, Balhoff, Ault, Ceasar and Dave Baker and began writing hymns.

"We were creating hymns in English that were easily singable and something they could relate to, and the folk era really provided that," he said.

The group shortened the name given to them as students and became known as The Dameans. They sent some of their musical compositions to a publisher in Los Angeles and by 1969, their first album, "Tell the World," was released.

"I was in seventh grade when I first played (guitar) at Mass at Our Lady of Mercy," Richard recalled. "That was the first music I learned to play because they were basic chords and good melodies."

Ceasar said the spirit of the time, in the wake of Vatican II, helped foster what was going on with the group.

"We worked so well together," said Ceasar, who is now the executive director of the Archdiocese of New Orleans Retreat Center. "We were friends and we were supportive of each other. We worked through any difficulties that arose that might have torn other groups apart. We were able to be honest with one another, to accept honest criticism and to grow from that."

"People tell me how much our music meant to them. If they were going through spiritual crisis, they said our music gave them the strength to get them through."

Dameans helped usher in Vatican II on a high note

The Dameans perform at St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans for the episcopal consecration of Bishop Stanley J. Ott in 1976. Picture are, from left, Darryl Ducote, Mike Balhoff, Paul Ceasar and Gary Ault. File photo/Archives Department

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Baton Rouge Morning of Prayer

Saturday, February 24
Cultivating Lenten Hope

Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church
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400 Marquette Avenue
Baton Rouge, LA 70806

8:00am Mass is offered
8:45am Registration
9:15am Program begins
11:30am Conclusion

To register: call Susan Halligan (504) 267-9604 or dial our Toll-free number 1-866-937-9170 or visit our website retreat.arch-no.org

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By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

The Bishop Ott Sweet Dreams Shelter

Pristinely painted walls and the enticing aroma of new construction sketched a cheery prelude of the expansion of the Bishop Ott Sweet Dreams Shelter.

But the $1.5 million expansion is much more than bricks and mortar. Rather, each of the nine rooms and each of the 42 new beds represent hope for a struggling family, a place secure from life on the street, a pillow to lay their head and allow themselves to dream of a future when the current darkness has been snuffed by the light of a new life.

“I think it’s going to mean a lot to the community,” St. Vincent de Paul Society executive director Michael Acaldo said, adding that a dedication of the expansion is planned for either late February or early March.

“If you are a mom, and that’s what we anticipate based on what we see and the calls we get, and you have male child over the age of five, this is the only place in Baton Rouge you can go.”

“What it will mean for the ladies we are blessed to serve is we will provide additional options.”

Acaldo pointed out that the homeless shelter for women at St. Agnes Church in Baton Rouge, staffed by the Missionaries of Charity, accepts male children only age five and under, although women can bring daughters above that age.

The end result is a glistening new shelter, as is present in the current shelters for men and women.

“Your must have children to come here as a family, that is the key concept,” Acaldo said. “Our target is mothers with children, and that will be 95 percent of who will be served. Our next largest group will be on occasion a dad with children, although that is not something where the phone is ringing off the hook.”

“The facility has been newly six years in the making, with fundraising efforts launching soon after the sonic demolition moved to its new facility above the main dining room in 2012. That building was aided with a $300,000 grant from the city of Baton Rouge.

Little did Acaldo realize at that time one of the largest donors for the expansion would be St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge, which pledged $100,000.

“That is awesome, isn’t it? A six-figure commitment,” Acaldo mused. “Their St. Vincent de Paul group is very vibrant and (pastor) Father Randy (Cuevas) is very supportive.”

The Hugh and Angelina Wilson Foundation was the largest donor with a grant of $500,000. The Baton Rouge Area Foundation committed $80,000, with the rest of the donations coming through private gifts of all shapes and denominations.

However, the project was not without complications. The new shelter is a remix of new construction and renovation of an existing building that was originally completed in 1997.

As Acaldo painfully learned, building and electrical codes are much different 30 years later, so the current building had to be brought up to code, especially electrical, which tacked on additional costs.

The end result is a glinting new shelter, awaiting the exuberance of youthful voices and the sighs of relief from worried parents whose prayers have been answered and hope is in their future.

“Our target is mothers with children, and that will be 95 percent of who will be served. Our next largest group will be on occasion a dad with children, although that is not something where the phone is ringing off the hook.”

Michael Acaldo
Executive Director, St. Vincent de Paul

Each room will have coded entrances, eliminating the need for keys and providing increased security.

Full bathrooms are in each of the nine new bedrooms, creating a hotel-like atmosphere for the residents.

In some bathrooms, a handicap-accessible shower is provided.

Acaldo shows off one of the new bedrooms, which will be able to accommodate a family including, for the first time, a father being able to stay with his wife and children. Each of the rooms will have single bunk beds, and cribs are available when needed.

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

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Expect the unexpected during March for Life

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

First-time and veteran young pilgrims from the Diocese of Baton Rouge encountered the unexpected when they journeyed to Washington, D.C. for March for Life on Jan. 15-20. But they said their biggest expectation was fulfilled to return filled with joy, peace and passion to defend life.

Ethan LeBlanc, of St. Gabriel Church in St. Gabriel, who made his first trip to March for Life this year, said he had been told the trip is “filled with inconveniences, but spiritual.” He heard the trip’s mantra “prayer and sacrifice,” but went because while he attends Mass at St. Gabriel, he had never been actively involved in ministry work.

He said as he packed, “I was really concerned with what I was to bring with me rather than what I would be doing.”

One stop that demonstrated to LeBlanc how different this journey was from others was at the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Hanceville, Alabama.

“We were just singing, which struck me as odd, because most people think that if there isn’t a band playing they (teens) won’t sing,” said LeBlanc.

Before the bus stopped at the motherhouse of the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia in Nashville, Tennessee, LeBlanc thought about people’s view of religious sisters as strict and serious.

“I figured we would say some prayers and leave,” said LeBlanc, who was surprised that many of the women were young and joyful. They got on the bus with them for the rest of the journey, and even danced in the bus aisle.

“It gave you the feeling that every one of them was glad to be there,” said LeBlanc.

He said camp life at Camp Letts was “so much fun” with lots of dancing and singing. But he especially remembers Mass and eucharistic adoration.

“We celebrated Mass, and that showed me that no matter how big or small (the venue), you are still celebrating the Eucharist,” said LeBlanc. “We kneeled and prayed and we were in God’s presence.”

Confession was also available.

LeBlanc said he normally “has a plan” when going to confession to state his sins, receive penance, say a prayer and then leave.

But the priest compassionately urged LeBlanc to reflect during the sacrament, catching him off guard.

“It brought tears to my eyes,” said LeBlanc.

The trip fueled LeBlanc’s desire to be more involved in pro-life ministry and mission work. He plans to go to Camp Pulse pro-life training for youth, attend a Come and See Weekend at St. Joseph Abbey in St. Benedict and do mission work in another country.

“I hope to open my relationship with God so he can equip me for bigger and better mission work,” said LeBlanc.

Marching with a multitude of other pro-life people also electrified the youth.

“We were told that there would be a lot of people there, but I still didn’t really know what to expect. Just seeing that many people in one place and knowing that they were all there for the same reason, to stand up for the unborn, was so inspiring,” said Madison Nicolosi, of St. John the Evangelist Church in Plaquemine, who made her first trip to March for Life.

Rachel Hebert, of St. Thomas More Church in Baton Rouge, who made her second March for Life pilgrimage, said, “I was prompted to go on the March for Life again this year because I was stoked by the amount of people that were there last year.

What was different about this trip was that there were a lot more people who have gotten involved than last year, and I was proud to be a witness to the pro-life generation.

“Being surrounded by hundreds of thousands of pro-life people fortified my faith and my commitment to spreading the pro-life message by making me realize that I have grown in my Catholic faith much more and my commitment to the

SEE LIFE PAGE 13
From page 12

LIFE ▼
From page 12

spreading of the pro-life message has flourished more than ever before.”

Unexpected happenings also touched veteran pilgrims.

“Having been on the March before (2017), I thought that there would be very little I wouldn’t expect. I was wrong,” said Nicholas DiLeo of Our Lady of Mercy Church in Baton Rouge. “What surprised me most this year was just how quickly my bus group became something of a family. They were all zoned in on the mission and had a blazing desire to serve God in this way. I had mostly expected the trip to be comprised primarily of pro-life related activities. However, this was not the case as the March for Life this year had a strong focus on the spiritual development as well.

“The march allowed me to encounter God in a way that I never had before, especially when I prayed with him in adoration. I hadn’t expected the pilgrimage to elicit such deep contemplation and progress in my own prayer life. What I’ll always remember are the women who had lost children to abortion that I saw on the day of the march. As we passed them on the road, our leader reminded us that ‘These are the women you fight for, they still feel the pain of what happened; reverence them as we pass.’

When he said that it reminded us that while we march for an end to abortion, our actions must be inspired by love and compassion for those afflicted by it.

“Something that we saw on the march was a sign that said: ‘Is this the only pro-life thing you’ll do this year?’ We talked about this after the march and agreed that it missed the point. It made the march a political statement, instead of recognizing the idea of a pro-life lifestyle that we’re aiming for.”

Father Ryan Hallford, parochial vicar for Holy Family Church in Port Allen, said the pilgrim’s dedication to their mission shone through in the most difficult unexpected situations.

“Every year, March for Life is an incredible opportunity to accompany the youth of our diocese on a spiritual adventure,” said Father Hallford. “For my bus, this was a special year. Our bus broke down and we had to change buses six times over the course of the week. Rather than complaining, everyone embraced the opportunity to pray and sacrifice. We are all in this together, and as long as we are doing it together with God, we can conquer anything.

“During our last bus transfer, which happened on the way back to Louisiana at 2:30 a.m., everyone joyfully transferred all our luggage. Our theme for the week was ‘fully alive’ and when we encounter each other in community and God in prayer, these relationships are life-giving.”

Hundreds of youth from the Diocese of Baton Rouge gathered with other pro-life advocates in Washington D.C. for March for Life. Photo provided by Albert Blount

Madison Nicolosi, of St. John the Evangelist Church in Plaquemine, was among the youth from the Diocese of Baton Rouge who attended this year’s March for Life in Washington, D.C. Photo provided by Tonya Nicolosi
Batman and Harley Quinn
Warner Bros.
Poorly conceived and produced as well as morally obtuse straight-to-video animated film from DC Comics. Tired of humans despoiling the environment, villains Poison Ivy (voice of Paget Brewster) and the Floronic Man (voice of Kevin Michael Richardson) team up to transform all animal life on earth into plant hybrids. After Batman (voiced by Kevin Conroy) and Nightwing (voice of Loren Lester) turn to Harley Quinn (voice of Melissa Rauch), the madcap, motley-wearing former psychiatrist and sidekick to the Joker, for help foiling the plot, director Sam Liu’s movie quickly devolves into a series of awkward and offensive situations and jokes, punctuated by harsh punch-outs. Frequent cartoon combat violence, two suggestive sexual situations, one instance of scatological humor, occasional profane, crude and crass language. A-III; PG-13

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

Forever My Girl
Roadside Attractions
Gentle adaptation of Heidi McLaughlin’s romance novel has an aspiring country music star (Alex Roe) returning to his small Louisiana home town when a high school classmate dies, only to learn that he has a 7-year-old daughter with his ex-fiancee. This forces him into finally making adult decisions. Writer-director Bethany Ashton Wolf plays up the romantic and faith-based elements to smooth over stilted performances and unrealistic dialogue. Adult themes of life and death, references to excessive alcohol use. A-II; PG

Den of Thieves
STX
A morass of crass. Gerald Butler is a rogue and troubled Los Angeles police officer chasing after a hyper-violent crew of bank robbers who have, as their ultimate goal, the heretofore-unassailable Los Angeles Federal Reserve Bank from which they hope to “withdraw” $30 million in untraceable cash. Director Christian Gudegast, who co-wrote the screenplay with Paul Scheuring, launches several scattershot, implausible plot lines that never quite come together. Skewed view of law enforcement, pervasive gun and physical violence, frequent racial slurs, pervasive crude and profane language and profanities. O; R

Hostiles
Entertainment Studios
Western, set in 1892, which works from the premise that not only were white soldiers at the time fully aware of their complicity in the decades-long genocide of Native Americans, they also could feel immense, paralyzing guilt about their actions. Director-writer Scott Cooper wishes to make a strong moral case as he sets an Army officer (Christian Bale) on a long journey from New Mexico to Arizona as he escorts a dying Native American chief (Wes Studi) to a reservation. Gun and physical violence, fleeting gore, some racist dialogue. A-III; R

Proud Mary
Screen Gems
Tall tale of a hitwoman (Taraji P. Henson) with a heart of gold who takes in the orphaned son (Jahi Di’Allo Winston) of one of her victims and dispatches the Fagin-like leader (Xander Berkeley) of the gang into whose service the lad was ensnared in the wake of his dad’s death. But this new arrangement does not sit well with the father (Danny Glover) and son (Billy Brown) who run the mob family to which she belongs, the latter of whom is also her ex-boyfriend. Intended as an homage to female-led blaxploitation films of the 1970s, director Babak Najafi’s drama is all style and no credibility since John Stuart Newman’s screenplay fails to lay the foundation either of its unlikely plot or of its adoptive central relationship. Morality also gets taken out as the script gives its featured assassin a pass for the two most prominent of her killings on the grounds that her targets are bad guys. A vengeance theme, much stylized gunplay with fleeting but nasty gore, a scene of torture, brief partial nudity, several uses of profanity, about a half-dozen milder oaths, a couple of rough and numerous crude and crass terms. A-III; R

I, Tonya
Neon
At no point is it clear whether the filmmakers are sympathetic to the plight of disgraced Olympic figure skater Tonya Harding (Margot Robbie) or just want to make fun of the skater and the peculiar, fleeting nature of fame. Instead, director Craig Gillespie and screenwriter Steven Rogers present a coarsening, numbing fusillade of domestic abuse and cursing. Occasionally this is broken up by ice skating routines which conform to the formula of a sports drama, and eventually the inept execution of a crime – the assault on Tonya’s rival, Nancy Kerrigan, just before the 1994 Winter Olympics. Pervasive scenes of domestic abuse, a nonexplicit scene of sexual activity, pervasive rough language, frequent profanities. A-III; R

Maze Runner: The Death Cure
Fox
In this adaptation of the third and final novel in James Dashner’s sci-fi trilogy, the story of a band of teens and their fearless leader (Dylan O’Brien) fighting evil in post-apocalyptic world comes to a noisy and violent conclusion. The gang seeks to liberate their peers from torturous experiments conducted by a wicked doctor (Patrick Clarke) and her colleague (Kaya Scodelario), who seek a cure to a deadly virus that has decimated the population. Returning director Wes Ball operates at a breakneck pace, turning this film into a white-knuckle roller-coaster ride with more vehicle crashes than you can shake a stick at. Despite worthy expressions of friendship, loyalty and self-sacrifice and some intriguing Christian symbolism, the trilogy has clearly outworn its welcome. Relentless but bloodless violence and gunplay, scenes of torture, occasional crude and profane language, one offensive gesture. A-III; PG-13

12 Strong
Warner Bros.
True military adventures don’t come any more rousing than this. Chris Hemsworth plays a Green Beret captain leading a small Special Forces unit on horseback in rugged terrain in the early weeks of fighting in Afghanistan after 9/11. Director Nicolai Fuglsig, working from a script by Ted Tally and Peter Craig, avoids what could have become flag-waving jingoistic moments, preferring to show the Americans quietly going about their tasks. Intense, lengthy and realistic combat violence and gore, a scene of an execution of a teacher in front of three young girls. A-III; R

TRUE MOVIES
believe this new facility will position our community for success in responding to the needs of the homeless during cold winter nights, as well as other natural disasters.”

The planned 4,000-square foot building will be located on the east side of the current shelter, replacing what is currently a parking lot. He said the space will also have the capacity to add 36 additional beds during emergency weather conditions, such as cold weather and hurricanes.

The beds would be placed in a dormitory-style setting that will provide ample bathroom and laundry facilities for the expanded populations in non-emergency situations.

“These services are much needed and will make a tremendous difference in the lives of the homeless in our community.”

Michael Acaldo
Executive Director, St. Vincent de Paul

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### Ash Wednesday Masses — Feb. 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALBANY</strong></td>
<td>6 a.m., 6 p.m.</td>
<td><a href="#">St. Margaret Queen of Scotland</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AMITE</strong></td>
<td>noon, 5 p.m.</td>
<td><a href="#">St. Helena</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BATON ROUGE</strong></td>
<td>6 a.m., noon, 5:30 p.m.</td>
<td><a href="#">St. Agnes – 6 a.m., noon</a>, <a href="#">St. Gerard – 7 a.m., noon</a>, <a href="#">St. Jean Vianney – 6:15 a.m.</a>, <a href="#">St. Joseph Cathedral – 7:30 a.m.</a>, <a href="#">St. Paul the Apostle – 6 p.m.</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DENHAM SPRINGS</strong></td>
<td>7 a.m., noon, 6 p.m.</td>
<td><a href="#">Immaculate Conception – 8:30 a.m., noon</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PLAQUEMINE</strong></td>
<td>noon, 5 p.m.</td>
<td><a href="#">St. John the Evangelist – 7 a.m., noon</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DENHAM SPRINGS</strong></td>
<td>6:30 p.m.</td>
<td><a href="#">Immaculate Conception – 8:30 a.m., noon</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>JACKSON</strong></td>
<td>7 a.m., noon, 6 p.m.</td>
<td><a href="#">Our Lady of Perpetual Help – noon</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MAUREPAS</strong></td>
<td>7 a.m., noon, 6 p.m.</td>
<td><a href="#">St. Stephen Martyr – 7 p.m.</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PLAQUEMINE</strong></td>
<td>8:30 a.m., 6:30 p.m.</td>
<td><a href="#">St. John the Evangelist – noon, 6 p.m.</a></td>
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### Stations of the Cross — Feb. 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>6 p.m.</td>
<td><a href="#">St. Helena</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BATON ROUGE</strong></td>
<td>6 p.m.</td>
<td><a href="#">Most Blessed Sacrament – 6 p.m.</a>, <a href="#">St. Gerard – 11:20 a.m.</a>, <a href="#">St. Jean Vianney – 6 p.m.</a>, <a href="#">St. Paul the Apostle – 6 p.m.</a></td>
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<td>6 p.m.</td>
<td><a href="#">St. John the Evangelist – noon, 6 p.m.</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ST. AMANT</strong></td>
<td>6 p.m.</td>
<td><a href="#">Holy Rosary – 6 p.m.</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ST. FRANCISVILLE</strong></td>
<td>6:30 p.m.</td>
<td><a href="#">Our Lady of Mount Carmel – 5:30 p.m.</a></td>
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### Grant

From page 1

“By expanding capacity at St. Vincent de Paul’s main campus with a new construction disaster shelter, we will be able to provide our homeless population with a safe harbor during disaster events,” Office of Community Development executive director Pat Forbes said. “The state is committed to sheltering our most vulnerable residents during emergency conditions and is pleased that East Baton Rouge Parish is using $1 million Community Development Grant funding for this important project.”

Broome and Acaldo agreed that the unusually recent, harsh winter weather has reinforced the need for additional emergency shelters in the Baton Rouge area. Acaldo noted that on Jan. 26 the Ott Center was at capacity and has been on several occasions recently.

Additionally, the men’s shelter has also been full severals nights during the cold snaps that have brought snow and ice to the area.

“We are so pleased that St. Vincent de Paul, a tremendous partner and resource for our region, is the recipient of these funds, and we look forward to the grand opening of the expanded shelter next year,” Broome said.

Construction is scheduled to start in June.
The most powerful woman in the world

God works in mysterious and surprising ways. He constantly invites us by his grace to a deeper relationship with him, father, son and Holy Spirit. But, because he wants our love, he never forces us. His call is always an invitation to participate in his plan for our salvation. Even when we do not respond at first, when turn away from him, he uses our rejection to call us in another way. Often that call comes through others.

Our Christmas season is not long past. Our attention focused on God’s greatest gift to us, the incarnation of his own son become man as the child of Mary of Nazareth by the power of the Holy Spirit. Who was this young woman? A poet once called her a “nobody from nowhere.” She was a poor girl, still in her teens, living in a tiny village in the hills of Galilee. That is all we actually know of her. Tradition has assigned her two saintly parents named Joachim and Anna, but they are not found anywhere in the Bible or any other historical documents. We just have the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke who describe is still the humble young virgin, but she woman in human history. As her cousin, the tilda, or cloak, of a Mexican peasant, the image of the virgin that was left on the Basilica of La Senora de Guadalupe. Faith of the Mexican people as they crawl and Herzegovina, millions of pilgrims have flocked to sights where visionaries have reported seeing apparitions of the Blessed Virgin. I have been to the first two sites. It is inspiring to see the simple faith of the Mexican people as they crawl on their knees across the stone plaza to the Basilica of La Senora de Guadalupe. The image of the virgin that was left on the tilda, or cloak, of a Mexican peasant, Juan Diego (canonized in 2002), is “one of the most reproduced female likenesses ever” according to National Geographic. It is the only image that has ever been left by Mary herself. According to art historians, the image would be recognizable to Aztec Indians. It contains a combination of Catholic and Aztec iconography. It served as catechism without words to the native population.

Another Perspective

Father John Carville

To me, what is more miraculous than the continued existence of the image itself without deterioration is the effect it had on the native population who first saw it. In 1531, the Franciscan Friars who accompanied the Conquistadors who defeated Montezuma were not able to change the culture of the Aztecs who practiced human sacrifices. But after Juan Diego brought his roses to the bishop of Guadalupe, and he and the native population saw the image they left on the tilda, there was a mass conversion. That was the important miracle.

There is a similarity in the story of Lourdes. The famous grotto where Mary in 1858 is believed to have appeared to St. Bernadette, a teenage French girl, and asked her to dig a spring is visited by six million pilgrims a year. I took a bath in the ice-cold waters fed by the spring. It was a shocking as well as a spiritual experience. I was praying when they dunked me. After that, I was just gasping for breath. But, that evening I saw the hundreds pushing the ill in wheel chairs to the prayer service. It was truly moving to see that faith and hope in action. Besides the many healings reported, after World War II Lourdes attracted veterans from both sides who fought in the World Wars. They met at the grotto to pray for peace. The custom continues today among veterans groups.

Even devout Muslims love Mary. There are more mentions of her name, Maryam, in the Koran than there are in the Gospels. An entire sura or chapter, is devoted to her. In Cairo, Egypt, Coptic Catholics have built a church over an old cave where they believe the Holy Family stopped when they fled Herod’s attempt to kill the child Jesus. Those Coptics need her intercession, for many are being killed by ISIS today because of their faith.

“Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us now and at the hour of our death. Amen”

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

Is marriage dead?

On a recent quiet evening, while surfing the TV channels, I stumbled across a talk show that featured a panel of people, married, divorced and single, who were debating the question “Is marriage dead?” At first, I was surprised that this question was even a realistic topic for discussion. But when I reflected on the state of marriage in our current culture, I realized that this topic might not be so unreasonable.

There is no question that marriage is in trouble in our society. Many sociological studies suggest that the divorce rate is nearing 50 percent. With such a high failure rate in marriages, young people are fashioning the viability of such unions. As a result, each year more of them are choosing to move in together rather than marry.

For others, the legalization of same-sex marriage is calling into question the very nature of marriage itself. As a result of these conditions, many people are understandably confused about the meaning of marriage and wonder whether or not it is still a useful concept.

This present state of marriage may cause some Christians to simply wring their hands in frustration and complain that society is on the verge of collapse. However, this current situation can offer people of faith some important opportunities. Believers can take advantage of the climate of confusion by sharing the good news of our Catholic Christian understanding of marriage and fill the gap that the world has created in marriages.

PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PRAY FOR US

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


We live in a world of deep divisions. Everywhere we see polarization, people bitterly divided from each other by ideology, politics, economic theory, moral beliefs and theology. We tend to use over-simplistic categories within which to understand these divisions: the left and the right opposing each other, liberals and conservatives at odds, pro-life vying with pro-choice.

Virtually every social and moral issue is a war-zone: the status of women, climate change, gender roles, sexuality, marriage and family as institutions, the role of government, how the LGBTQ community is to be understood, among other issues. And our churches aren’t exempt; too often we cannot agree on anything. Civility has disappeared from public discourse even within our churches where there is now as much division and hostility within each denomination as there is between them. More and more, we cannot discuss openly any sensitive matter, even within our own families. Instead we discuss politics, religion and values only within our own ideological circles; and there, rather than challenging each other, we mostly end up feeding each other in our biases and indignations thus becoming even more intolerant, bitter and judgmental.

Scripture calls this enmity, hatred and indeed that’s its proper name. We are becoming hate-filled people who both fuel and justify our hatred on religious and moral grounds. We need only to watch the news on any night to see this. How’s this to be overcome?

At the more macro level in politics and religion, it’s hard to see how these bitter divisions will ever be bridged, especially when so much of our public discourse is feeding and widening the division. What’s needed is nothing short of religious conversion, a religious change of heart, and that’s contingent on the individual. The collective heart will change only when individual hearts first do. We help save the sanity of the world by first safeguarding our own sanity, but that’s no easy task.

It’s not as simple as everyone simply agreeing to think nicer thoughts. Nor, it seems, will we find much common ground in our public dialogues. The dialogue that’s needed isn’t easily come by; certainly we haven’t come by it yet. Many groups are trying for it, but without much success. Generally what happens is that the even most-well intended dialogue quickly degenerates into an attempt to by each side to score its own ideological points rather than in genuinely trying to understand each other. Where does that leave us?

The real answer, I believe, lies in an understanding of how the cross and death of Jesus brings about reconcili-ation. The author of the Letter to the Ephesians tells us that Jesus broke down the barrier of hostility that existed between communities by creating one person where formerly there had been two – and he did it this “by reconciling both (sides) in one body through his cross, which put that enmity to death.” (Ep 2, 16)

How does the cross of Christ put enmity to death? Not through some kind of magic. Jesus didn’t break down the divisions between us by mystically paying off some debt for our sins through his suffering, as if God needed to be appeased by blood to forgive us and open the gates of heaven. That image is simply the metaphor behind our icons and language about being washed clean of sin and saved by the blood of Christ. What happened in the cross and death of Jesus is something that asks for our imitation not simply our admiration. What happened in the cross and death of Jesus is an example for us to imitate. What are we to imitate?

We live in bitterly divisive times, paralyzed in terms of meeting amicably on virtually every sensitive issue of politics, economics, morality and religion. That stalemate will remain until one by one, we each transform rather than enflame and retransmit the hatred that divides us.

OBLATE FATHER RON ROLHEISER, theologian, teacher, and award-winning author, is President of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, TX. He can be contacted through his website ronrolheiser.com and facebook.com/ronrolheiser
Families of Disabled Talk — Angie Lorio, of Families Helping Families associated with Louisiana Development Disabilities, will present a talk on Saturday, Feb. 10, 9 – 11 a.m., at the St. Francis Room of St. John the Evangelist Church, 15208 Hwy. 73, Prairieville. Lorio will discuss how families taking care of loved ones can benefit from each other’s experience and how they can benefit from each other’s experience. Several other workshops will be held at other locations in the near future. For more information, call Lorio at 504-723-7193.

Discalced Carmelites — The Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites will meet Sunday, Feb. 11, 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.

Magnificat Breakfast — Sister Tracey Matthis Dugas, of the Daughters of St. Paul, will speak at the breakfast meeting of Magnificat, a ministry for Catholic women, on Saturday, Feb. 17, 9 a.m. – noon, at the Oak Lodge Reception Center, 2834 S. Sherwood Forest Blvd., Baton Rouge. Reservations are $22 each and can be made through Tuesday, Feb. 13. By mail to a check made out to BR Magnificat with the names of each attendee to Kathy Simoneaux, 9650 Victory Lane, Denham Springs, LA, 70726.

Pro-Life Mass — A monthly pro-life Mass will be celebrated Tuesday, Feb. 13, 5:30 p.m., at St. Agnes Church, 749 East Blvd., Baton Rouge. All are invited to attend. For more information, call 225-383-4127.

Busy Person Retreat — The St. Joseph Spirituality Center, 2980 Kleinert Ave., Baton Rouge, will present a Busy Person Retreat Monday, Feb. 19 – Friday, Feb. 23. The retreat consists of a daily 30-minute commitment to prayer and a conveniently scheduled meeting for 30 minutes with a spiritual advisor. The fee for the retreat is $100. To register and for more information, visit stjocenter.org or call 225-383-3349.

Morning of Prayer — Author Judy Klein will present a morning of prayer, “Cultivating Lenten Hope,” on Saturday, Feb. 24 at Our Lady of Mercy Parish Activity Center, 444 Marquette Ave, Baton Rouge. Mass is offered at the church at 8 a.m., and registration begins at 8:45 a.m. The program will run from 9:15 – 11:30 a.m. Minimum offering for the program is $25. To register and for more information, call Susan Halligan 1-866-937-9170 or visit retreats.arch-no.org.

Day of Prayer — Sister Pat Thomas OP of the Peace Center in New Orleans will present a day of prayer Tuesday, Feb. 27 at Rosaryville Spirit Life Center, 39003 Rosaryville Road, Ponchatoula. The day will start at 9 a.m. with coffee and fellowship. The talks begin at 9:30 a.m. with discussion and quiet time for reflection. Lunch will be provided. The day concludes with the celebration of Mass around 2:30 p.m. Cost of the day is $35. For more information and to register, email scallais@oppeace.org or call 225-294-5039.
at a person’s judgment their works will be judged by fire to test their quality. If the person’s works are built upon a solid foundation of “gold, silver and precious metals” (rooted in Christ) that person will receive a wage. But if someone’s work is burned up like hay, wood or stubble (through “bad works” or sin) that one will suffer loss; the person will be saved, but only as through fire.

The fire of purgatory is much different than the fire of hell, which is eternal loss and regret according to Father Walsh and Father Graham. The fire of purgatory is the soul’s burning desire to be with God. Father Walsh noted that in 1 Peter 1:7, the apostle writes about the assurance that souls in purgatory have of ultimate salvation: In this you rejoice, for although you may have to suffer for a while, this is so that the genuineness of your faith, which is more precious than gold tested by fire, may prove to be for the praise, glory and honor of God.

“Here St. Peter is pointing out that we can voluntarily begin our purgatory – our purification – here on earth – but there will also be a time of purification for us after we have died, a time of preparation for heaven,” said Father Walsh. Praying for the souls in purgatory, who can no longer do anything for themselves but receive the painful, but necessary, purging of sins by God, is a way to assist those souls and receive graces. Father Walsh and Father Graham pointed to passages in the Bible and church traditions that highlight people praying for the dead. Scripture notes that even before the days of Christ, Jewish people, such as Judas Machabeus and Job in the Old Testament, prayed for the dead.

Father Graham noted that the souls of the dead are remembered in the eucharistic prayers at Mass, as well as in a prayer over offerings for the funeral Mass.

He recommended that Catholics offer a prayer for the souls in purgatory once a week during Lent. Additionally, they could offer up their fasting for a deceased family member or loved one. Other ways of remembering the dead include lighting a votive candle, visiting a cemetery, reciting lauds or vespers from the Office of the Dead or the Eternal Rest Prayer or praying the Requiem after mansions for the souls of the dead. Scripture notes that even before the days of Christ, Jewish people, such as Job in the Old Testament, wanted to be spotless and pure in the sight of God. “Even after the dishes are cleaned, and the impurities are washed away, some impurities remain, and we use the steaming heat of a dishwasher to sterilize and the impurities are washed away, some impurities remain, and we use the steaming heat of a dishwasher to sterilize them. So also with our souls,” said Father Walsh. “If we are far from God at the time of death – though not deserving of hell and eternal separation from God, then our purgatory will be longer and more painful. If we are very close to God, then our purgatory will be short and sweet. The wonderful thing about purgatory is that everyone is in that state knows that they will one day be in heaven and there is no longer any desire or taste for sin.

“And yet there is pain, the pain of self reflection, sorrow for sin, and an intense longing for perfect communion with God.”

Father Graham compared the soul’s need to be purified to the bride’s desire to be spotless on her wedding day before coming to her groom. In this case, we, as part of the church, want to be spotless before coming before the bridegroom, Christ.

He also referred to purgatory as a safety net, because, even if people question a deceased person’s salvation, no one knows what was in the person’s heart when they died.

“There are only things that the Lord knows,” said Father Graham.

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**Purgatory ▼**

From page 1

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**CLASSIFIEDS**

**HELP WANTED**

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**CRISTO REY BATON ROUGE FRANCISCAN HIGH SCHOOL**

**Development Director**

Cristo Rey Baton Rouge Franciscan High School seeks candidates for the position of Development Director. The primary function of the Development Director will be leadership and oversight for all fundraising activities of the school, including annual giving, grants management, and major gifts. The Development Director will work with the President and leadership team to develop strategies, generate prospects, and cultivate relationships. The director will lead a team in the execution of fundraising activities to generate resources for the school. Interested candidates should submit a cover letter and resume to Brian Moscona via e-mail at bmoscona@cristoreybr.org. For more information about Cristo Rey visit the school website at cristoreybr.org.

**Business Manager**

Cristo Rey Baton Rouge Franciscan High School seeks candidates for the position of Business Manager. This detail-oriented member of the school leadership team will manage the school’s accounting, as well as provide financial guidance with regard to operations and strategic planning. The Business Manager will also oversee Human Resources functions, such as employee payroll and benefits, and will serve as the school’s liaison with insurance providers. Experience in bookkeeping, financial management, payroll, benefits, and insurance required. Interested candidates should submit cover letter and resume to Brian Moscona via e-mail at bmoscona@cristoreybr.org. For more information on Cristo Rey visit the school’s website at cristoreybr.org.

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**PASTORAL ▼**

From page 1

125 ministries in which our parishioners are actively engaged,” said Father Cuevas.

St. Aloysius parishioner Bryan Jones, one of three co-chairs of the church’s capital campaign committee, said the new building is part of several structures planned for the campus. A new childcare center has already been completed.

“We have several other buildings planned that are in various stages of development right now including a new parish hall that will serve as a venue for large wedding receptions and larger functions that many parishioners have longed to see at St. Aloysius,” said Jones.

Tricia Gereedy, director of children formation, stood in the doorway of her new spacious office and greeted visitors.

Her room with a view, a large window behind her desk, is located adjacent to the childcare center, allowing her to “hear the children playing in the yard.”

“I think it’s very welcoming,” she said of the new offices. “It allows people to come in and sit and visit. It’s new, it’s fresh, it’s clean and a gift from God.”

Parishioners and staff members at St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge gather for the blessing of the new Pastoral Services Center on the church campus. The new building has a wing for pastoral care in order to maintain privacy for those seeking counsel. Photo by Bonny Van | The Catholic Commentator

**DAMEANS ▼**

From page 9

road for their music ministry. After they were ordained priests, the travel was cut down to once a month. Their travels took them to 48 states, including Hawaii and Alaska.

“Alaska – that was incredible!” laughed Ducote. “Culture shock for them and for us! It was a lot of fun! From Alaska, we went to Hawaii! All of this was great fun but it got tiresome.”

On one trip to Hawaii, a community of Filipino nuns ministering to a small village in the mountains invited The Dames to Sunday Mass.

“They played guitars and sang our music at the little village church,” Ducote said. “So that was wonderful!”

In 1973, The Dames were sent to Germany for a month on behalf of the military apostolate. Ducote said the stint, which included a tour of the military bases, involved hours of travel in the back of army trucks with accommodations he called “abysmal.”

“It was absolutely grueling and really took a toll on all of us,” he said.

The following year, Dave Baker bowed out of the group, citing the travel was too difficult from his Wisconsin home. The Dames continued to write and record music and give concerts, releasing several more albums. Keyboardist Gary Pigeon of Gonzales joined the south Louisiana based musicians in 1978. Their final album was released in 1995 and their last performance was at the 2012 Gulf Coast Conference in Mobile, Alabama.

Besides “Remember Your Love,” which was a composite by Ducote, Blahoff and Daigle, Ducote said “Look Beyond” is also widely used. The Communion hymn, written by Ducote, is based on the Gospel of John, chapter 6, the bread of life discourse.

“I took Scripture and put it to music and wrote a refrain,” he said. “It makes those scriptural passages come to life.”

Ducote said he still listens to the music of The Dames, especially the song “Without Clouds,” which he wrote.

“It’s so universal. It talks about the consistency of change and how we have to adapt to change on a regular basis,” he said.

Ducote said he thinks the biggest contribution The Dames made was in “facilitating what the Second Vatican called for in the liturgical form, namely, fully conscious and active participation of the laity in the liturgy.”

“People renewed their faith through our music,” he said. “The music was a sign of hope for many people.”

Darryl Ducote, director of The Office of Marriage and Family Life for the Diocese of Baton Rouge, looks over albums from his years with The Dames. Many of the songs Ducote and others in the group wrote are still found in the Glory & Praise hymnals. Photo by Bonny Van | The Catholic Commentator

**BUILD A BASKET FOR A NEEDY CHILD**

When families are struggling to exist on low incomes, just paying the rent and putting food on the table is difficult. Needy children learn at an early age that there’s nothing in the budget for extras. Things like Easter baskets are luxuries their families simply cannot afford. Last year, our Build a Basket campaign was a tremendous success and reached so many children in need. The kids in these pictures were uplifted by this act of sharing.

Join us in providing Easter baskets for hundreds of needy children. You can actually build a basket yourself (see instructions below) or make a contribution to the effort online at www.svdpb.org and we will build it for you and give it to a needy or homeless child. This is a great project for church groups, schools and clubs. For more information, call us at (225) 383-7857 or visit us at svdph.org. Bring Christ into the lives of those in need!

**Build a Basket Instructions For a Happy Easter**

1. Lots of love and prayers.
2. A new or gently used basket.
3. Easter candy of all sorts. (No peanut products.)
4. Easter related toys, small toys, stuffed animals, crayons, color books, etc.
5. Write basket with Easter cellophane.
6. Drop your gift off at our St. Vincent de Paul main charitable campus located at 220 St. Vincent de Paul Place.