Archives building dedicated

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

The Diocese of Baton Rouge stepped into the future to preserve the past with the dedication of a new archives building that will house records reaching back some 300 years.

Bishop Robert W. Muench on July 27 blessed the 8,000-square foot building located at the rear of the Catholic Life Center campus.

“Today, you, we and the church in and out of Baton Rouge make history,” said Bishop Muench, who through the years has made no secret that one of his priorities was the construction of a state-of-the-art archives building. The dedication comes only weeks before Bishop-designate Michael G. Duca is installed as the sixth bishop for the diocese.

“Our archives department keeps records of our history that is always on the move, changing to new circumstances with new people, not all new, but as progress from one stage to another, in our call to eternal life,” the bishop added. “So today is a day of celebration.”

The building, which has been in the planning stages since 2003, houses two records storage areas new including a temperature and humidity control inner vault that can house more than 2,000 cubic feet of materials, according to diocesan archivist Ann Boltin. She said the vault, located at the center of the building and surrounded by concrete on all sides with a gas fire suppression system, will house the diocese’s most fragile records and materials.

The building also has a large conference room and library where researchers will be able to work.

“Today is a great day for archives,” Boltin said during the opening ceremony. “It is a great day for the history and heritage of the people of Louisiana.”

“We’re keepers of the past, illuminators of the forgotten, the discoverers of the treasures of the information that lies within the records,” she added. “The preservation safeguarding of the sacramental lives of the faithful falls to us. We take great pride in ensuring these lives are not forgotten, that they live on in the hearts and the minds of the thousands of ancestors who are still looking for them.

St. John enjoys being debt free

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

On June 24, the feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, Father Matt Lorrain, pastor of St. John the Baptist Church in Brusly, burned the note on a $1.4 million loan to renovate the church ... or in this case, because the renovations include a new sensitive state-of-the-art fire alarm, maybe just a paper shredder located near the altar.

“As part of the new church restoration, they installed a new fire detection system that is quite sensitive,” said Father Lorrain. “So, rather than burn the note, I decided to shred it.”

With the loan paid in full earlier in the year, Father Lorrain said he waited until “our parish feast day” to celebrate, which happened to fall on a Sunday. Before each Mass that weekend, he placed a shredder to the side of the presider’s chair, throwing off some members of the congregation.

“It’s a solid black non-descript box, so at first, some thought it was a coffee maker or something like that, and at the end of Mass, when I was making the announcements I mentioned that the debt was paid in full. So, we got a copy of the note from the Diocese (of Baton Rouge) and with the big stamp on it saying canceled ... and so, I just slipped the sheet of paper into the shredding machine and let it go.”

Work on St. John, which included renovations, restoration and new construction, began more than a decade ago under the direction then-pastor of Father
Panis de Caelo:
Bread from Heaven

By Dina Dow

The liturgical readings for the upcoming 18th and 19th Sundays in Ordinary Time (Year B) inspire us to a deeper faith in God through Jesus Christ. The words we will hear are those that will serve as the invitation to everlasting life. The act of believing will open hearts to conversion and transformation, and thus answer God’s call to holiness.

“It is enough, now O LORD …” (1 Kgs 19: 4)

Both Old Testament readings begin with people in flight. The Israelites are fleeing from slavery in Egypt with Moses guiding them to safety, while Elijah is escaping impending death from Jezebel. The Israelites are hungry and thirsty, stating it would have been better to stay in Egypt, where Elijah is scared, exhausted and without strength to find safety. The Lord hears their cries, sending food for sustenance, thus fortifying their journey with belief that God will provide. He ministers through Moses, once a shepherd, and an angel, one who constantly holds the heavenly vision of God. The Israelites ate “bread from heaven (Ps 6: 78),” as Moses tells, “This is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.” (Ex 16:15) Elijah ate the bread of the angel. Yet, the bread of this fortification points to something greater, perfectly substantial and everlasting.

Think about a time when you have run out of energy to fuel the body, mind and spirit. As senses weaken, you cry out for some type of reprieve saying, “I am done with (fill in the blank).” You want to give up, throw in the towel, plop on the couch, and go to sleep! Yet, also recall when God has nudged you, awakened by an angel, of sorts, saying, “Here, eat this,” to get you moving again. There is an open invitation to come home to God through Jesus. He gives us more than the world can ever promise to provide. He gives us everything needed to draw near to him today, tomorrow and eternally.

“Be renewed … put on the new self…” (Eph 4:23-24)

The closer we are to Christ, the more we grow in holiness. St. Paul reminds the Ephesians to walk away from the evil of non-believers, knowing Jesus’ path is truth and life. He invites us to a constant renewal of the promises made in baptism as we adorn the garment of his glory, pure in color, stitched with sacrifice, fitted with love and worn with humility. Similar to the woman who touched the tassel of Jesus’ garment experienced healing, so too should another who “touches our garment,” be aware of the life-giving love and joy of Christ, our Lord. As we clothe ourselves in this garment, we are embraced by the power of the Holy Spirit and are enabled to be immersed in the mission of his ministry. We believe in his truth, and thus are open to the graces that transform us into a newness of life.

This is conversion, “a radical reorientation of the whole life away from sin and evil, and toward God. This change of heart is a central element of Christ’s preaching, of the church’s ministry of evangelization, and of the sacrament of reconciliation” (Catechism Para. #1427-1429). Of course, with this call to holiness comes also the reality of “life in Christ is not that easy.” How can we, like Elijah and the Israelites, remain conform to, strengthened by and united with God and others? What actually feeds us?

Bread from Heaven

St. John’s Gospel illuminates the teachings of the manna from heaven, as recalled in the Book of Exodus, now placed before Jesus by those following him. They long to see him perform another sign because it was not enough to be one of the 5,000 people just fed by him. Jesus offers an invitation to work for “food that endures for eternal life” (Jn 6: 27). They naturally ask, “How?” Jesus invited them this time into a deeper union with the Trinity, as he tells them to believe in the Messiah, as he tells them to believe in the Trinity, as he tells them to believe in the Messiah.

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See Gospel Page 11

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See Gospel Page 11
Summer program gives seminarians inside look

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

On a hot Friday afternoon in July, the grounds outside of Immaculate Conception Church in Lakeland were quiet and vacant of cars and people. It was a serene setting, but in less than 24 hours, the church would be busy with the hustle and bustle of a vibrant parish life.

In the air-conditioned church office, located across the street from Immaculate Conception, Notre Dame seminarian Taylor Sanford, a second year theology student, was wrapping up the final day of his eight-week summer placement program through the vocations office of the Diocese of Batson Rouge.

“I’m kind of like an intern, so anything they don’t want to waste their time doing, I’ll do it,” said Sanford with a chuckle. “It’s kind of a mentorship program, so I’m living with Father Todd Lloyd at the rectory and I come in to the office and go to Mass when he celebrates Mass. So I’m getting a feel for the rhythm of a parish priest’s life, the day-to-day stuff, which helps with discernment, and I get a taste of what’s in store for the future.”

The summer assignments for seminary students can range from church parishes to hospital placement programs. Father Matt Lorrain, director of vocations, said the goal is to use the students’ down time, when they are not busy with classes and studying, to educate them in real-world ways.

“Each summer, it could be something similar or something different, depending on (the students’) studies,” said Father Lorrain. “Between being assigned to a parish or working in a hospital or going up to the summer institute (in Nebraska) or doing Spanish immersion. All of that comes together to compliment their classroom study and helps them apply some of the knowledge they’ve gained and also start applying some of their spiritual formation, the insights they’ve gained in their prayer life and all.”

Of the 14 seminarian students in the diocese, one has been studying at Creighton University, Institute for Priestly Formation in Omaha; two were assigned to hospitals, one in Houston and one in Pensacola, Florida; one is at the Madonna House Apostolate in Canada; and, the rest were assigned to church parishes throughout the diocese.

Father Lloyd has sponsored seminarians for four summers and said it’s the only way for the students to learn what takes place in a priest’s life, from living in the rectory to “living and being amongst your parishioners and their lives.” And, he points out other job requirements that fall outside of pastoral duties.

“There are administrative issues, putting blinds up, fixing things,” said Father Lloyd. “I think the only way you can experience all of that, like every aspect of the life of a parish, is by living in it. It’s important; it’s good. I don’t know how else a seminarian could do it.”

Father Lloyd was in his first assignment as a priest at Christ the King Church in Baton Rouge, when he became Sanford’s spiritual director while Sanford was a student at LSU. Priest and student were reunited again in Lakeland, but with the student watching more closely and carefully. Sanford said there were plenty of lessons he learned along the way during his assignment including seeing how Father Lloyd “loves his people and lives out his priesthood,” time management; and, creating a life as a priest that works for him. For example, Father Lloyd spends his morning in prayer while Sanford said he loves to run in the morning.

“There’s a certain level of freedom that I have come to in realizing that I’m my own person and as a priest, I can live out my priesthood differently,” said Sanford. “While it’s still good, and can still be a wholly, fruitful priesthood, it doesn’t have to be like a cookie cutter type of model and so, that’s a good take away from living with Father Todd Lloyd.”

Sanford has also been by Father Lloyd’s side when visiting the sick, either at home or in the hospital; attending every Mass; and getting to know the faithful of Immaculate Conception.

“(Going to) different people’s houses for dinner, which is a ministry itself,” said Sanford. “While it’s still good, and can still be a wholly, fruitful priesthood, it doesn’t have to be like a cookie cutter type of model and so, that’s a good take away from living with Father Todd Lloyd.”

Sanford’s watershed moment came when he had to conduct a Communion service by himself at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. Every Thursday, Father Lloyd travels to the prison to celebrate three Masses in different camps. One Thursday, he was too sick to go and sent the young seminarian in his place for one of the services. With a prepared reflection for the service, Sanford headed to Angola, but, when he got there, the 20 men gathered had their missalettes ready for the Sunday Mass readings, not the weekday readings.

“I had to go off the cuff, so it worked; like, the Lord was there,” Sanford recalled. “It was great for my discernment. Like in the moment, I was like, Wow! I’m not celebrating Mass right now but this is kind of a taste of what I can look forward to in the future.” It felt right. It felt natural leading them in prayer, and so, it was really good. It was a good feeling.”

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The walls of Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Baton Rouge are painted with some of the most striking images of Jesus and Gospel stories of any church in the Diocese of Baton Rouge. It is the work of Dom Gregory De Wit OSB, a Holland Benedictine monk who originally came to the United States to paint murals at St. Meinrad Archabbeey in Indiana in 1937.

“Our pastor at the time, Father Dominic Blasco, went up there (the archabbey) to visit and that’s when they were planning to build Sacred Heart,” said Mary Lee Eggart, archivist for Sacred Heart.

Impressed with the artwork, Father Blasco commissioned Dom De Wit to paint a series of murals in the new church. The work lasted for two years, from 1940–1942. Among the works are shrines honoring Our Lady of Sorrows, a pieta, the appearance of the Sacred Heart, St. John the Baptist, St. Peter, St. Paul, 14 Stations of the Cross and the Victorious Christ, based on a mosaic in Sicily’s Monreale Cathedral.

“We get a lot of comments about the artwork,” said Eggart. Dom De Wit was unable to return to Europe because of the war, so he next went to St. Joseph Abbey where he painted murals in the refectory and the church.

On Saturday, Aug. 18 a documentary about the monk will be shown at Sacred Heart at 5:30 p.m. The film, directed by David Michael Warren, showcases Dom De Wit's is strong personality and “bold artistic choices.” Warren said in a statement that Dom De Wit's art is “massively underappreciated.”

“He fascinates me,” said Warren. “As I researched his life and artwork, I discovered that (Dom) De Wit was just as quirky as he was theologically deep. My film explores some of his antics and behavior that understandably upset some folks, but it also focuses on his spiritual life.”

The 55-minute film is narrated by singer/songwriter Kitty Cleveland. It also features interviews with Eggart, historian Edward Begnaud and personal friend Father Raphael Barousse.

“Our parishioners have always been proud of the original works of art in our church, and I’m always amazed at the number of visitors who come to our church specifically to see and photograph Dom De Wit’s works,” said Father Miles Walsh, pastor of Sacred Heart. “We are also privileged to have Mary Lee Eggart as our resident artist, archivist and historian and are so grateful to her for collaborating with the producers of this film to make it a reality.”

“I hope people will take away from the film, and that Dom De Wit communicated through his art, is that Christ is for all people,” said Warren. “His Last Judgment painting in St. Joseph Abbey portrays a diverse group of individuals approaching Christ – an African American in an undershirt, a blonde-haired little girl, a member of the armed forces, a large man in a suit smoking a cigar, a child with a disability and more. More than anything else, I want viewers to see Dom De Wit’s message that Christ makes himself available to all people of all walks of life.”

The showing of the movie is free; however, the church is asking people to RSVP so they can determine the number of people to expect. Please RSVP to ccoulon@sacredheartbr.org or call 225-387-6671.

**Join us as we welcome Bishop Michael G. Duca as the next bishop of the Diocese of Baton Rouge in a special section of The Catholic Commentator in the issue of August 31. Deadline is Aug. 21.**

For more information call Wanda Koch at 225-387-0983 or email wkoch@diobr.org
Father Adkins retiring; reflects on ministry

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

"Thank you for loving me," said Father Howard Adkins, pastor of Mater Dolorosa Church in Independence and St. Dominic Church in Husser to people who have played an important role in shaping his life and call to the priesthood through their support and challenges. Father Adkins, 72, is set to retire this month.

Father Adkins was ordained to the priesthood on May 26, 2007 along with Father Michael Adell, pastor of St. Thomas More Church in Baton Rouge; Father Cary Bani, pastor of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church in St. Francisville; Father Christopher J. Decker, pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Church in Maringouin, St. Francis of Xavier Cabrini Church in Louisiana and St. Joseph Church in Grosse Tete; and Father Jason Palermo, pastor of St. Joseph Church in French Settlement and St. Stephen the Martyr Church in Maurepas.

"In (seminary) we were called 'The Baton Rouge mafia," grinned Father Adkins. "Usually if a seminarian needed something and couldn’t afford it and get it from the archdiocese (of New Orleans) they called our group and we would make it happen. Father Pat Williams (then rector of Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans) rolled his eyes and didn’t want to know what was going on." A late vocation to the priesthood required that Father Adkins give extra effort to pass the seminary’s rigorous curriculum.

"With almost 100 degree certainty, I know that the academicians would have washed me out if I didn’t make it. But when you come face to face with something you really want, you’ll find ways to make things happen. Being away from academics for over 30 years and starting up again was challenging, but very rewarding," he said.

Father Adkins’ parents were also ill, and through the help of Father Williams, Archbishop Alfred C. Hughes, and Father Jeff Bayhi, then director of vocations and seminarians, he was able to attend to their needs.

“They let me out of some of the things in the evening so I could drive back to Baton Rouge. I would get up and get back in time for morning classes,” said Father Adkins.

Such discipline and determination were engrained in Father Adkins, as he grew up in a military family and served six years in the Marines.

“When I was evaluated for the priesthood, the psychologist asked, ‘Do you want to be a priest because they take orders and wear uniforms?’” mused Father Adkins.

The Marine Corps gave him valuable training for the priesthood and challenges in life, according to Father Adkins.

“The Corps taught me to improvise, overcome and adapt, to think on my feet, to be two steps ahead of the situation, to have thick skin. The Corps taught me discipline and to be open-minded, to listen to people, events and the environment. The Corps taught me the importance of tradition, duty, honor and loyalty. All of this I value – to run toward the fight and not run away from it,” said Father Adkins.

He has served as chaplain at Baton Rouge General Medical Center in Baton Rouge and Our Lady of Mercy Church in Baton Rouge before becoming pastor of Mater Dolorosa and St. Dominic.

When he was notified that he was being appointed to Mater Dolorosa and St. Dominic, Father Howard admitted that he thought he might not like it.

“I was a city boy coming into the country. But I fell in love with it,” said Father Adkins.

“But the journey didn’t come without a few bumps.”

“I made a really bad mistake in my opening homily here,” confessed Father Adkins. “I said, ‘I will listen to you, but I can tell you right now, I will win because I’m going to get my way.’”

With some parishioners expressing their unfavorable reception to his comments, Father Adkins said, “I think I have adjusted my priesthood to ‘It’s not my way or the highway.’”

And there’s an overall understanding and respect between the priest and his two church communities.

“When I would talk about my active priesthood coming to an end, people were telling me that there were some who were actually crying because I’m leaving. That caught me by surprise,” he said.

He expressed his admiration of the people of Mater Dolorosa and St. Dominic.

“What I see are two faith communities who really love God,” said Father Adkins. “They will do what’s necessary and support their church, not only monetarily, but spiritually. Time, talent as well. It doesn’t seem like work to them because they love the church and most certainly love God.

He was also proud of the accomplishments of Mater Dolorosa School.

“I have probably one of the best principals in the diocese (Cheryl Santangelo),” said Father Adkins. “She’s doubled the size of the school from where it has been in the past. She’s tough, but I think it’s necessary in this age and time that you stand up for what is good. She has assembled a good teaching staff.”

Much of the focus of Father Adkins’ priesthood has been on listening and being compassionate.

“I’m a big proponent of the confessional,” said Father Adkins. “I’ve been told ‘You’re probably one of the most compassionate priests in a long time.’”

One woman would drive from Mississippi every couple of months for confession with Father Adkins.

He also opened the doors of mercy every third Wednesday of the month by offering confession from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

“I was told in seminary to get your spiritual reading in now because you won’t get it when you’re a priest. But I used that time when it was slow (in the confessional) to get caught up on spiritual reading. I can say I never fell asleep,” he said.

He said his brother priests have also been helpful in his journey.

“I would say that Father Mark (Beard, pastor of St. Helena Church in Amite) and Father Jamin (David, pastor of St. Margaret, Queen of Scotland Church in Albany) have been the closest I’ve had in friendships,” Father Adkins said.

He noted that Father Beard said, “If you ever have to be in a foxhole, you want Father Howard with you.”

Father Adkins has no specific plans on what he will do or where he will stay. A scuba diving instructor, Father Adkins said he would like to return to Florida to refresh his skills. He also would like to resume growing bonsai trees, something he enjoyed doing but ran out of space to do once he went to seminary, as well as watch a New York Yankees baseball game.

He will also reflect on his priesthood, which he said, even with it’s winding path, was something he was meant to do.

“I have sometimes felt unworthy of this calling, but I’m so happy I did it. I’ve tried to give back as much as they gave me, but I’ve fallen short. I did the best that I could,” said Father Adkins.

Father Howard Adkins

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Burial in ‘consecrated ground’/ Cohabitation and Catholic seniors

Q My husband and I are both cradle Catholics. He has completed paperwork with the Emory School of Medicine to donate his body to their research program. Emory’s policy is to cremate the body once their research is completed and then, after a memorial service, the cremains will be buried at the Decatur Cemetery here in Georgia. I would like to know whether this satisfies the “consecrated grounds” requirement of the Catholic Church. (Alternatively, if requested, Emory would return the cremains to the family via the U.S. Postal Service. I would prefer to avoid this if possible, as it would obviously create additional heartache and stress.) (Atlanta)

A I take it, from what you say, that the Decatur Cemetery is nonsecular and that seems confirmed by its website. It is actually the oldest burial ground in the Atlanta metropolitan area so it would not surprise me if a number of Catholics have been buried there, especially in the days when there were very few Catholic churches and cemeteries in southern states.

Your husband’s cremains may certainly be interred in the Decatur Cemetery. The church’s Code of Canon Law, after speaking about Catholic parish cemeteries, says specifically that “everyone, however, is permitted to choose the cemetery of burial unless prohibited by law” (Canon 1180.2).

A later canon does say, though, that if someone is buried in a secular cemetery, his or her gravestones should be “properly blessed” (Canon 1240). That might be taken care of in what you describe as a “memorial service,” and I have sometimes been asked to officiate at such services; if not, you could ask a priest at a later time to bless the place of your husband’s cremains.

The church’s encouragement of a Catholic resting place has, in part, to do with the fact that prayers and masses will regularly be offered for those who are buried there. In your case, the prayers of you and your family will help to supply that.

Q I was born in 1926 and attended Catholic schools before being called into military service during World War II. My wife of 57 years, a convert to Catholicism, died in 2005. Two years later, I began seeing a widow whom I had been raised Catholic and sometime later asked her to marry me.

She declined, saying that she had promised her husband she would not remarry because she would then lose the medical benefits and the annuity she was receiving. So we lived together for six years, attending Mass regularly, and when she passed away there was a funeral Mass.

While we were living together, I spoke to two different priests in confession and got conflicting advice. One said what we were doing amounted to “fornication;” the other said that the restrictions imposed on her financial benefits were unjust and that I should not let my moral situation bother my conscience. Would you comment? (Richmond, Virginia)

A The first priest was right although I would have used a bit more pastoral language in explaining it to you. You and your widowed friend were not married in the eyes of the church and, in the church’s view, had no right to be living together as husband and wife. I wish things were different. I wish, in your situation, there were a way for a priest to offer a marriage blessing while conducting a sort of “commitment ceremony” so that you would be married religiously but not civilly (and thus not adversely affect your individual financial benefits.) But there is not.

Marriage is not purely a private affair; in contemporary culture, clergy, when solemnizing a marriage, act also as agents of the state, and the ceremony must be recorded civilly. The only thing I can do, in a circumstance like your own, is to pray that if your mutual love and your commitment to your religion are strong enough, you would be willing to make the financial sacrifice, sanctify your commitment and be married by a priest.

FATHER DOYLE is a retired priest in the Diocese of Albany, New York. Questions may be sent to Father Kenneth Doyle at askfatherdoyle@gmail.com and 30 Columbia Circle Dr., Albany, NY 12203.
By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Living out the beatitude “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth” assures people that if they put their lives under the control of God, they will see the promise of the kingdom of heaven come to earth, according to Father Eddie Martin, parochial vicar at St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge.

Father Martin said the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that the beatitudes show the inner heart of Jesus and provides a perfect model of meekness. It states, “The beatitudes depict the countenance of Jesus Christ and portray his charity ... they are the paradoxical promises that sustain hope in the midst of tribulations; they proclaim the blessings and rewards already secured, however dimly, for Christ’s disciples ...”

Jesus constantly called people to adopt an attitude of meekness, Father Martin said. In Matthew 18:3, when the disciples approached Jesus and asked who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, he called a child over, placed it in their midst and said, “Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” Likewise in Matthew 11:25, Jesus says, “I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike.”

“That speaks so much to our society today,” said Father Martin. “I’m finding we’re becoming more and more of an empirical society that wants proof of everything. If you can’t believe the proof, it’s just some fairy-tale or superstition you have to help you get over your mortality when you realize you aren’t going to live forever. If you can’t feel, see, touch, categorize it, define its molecular breakdown, it’s not real. I don’t think you can scientifically classify such an important (spiritual) truth.”

Father Martin said in the Scriptures, the Lord clearly says there’s the realm of the visible and invisible. “It’s the invisible things that endure, the visible is transitory. We’re all going to be gone one day, including every person we love. It (the transitory) is not what we are supposed to put our faith in. I think that’s what (Jesus) was saying.”

The Beatitudes

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

“I think it starts when we are babies. The world ends at the end of our nose – feed me, change me, entertain me, nothing else matters.”

The virtue of meekness calls for the opposite, Father Martin emphasized.

“If we follow the teachings of Christ, the No. 1 thing the Catholic Church teaches is to die to self and live for others,” said Father Martin. “It takes a unique person to do this in a world where people want to conquer the world and everything in it and ‘get a chunk of the pie and defend my turf.’”

“The meek people aren’t worried about the things of the world – they seek the world to come, where there’s no more pain and death and justice reigns – the promised kingdom Jesus talked about so much.”

Far from being soft minded or willed, meek people know how to “let go and let God” control their lives. And this is counter-cultural, he noted.

“We’re in a natural fallen state where it’s all about me,” said Father Martin. “We’ve got to ‘virtualize’ ourselves out of that ... we need to be totally selfless and totally giving.”

“It’s truly better to give than to receive, and the meek understand that. It’s not that they are pushovers, it’s not that they are inactive, that they are hiding in the shadows and don’t want to make changes. It’s that they are not touting their own horn and saying, ‘Hey, look at me.’”

He said two role models in his life concerning meekness include Donald “Speedy” Gonzales, deceased, and wife Helen. Father Martin, who grew up downtown from Gonzales and recently celebrated “Speedy” Gonzales’ funeral, said the couple’s lives were a testimony in giving.

“They were forever bringing people in need into their home,” said Father Martin.

He said “Speedy” Gonzales performed at nursing homes with a Cajun dance troupe, helped load emergency supplies at Red Cross warehouses and was an active organizer at the 40 Days for Life events.

The Gonzales’ daughter, Sister Drita Maris, is a sister of the Missionaries of Charity.

Another one of Father Martin’s role models is his father.

His family refers to him as “pure love walking with arms and legs.” He is always eager to serve and steers conversations away from being about himself to the person he is talking to.

“He has a pure joy of being a servant to others. He is utterly content and at peace because he’s doing what the Lord has called him to do,” said Father Martin.

The best way to cultivate such meekness, according to Father Martin, is to simply ask...
By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

With the sparkling waters of the False River as their backdrop, youth from around the Diocese of Baton Rouge nourished thirsting souls in New Roads with living water during Mission Helping Other People Everywhere (HOPE) July 20-21. Baton Rouge area youth entering 10th – 12th grades spent the four-day mission project and service retreat en- courageing and practicing the corporal works of mercy. The mission was sponsored by St. George Church in Baton Rouge, St. Jude Church in Baker and St. Mary of False River Church in New Roads.

“You have to serve in the midst of your people before going for more,” said John Culotta. “Everyone is really caring, and strong in their faith.”

Although she has served before, Culotta discovered there is always something new to learn, like she espe- cially treasured by a prayer led by the youth that fo- cused on “soul to soul faith.”

“Our community of faith helps you be more effective,” said Culotta. “To know your peers and you – someone you know and trust – it’s really comfort- ing, and builds your faith.”

Strong faith is needed in facing the reality that suffering touches everyone, according to Culotta. “There’s suffering everywhere. If you have the availability, you have the responsibility to help others,” said Culotta.

One of the activities was visiting a nurs- ing home. This was familiar ground for Marina Mouton, who was visiting from Pineville for the summer and joined in the mission through St. George. She had witnessed her grand- mother serving in a nursing home ministry and found the face of Christ in the wrinkles of the aged.

“She was really fast to get visitors and you can come and make their night,” said Cascio. “I enjoined everyone to have fun.”

Some people never get visitors and you can come and make their day happy,” said Mouton.

Ethan LeBlanc said his trip to March for Life was sponsored by St. Isaac Duplantis said the missionaries quickly found the face of Christ in the wrinkles of the aged.

“Some people never get visitors and you can come and make their night,” said Cascio. “I enjoined everyone to have fun.”

“I’ve been looking forward to all of us teenag- ers so that we can all grow. I would like to bring others to help others,” said Fontenot. “Everyone has a good life and we make others know that not ev- eryone has a good life. I’m a different person because of this mission. I would not change her experi- ence for anything.

“I enjoyed last (Thursday) night,” said Cascio. “We had prayer and talked about the music we were in. It was emot- tional, but liberating to hear what they (could) went through and the good things that came out of it. There’s a good way to push through it and there will always be someone there for you.”

Cascio, who has a brother with autism, said she may pur- sue a career as an occupational or other type therapist. Victoria Fontenot said the mission HOPE has brought her out of her comfort zone, but she would not change her experi- ence for anything.

“It was probably one of the best weeks of my life. I think I’m a different person because of it,” said Fontenot. “Before I started going to youth group and participating in things like this, I really didn’t talk to peo- ple and now I’m more outgoing and want others to know about the love of Christ.”

Different parishes, some at- tended Catholic schools, some private and others were home- schooled,” said Duplantis. “We were 23 students from all over with different backgrounds, but we came together for the same cause with the same desire and instantly friendships began. No one was ever left out. There were no cliques.”

Duplantis also noted there was also an ecumenical spirit in the community.

“One thing we noticed at a second facility we went to, there was a group of people in a prayer meeting,” he said. “As a few of us walked in and started to lis- ten, we noticed it was people of different faiths. They weren’t arguing about who was right or wrong. They were all sharing their in- dividual faiths so that they would all grow. I would like to bring this back to school, to be able to share my faith and beliefs as well as try to understand others so that we can all grow and learn from each other.”

The youth abjured as oppor- tunity to use their talents.

Juliette Gregoire said “Actu- ally, I had different plans for this week (attending rehearsals for Theatre Baton Rouge’s pro- duction of “Thoroughly Modern Millie,” which she emceed af- ter the mission) When I arrived I had a chance to take a mission trip, I decided to do something to help others.”

“When I heard they might be going to a retirement home, I got excited because I had per- formed before at a retirement home. Just seeing them smile makes my day. “I want to learn as much as I can about these people, because they have the better stories and experiences,” said Gregoire. She said the mission trip has inspired her to pursue a career to help the elderly either as a lawyer, social worker or coun- selor. Like Gregoire, Austin Will also enjoys acting and would like to use his talent to benefit others. “I want to be a performer, to make others know that not everyone has a good life and we should try to help each other,” said Will, who also enjoyed the youths’ prayer time to- gether.

Brennan Casio chose to go to the mis- sion because, “I thought it would be great to meet people who live a life different from me and how they do it.”

He learned during the mission that the “little things” matter to people in need. And those trials can increased endurance.

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The Catholic Commentator

ACROSS
1. Opening of the largest diocese in a province
5. Religious garb
10. London jail
14. The Holy See
15. Blue
16. "The ___ of the Ancient Mariner"
17. What we are forbidden to do by the fifth commandment
18. Uninterested
19. Home of Adam and Eve
20. Mules
22. "By the mercy of God, we do not lose ___" (2 Cor 4:1)
23. Purple quartz
26. Noon prayer time
30. "Our Father who ___…"
31. "___ humbug!"
32. Purple quartz
33. Biblical dry measure
34. Season that begins with Ash Wednesday
35. These were waved at Jesus when he entered Jerusalem
36. After FDR
37. "Mary"
38. Jewish measure
39. Media union (abbr.)
40. Edged ahead
41. Continental money
42. Catholic comedian married to Bette
43. Stops
45. Favorite food of Isaac (Gen 25:28)
46. Cite Scripture
48. A fallen angel
51. Hilton, for example
56. 8th month of the Jewish calendar
57. A sister of Calliope
59. Spherical opening?
60. Formerly, formerly
61. Intense light beam
62. Vener's captain
63. Scarf
64. Window cover
65. Small drink of liquor

DOWN
1. Commandment carrier and Noah's ship
2. Upset
3. CCCXXI + DCXXX
4. Our Lady, ___ of Christians
5. ___ James
6. Islands in the Atlantic
7. Blow-up
8. Anger
9. Harshbarg of Notre Dame, to friends
10. "___ one another with a holy kiss" (1 Cor 16:20)
11. Ethiopian princess of music
12. Biblical dry measure
13. Season that begins with Ash Wednesday
14. These were waved at Jesus when he entered Jerusalem
15. After FDR
16. "Mary"
17. Jewish measure
18. Media union (abbr.)
19. Edged ahead
20. Continental money
21. Catholic comedian married to Bette
22. Stops
23. Favorite food of Isaac (Gen 25:28)
24. Cite Scripture
25. Bk. of the Pentateuch
26. Reestablish
27. ___ of Man
28. Rampaged
29. Direction from Jerusalem to Nazareth
30. Capital of Tibet
31. ___ Iraq
32. Jaguarundi
33. Sunday service
34. Holy
35. Road to the Colosseum
36. Madame Bovary
37. The Upper ___
38. High trains
39. Cheer

Solution on page 14

Special to The Catholic Commentator

Scouts learn work ethic while giving back

Bear Scouts from Pack 170, Den 5 and Den 8 helped to restore the Holy Ghost Church in Hammond prayer garden to its former beauty this summer. Third-grade scouts bagged groceries at a local supermarket to earn money to purchase materials for the project. The prayer garden was chosen because a majority of the scouts attend Holy Ghost School and are members of the church. The prayer garden is a memorial for several people from the Holy Ghost family. It also serves as a Stations of the Cross walk and a serene place to pray, meditate and give thanks.

Scouts spent the day trimming limbs, restoring the broken fountain, fixing the leaky pond, cleaning and restoring spiritual statues, staining the Stations of the Cross monuments and spreading two pallets of mulch. Holy Ghost principal Donna Wallette said, “I am just blown away by everything that was done by these scouts. Thank you is just not enough!”

Though the scouts are happy with their progress in the garden, they aren’t finished yet. In the fall, the scouts plan to have a planting day to add color to the space and have agreed to maintain the prayer garden until their eighth grade graduation.

The scouts are under the leadership of Lee Foster, Mike Mercante, Julie Ponder and Tara Pierre.

Cub scouts from Holy Ghost School in Hammond worked to restore the beauty of the memorial prayer garden at Holy Ghost Church this summer. The third-graders plan to keep up the garden through eighth grade. Photo provided by Cindy Wagner Holy Ghost School
Hotel Transylvania 3: Summer Vacation

Sony

Breezy second sequel to the 2012 original finds Dracula’s daughter (voice of Selena Gomez) arranging for her overworked father (voice of Adam Sandler) and the other friendly monsters who staff the hostelry of the title (the most prominent voiced by Kevin James, David Spade and Steve Buscemi) to take a cruise. But when widowed Dad falls for the ship’s captain (voice of Kathryn Hahn), he feels torn between romance and family responsibilities. He also fails to realize that the skipper has a secret conflict of her own based on the legacy of her vampire-hunting ancestors, embodied by her artificially preserved great-grandfather (voice of Jim Gaffigan). Like the excursion around which it’s built, the plotline has him tangling with a band of hitmen who unwittingly assassinate a major CIA asset in Brussels, drawing his old boss at the agency (Melissa Leo), who is also his closest friend, into the investigation. In between maiming and killing the bad guys, he mentors a neighbor lad (Ashton Sanders) hoping to keep him from joining a local gang, and reconnects with his former partner (Pedro Pascal) from his days as an operative. Solitary, grieving, beset by mild obsessive-compulsive disorder, the widowed loner would make a sympathetic figure if his hobby were not wreaking bloody vengeance. By the time he dispatches one of his opponents with a harpoon, however, the combination of gruesome mayhem and skewed values overwhelms all attempts at justification or excuse in returning screenwriter Richard Wenk’s dialogue. Excessive gory violence, including torture, vigilantism, at least one mild oath, frequent rough and crude language. O; R

The Equalizer 2

Columbia

Neither the gifts of Denzel Washington in the title role nor the good his character sometimes achieves compensate for the second round of do-it-yourself justice he delivers to various malefactors in director Antoine Fuqua’s follow-up to his 2014 thriller. This time out, the protagonist is a Lyft driver who sometimes avenges his wronged passengers. But the principal plotline has him tangling with a band of hitmen who unwittingly assassinate a major

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

REVIEWS

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It is also true for the soul. If we starve the soul, we die a spiritual death. So how do we feed our soul? Where can we get such food? Who ultimately feeds both our body and our soul, providing the best and perfect way of nourishing our very being in order for us to live for today, tomorrow and eternally? What does this look like? How can we obtain such a gift? Where can we find this? Here is a hint, “Have you been to Mass lately?” Stay tuned for the next issue.

“So be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma” (Eph 5:2).

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

catholiclife.tv.org

NEW TIME
STARTING AUGUST 5

Sunday Mass
from St. Joseph Cathedral
LIVE at 10:30am

Replays
12:30pm
4:30pm
6:30pm

catholiclife
television

Info 225.242.0218

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The Catholic Commentator VIEWPOINT  August 3, 2018

The unclean spirits of an increasingly secular society

Young children are clearly the most vulnerable members of society and certainly deserving of our protection. Yet, they continue to be exploited as pawns in bi-partisan political chess matches. Paradoxically, young lives are being used to bolster two seemingly unrelated political planks, that of immigration and abortion.

The so-called “zero-tolerance” policy enacted by the Trump administration separated 2,700 young immigrant children from their parents during a seven-month period beginning in October. The children in question, some under the age of five, were separated from their parents because the parents who entered the country illegally were detained for potential prosecution and the children placed in foster care or in the custody of a family member. Some are using these children to cast dispersion on the Trump administration and his controversial immigration policies.

In a debate with far more tragic implications, unborn children are being used as the flashpoint in the debate to replace retired Supreme Justice Court Anthony Kennedy, who was generally considered a swing vote on many issues. Trump has nominated federal judge Brett Kavanaugh but, unfortunately, few seem willing to evaluate him on his jurisprudence acumen.

Rather, pro-abortion forces are lobbing what could be perceived as scare tactics that if Kavanaugh is approved, it’s a no-brainer the court will overturn Roe v. Wade, the 1973 decision that legalized abortion.

Conversely, many conservatives are lobbying the litmus test for any nominee is that person’s stance on Roe v. Wade.

Of course, there is no moral equivalency between abortion and immigrant children being separated from their families at the border because of an alleged illegal act by their parents. Abortion is inherently evil, the silencing of a human heart with the weapon of choice a surgical instrument ostensibly designed to save lives.

But under no circumstances should children be placed at the center of either of these debates. Children, whether they are immigrants or in a mother’s womb, have the right to a healthy and hearty childhood, the right to live in freedom, and most importantly the right to survive in their mother’s womb.

We should be guardians of our children, not exploiters. It’s a lesson some politicians must learn.

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Another Perspective

Father John Carville

PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PRAY FOR US

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

Aug. 9  Rev. Joseph M. Camilleri  Dcn. Angelo S. Nola  Sr. Lan Thuuy Bui KC
Aug. 11  Rev. John Carville  Dcn. Stephen Paul Ourso  Sr. Helen Cahill FMOL
Aug. 12  Rev. Edward Chiffirller SSJ  Dcn. Ricky A. Patterson
Aug. 13  Br. Dwight Kenney SC  Rev. Thomas F. Clark SJ
Aug. 19  Rev. Al. M. Davidson  Dcn. Mario (Sam) Sammartino  Sr. Judith Couture CSJ
To the friends I’ve known

Recently, reading Commonwealth magazine, I was struck by this line by Jerry Ryan, a Little Brother of Jesus: “I have lost contact with so many people who meant a lot to me at different stages of my life, people I loved dearly and really cared for and who had given me so much and made me what I am.”

That’s so true for me and, I suspect, for most of us. People enter our lives, friendships develop, and then some of those friends disappear from our lives. Sometimes we move away, sometimes they move away, sometimes things change and we drift apart, or sometimes the affective bonds that held us together disintegrate and they, and we, move on. To the degree that we’re sensitive, there’s always some pain and guilt in this. It’s not an unhealthy thing to feel the loneliness of that loss, nor is it unhealthy to feel that somehow we’ve failed and been less than attentive.

Indeed sometimes we have been less than faithful, but mostly the blame for that (to the extent that some applies) lies inside our inculpable inadequacy. Only God is adequate. Only God has a heart big enough to be attentive to everyone personally and intimately at the same time. Only God never moves away or grows tired. And only God has the strength to forever be faithful. We cannot be inadequate. I struggle mightily with that inadequacy. Being a missionary, given the work I do, and given the quirks of my personality, I find myself perennially overwhelmed by my inadequacy in the area of staying close to family and friends, including very dear friends. The task isn’t easy.

First, I come from a very large family which through the generations has expanded into a virtual tribe. It could be a fulltime job just staying in touch with family. Next, I’ve been ministering for more than 40 years and during that time have lived inside various Oblate houses with almost 200 different people. Community is family and, again, it would be a fulltime task just staying in meaningful touch with them all. Then, during my years of doing graduate work, I had the privileged opportunity to develop long-lasting friendships with a number of classmates from different parts of the world. Finally, during all those years of ministry, I’ve met hundreds of students in classrooms and thousands of people doing workshops and retreats. Most of those encounters were temporary and casual, but through the years a good number of meaningful friendships developed there as well. And, while all this was happening, I’ve lived and worked in four different countries and made friends in each of those places.

Then today there’s the further struggle to stay in touch with all the contacts that one necessarily has to deal with on social media. How does one keep meaningful contact with everyone? How does one not betray friends by simple neglect?

Even as I’m deeply thankful to have so rich a treasury of family and friends, not infrequently I’m overwhelmed with the task of staying in meaningful contact with them and at those times I feel some guilt about forever being out of touch with so many people I was once close to. Sometimes friends whom I have been out of touch with remind me, and not always deliberately, of my neglect of our friendship. But as the years go by and the problem grows larger rather than smaller, I am making more peace with my inadequacy and guilt – if not always with some of my neglected friends.

What helps is to remind myself constantly of what a great grace it is to have so large a family and to have such a large number of friends. There are few things for which to be more grateful. Next, I do try to stay in meaningful touch with them to the extent that time, energy and distance allow. Most importantly, though, given my inadequacy, I try to meet my family and friends at a place where time, energy and distance are eclipsed by an immediate, intimate presence. There’s one place where we’re not inadequate, where we can be at more places than one at the same time and where we can love countless people individually and intimately, namely, inside the Body of Christ.

Scripture tells us that, as believers, we form together a body that, as much as any living body, is a true living organism, with all parts affecting all other parts. Inside that body we’re present to each other, not fully consciously of course, but deeply, truly, actually. And to the extent that we’re living our lives faithfully and sharing honest friendship and fellowship with those who are immediately around us, we’re not only healthy enzymes helping bring health to the body, we’re also present to each other, affectively, in a way that touches us at the deepest level of our souls. There is a place where we are not neglecting each other.

And so, to all my friends: we’re still together!

OBLATE FATHER RON 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 onrolheiser.com and facebook.com/ronrolheiser.

God rested. Don’t we need the same?

This column almost made a liar out of me.

“T’ll write about leisure,” I decided one morning at Mass, snuggled next to a rarely calm child, soaking in the Sunday quiet.

A perfect topic for July’s sultry weather and summer vacations. Gentle reminders that God calls us to rest.

But then my work schedule picked up. So did my husband’s. House projects became emergencies; kids got sick; calendars got thrown off.

When I finally sat down to write, my fingers paused, caught. Nothing came to mind.

Turns out I had zero leisure in my life.

Even before our family’s rhythms slipped from school schedules to summer’s slower pace, I had started to notice the restless itch. The inability to slow down, the frantic rush from one must-do to the next, the nagging guilt that stopping would be easy.

We read in Genesis that God rested on the seventh day. But too often we dismiss this notion for our own “crazy busy” lives as quaint or cute, a heavenly nap on the couch after a long week of creation. But what if like every one of God’s actions resting on the Sabbath was a powerful and profound act of divine might and wisdom?

God rested. Why do we think we don’t need to do the same?

“We tend to overwork as a means of self-escape, as a way of trying to justify our existence,” wrote the German Catholic philosopher Josef Pieper in “Leisure: The Basis of Culture.”

Look around at our culture. It’s not hard to see that most of us are soul-worn, living beyond basic human needs. Living even beyond divine mandate.

The Third Commandment tells us to keep holy the Sabbath. The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that “the Sabbath brings everyday work to a halt and provides a respite. It is a day of protest against the servitude of work and the worship of money” (No. 2172).

So how can we slow down to reclaim rest? Here are three ways to make space for Sabbath simple ideas that are helping me get back on track.

First, let technology rest.

I’ve been taking a “phone-free sabbath”; tucking the phone in a drawer on Saturday night and resisting the temptation to scroll on Sunday. I’m embarrassingly admit that it’s harder than I expected.

But the deliberate practice of being offline and available to those who matter most, my spouse and kids, is delightful and refreshing. I pray longer without distraction. I started reading novels again. I sit and notice: children at play, birds at the feeder, growth in our gardens.

Now on Monday mornings, I regret picking the phone back up. The more Sabbath I have, the more I crave it.

Second, let chores rest.

In a bustling household, there is always something to do, fold, fix, file, scrub, wash, sweep or mend.

But a family isn’t called to be a well-oiled machine. We’re a home full of humans who need to rest, relax and enjoy each other’s company, too.

Try piling the dishes in the sink after Sunday lunch. Or quieting the washing machine from its constant churning. Leaving a chore or two to rest (even until Sunday night) can free up a little breathing room.

Third, let yourself rest.

Yes, you, with 1,000 things to do and a racing mind that won’t quit. Go to bed early. Sleep in a little later. Take a guilt-free nap. Summer is a season to slow down and let ourselves breathe again.

Let the God of rest, the God who rested, restore you, body and soul.

FaITH AT HOME
Laura Fanucci

FANUCCI is a mother, writer and director of a project on vocation at the Collegeville Institute in Collegeville, Minnesota. She is the author of several books, including “Everyday Sacrament: The Messy Grace of Parenting,” and blogs at motheringspirit.com.
Day of Renewal — Catholic Charismatic Renewal of the Diocese of Baton Rouge will host a Day of Renewal, “Praise Rally,” Saturday, Aug. 4, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m., at the Our Lady of Mercy Church Parish Activity Center, 444 Marquette Ave., Baton Rouge. No registration will be required. Lunch will be provided. For more information, call 225-636-2464.

Preached Silent Retreat — Father Donald Blanchard will present a preached silent retreat Friday, Aug. 3 – Sunday, Aug. 5. The retreat will focus on the nature of prayer, the need for discipline, forms of prayer and resistance to prayer. To register and for cost information, visit retreats.arch-no.org/retreats, email retreats@arch-no.org or call 1-866-937-9170.

God the Father Mass — Father Ambrose Akalawu CSSp will celebrate a Mass honoring “God, the Father of all mankind” Monday, Aug. 6 at St. Agnes Church, 739 East Blvd., Baton Rouge. Confession and a rosary will begin at 5 p.m. followed by the Mass at 5:30 p.m.

Men’s Conference — The Men of the Cross of Holy Rosary Church, 44540 LA Hwy. 429, St. Amant, is hosting a Men’s Conference Saturday, Aug. 11, beginning at 8 a.m. Speakers will be Father Joshua Johnson, pastor of St. Joseph Church, 1570 LA Hwy. 16, French Settlement. Praise and worship begins at 1:30 p.m., and Mass starts at 2:30 p.m. Individual prayer will start after Mass. For more information, call 225-668-3130.

Pro-Life Mass — A monthly pro-life Mass will be celebrated Tuesday, Aug. 14, 5:30 p.m., at St. Agnes Church, 749 East Blvd., Baton Rouge. All are invited. For more information, call 225-383-4127.

New Orleans Retreat — Father Anthony Rigoli OMI will present a preached silent retreat Wednesday, Aug. 15 – Saturday, Aug. 18 at the Archdiocese of New Orleans Retreat Center, 5000 St. Mary St. Metairie. The theme of the retreat will be “How we teach our children to cross the street gives us three important lessons for the spiritual life.” The Wednesday evening session will focus on the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. For information about cost and to register, call Susan Halligan at 504-267-9604.

Magnificat Breakfast — Denise Beyer will speak at the next breakfast of Magnificat, a ministry to Catholic Women, Saturday, Aug. 18, 9 a.m. – noon, at the Oak Lodge Reception Center, 28354 To weedwood Forest, Blvd., Baton Rouge. Tickets are $22 each and will be sold through Wednesday, Aug. 15 by mailing checks payable to BR Magnificat to Kathy Simonneaux, 9650 Victory Lane, Denham Springs, LA, 70726.

Prayer Service for New Bishop — The Diocese of Baton Rouge will host a prayer service for Bishop-designate Michael G. Duca on the evening before his installation as the sixth bishop of Baton Rouge Thursday, Aug. 23, 7 p.m., at St. George Church, 7808 St. George St., Baton Rouge. The event will also be simulcast online at facebook.com/catholiclife4v. All are welcomed.

Rosaryville Retreats — Rosaryville Spirit Life Center, 39003 Rosaryville Road, Road, Ponchatoula will host two upcoming retreats. Becky Eldredge and Stephanie Cloutier Davis will present a preached silent Ignatian Retreat Thursday, Aug. 23 — Sunday, Aug. 26. The retreat will focus on the Ignatian exercises. Writer and playwright Paul Darcy will present a silent retreat Thursday, Aug. 29 – Sunday, Aug. 31. For details, visit call 225-294-5039, email scalias@oppeace.org or visit catholicretreatcenter.org.

Marriage Help — A Retrouvaille weekend will be held to help couples with troubled marriages Friday, Sept. 7 – Sunday, Sept. 9. For confidential information and to register, call 225-993-2443, email retro vibrecomoor@gmail.com or visit helpourmarriage.org.

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through genealogy and scholarly research."

The diocesan archives collection consists of more than 550 sacramental registers dating to 1707 with the Acadians. Those records are reportedly the only known church records to survive the Le Grand Derangement when the British expelled the Acadians from Nova Scotia.

Many of these records came with the Acadians who settled in the St. Gabriel area and built a church.

The earliest church registers date to 1728 from St. Francis Church in Pointe Coupee.

The collection also consists of bishops’ records, photographs, microfilm, memorabilia, liturgical and sacred items and records of parishes, schools and Catholic organizations.

“It’s not just the building but it’s the records that are being housed in this building; that’s what is important,” Boltin said in an interview with The Catholic Commentator. “Our records are woven into the fabric of the history of the people of Louisiana. You can’t tell one story without telling another story.”

She said the records include not only the Acadians, but also groups from France, Germany, Britain and the Canary Islands.

She said those people all brought their faith, and those records are in the archives registers.

“These are records of art, love, war and plague,” said Boltin, who explained sacramental records include those of baptism, confirmation, ordination, marriage and burial. “Everything will now be in one place under one roof.”

Boltin admitted there were times when she had doubts about the building becoming reality, because of some setbacks, including zoning issues with the city of Baton Rouge. But she said Bishop Muench “never lost confidence in anything, he never had doubts that it was going to happen.

“Without him the project never would have developed. He has been the guiding force behind all of this and we are immensely grateful to him for everything.”

Bishop Muench even admitted there were naysayers.

Boltin said the dedication was the culmination of everything that has been worked for. She said she and her staff were still in disbelief that “we are actually going to get to work in this beautiful place.

“It’s like you are molding your own piece of art out of clay.”

From early returns, the art is a masterpiece.

**BEATITUDES ▼**

From page 7

God, “What is it you want me to do today?”

“The things I tell people in confession so much, especially when it’s about envy, gossip and judging others: We all look at people who are better than us,” said Father Martin. “They say, ‘This one is more intelligent; this one is more eloquent; this one is much more handsome or a better athlete.’ There’s always going to be someone better than us in every aspect.

“The problem is we tend to think there’s something wrong with us or we’re flawed because we are not the best. But God doesn’t need us to be the best in all these things. He makes no mistakes. He’s given us the right amount of intelligence, eloquence, looks, athletic skills, whatever characteristic you want to talk about, to do what he wants us to accomplish in this world. He has great things in store for all of us. The problem is we don’t want to fit in our mold, we want to fit in someone else’s mold. That creates friction and unhappiness in us.”

Father Martin assures people that God has good things in store for them.

“But it’s not by setting the world on fire, but by showing up and saying ‘God, how can I be your arms and legs today? Please show me.’

“That’s all it takes. You don’t have to climb a mountain or even look as you’re going down the road God wants you to go down and say, ‘Oh, no, I’m not going through that part of town or that mountain is too steep – you must need someone else to take that path.’ No, he’s right there with you. You just take the next step, take a deep breath in and breathe out, left foot, right foot and trust him with an Our Father Lord’s Prayer: “Give me this day my daily bread, whatever I need to get through this moment of this day. I trust you Lord,” Father Martin said.
LOAN ▼
From page 1
Matt Dupré, according to Father Lorrain.
“IT was a big job,” said Larry Durbin, who served on the building committee and acted as project manager on behalf of the church. “It took us a little over two years to do it, from the time we vacated the church until we moved back in.”
“IT turned out to be quite a large project, some $4 million,” said Father Lorrain. “They had raised quite a bit of money previous to the loan, but the loan was taken out on Aug. 1, 2011 for $1,788,800, which was the balance. And, so we’ve been faithfully, since that time, sending in a loan payment of $12,000 a month.”

According to Father Lorrain, the church would send in money collected through pledges and the monthly building fund collection. He said the debt was so large that after the five-year pledge commitments ran out, “there was still a lot of debt remaining.”

“By and large, most of it was just the generosity of the parishioners, month by month, contributing to the building fund,” he said. “And even after the pledges ran out, I asked them to voluntarily continue to contribute so that we could pay off the note.”

“I think we paid it off a couple of years ahead of what our schedule was,” said Durbin. “I was tickled to death to see our parishioners continue to support it and pay it off.”

“Father Dupré deserves the credit for the restoration of the church,” said Father Lorrain. “You know, with an old building like that, it needed quite a bit of work and once you start digging into it, you’re going to find out that the electrical wiring had to be replaced, things like that. And so it ended up costing quite a bit, but that was the time to do it.”

Besides electrical wiring, all of the plumbing in the building had to be updated. The church, built in 1907, also lacked amenities found in today’s structures. An annex was built that included restrooms, a bridal room, a sacristy and a covered drop off area. Also, the steeple, which Father Lorrain said was blown off in a storm 100 years ago, was replaced.

“Everyone is pleased,” said Durbin. “We’ve had visitors constantly coming by to see the church, our new church, as we call it. We’re very proud of what we’ve accomplished.”

“Though there is more work that needs to be done, according to Father Lorrain, such as a new parish office building, those plans, for now, are on hold.”

“We need to wait a while and kind of enjoy just not having any debt before taking on another big project,” said Father Lorrain. “(It) feels like a huge burden has been lifted. It’s a huge moment. It’s rare that you get a chance to celebrate being debt free because so often there’s another project on the horizon.”

CARVILLE ▼
From page 12
in America magazine, “We recognize unclean spirits today, not through the illnesses they cause but through the minds they enraputre. Individuals, communities, even whole nations can fall prey to systems of thought that obscure God’s love or subvert the means to imitate it. Suicide, addiction, ethical confusion and a general sense of hopelessness are just a few of the signs that unclean spirits prowl our world.”

We need some liberation from those kinds of spirits. We had better pray Psalm 85, “Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.”

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 johnny carville@gmail.com.

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BISHOP ROBERT W. MUENCH

THE HAPPY BISHOP

Special Supplement
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Commentator
August 3, 2018
His Excellency,
The Most Reverend Glen John Provost, D.D., M.A.
Bishop of Lake Charles,
with the clergy, religious and laity of the
Diocese of Lake Charles
express congratulations and best wishes to
The Most Reverend Robert W. Muench
upon his retirement as Bishop of Baton Rouge
after 50 years of ministry,
including 28 years in the episcopacy.

Bishop Muench: ‘It’s been a graced time’

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Laughing over the good times and surprises, reflecting on challenges faced by the diocese and concluding with a note about God’s grace, Bishop Robert W. Muench shared a panoramic view of his life and ministry as he prepared to end his 16-year watch as shepherd of the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Bishop Muench was the person most surprised that God would call him to become a bishop when he entered the priesthood 50 years ago. With his trademark infectious laugh and smiling eyes, he looks back and sees the footsteps of the good shepherd who nudged him to lead his faithful.

The bishop was a nervous 13-year-old when he applied to St. Joseph Seminary College in St. Benedict in 1956 after Sister Mary Alice Russell OP, a former principal at St. Leo the Great Elementary School in New Orleans, asked him the question, “Have you ever thought about being a priest?” to which he replied, “Yes.” She persuaded him that “now is better than later” to apply, and he wondered, “How am I going to shock my parents?” about his desire to apply. They were supportive, as were a number of priests and religious.

After the bishop’s ordination to priesthood on May 18, 1968, his Uncle Bernie gave the freshly-minted priest a letter he wrote as an eight-year-old, inviting his uncle to his first Communion. Bishop Muench’s one-page letter included this sentence: “I think some day I might be a priest.”

Among the priests who served as a role model for him was Father Alcide Clement, who served as pastor at St. Leo. The bishop had fond memories of Father Clement training him to be a master of ceremonies during the Holy Week Masses. Without a notebook or notes, Father Clement sat with the future bishop on the steps to the sacristy of St. Leo and patiently went through the ceremonies one by one, teaching the young man when to turn the page, bring items up, etc.

“As a twerpy 13-year-old teen, I felt validated as a human being,” said Bishop Muench.

With so many good priests as role models, Bishop Muench said he was “happy as a lark” being a parish priest and it was his first love. Yet he was called forth to become a leader in Catholic education.

Archbishop John P. Cody sent Bishop Muench, then a seminarian to Catholic University in Washington, D.C. to study theology and work on his master’s degree in education. Archbishop Cody told the bishop at the time to plan on being appointed as principal of a Catholic high school after ordination.

He taught at St. John Vianney Prep School in New Orleans, which was then a high school for young men aspiring to be priests. He also served as chaplain at Brother Martin High School, also in New Orleans.

Bishop Muench served four years as a teacher and counselor at St. John before asking Archbishop Philip M. Hannan to reassign him to a parish ministry.

But God had different plans. Archbishop Hannan called Bishop Muench to work as an administrative assistant, and as part of those duties he was heavily involved in the planning of St. John Paul II’s visit to New Orleans in 1987. Later, Archbishop Francis B. Schulte, who had succeeded Archbishop Hannan, appointed Bishop Muench to serve as vicar general.

He was further shocked when he was appointed auxiliary bishop of New Orleans in May 1990.

Father Michael Fritzen appeared to leak the news, but was actually just conjecturing, when then-Msgr. Muench filled in for Archbishop Schulte during a confirmation ceremony at St. Paul Church in New Orleans. Father Fritzen thanked him for coming and added, “After all, everyone knows Msgr. Muench is going to be the next auxiliary bishop of New Orleans.”

Bishop Muench angrily thought, “I am never going to be able to dispel this false rumor.”

But only a few hours later, Archbishop Schulte called him to the archbishop’s office and said, “I’m going to make you an auxiliary bishop.”

Bishop Muench then spent eight years as auxiliary bishop of New Orleans before being appointed as bishop of Baton Rouge in 2003.

As his time as bishop of Baton Rouge comes to a close, Bishop Muench summed up his ministry with a note of gratitude.

“Thank you for the grace of your support and commitment. It has been a graced time.”

SEE REFLECTION PAGE 3B
Schulte asked him to meet him in his office. He said Archbishop Schulte said, “Let’s go to the chapel (at Notre Dame Seminary).”

At the time, the Bishop of Detroit was retiring, so Bishop Muench thought the news would be that Archbishop Schulte was being appointed there.

“He said, ‘The pope has appointed you the next auxiliary bishop of New Orleans,’ ” said Bishop Muench.

“I had missed it, ‘Zoom!’” laughed the bishop.

Attracted to the role that St. John the Baptist played in her life, Bishop Muench chose the episcopal motto, “Jesus Must Increase” (Jn 3:30).

“He (St. John Baptist) was saying ‘I’m not the the one, Jesus is one,’” said Bishop Muench.

And he continues to be humbled that God called him to leadership roles.

“This was not my plan. Being a priest was my plan, I loved the priesthood and still love the priesthood,” said the bishop.

But God nudged him farther along. In 1996, Bishop Muench was appointed bishop of Covington, Kentucky. He had known the bishop of that diocese was retiring.

When a papal nuncio visited the archbishop’s residence in New Orleans he asked him, “You’re from Kentucky, aren’t you?” But Bishop Muench never connected the dots that he would be going to Kentucky.

“Archbishop Schulte called me into his office and said, ‘The nuncio called me, and he said, ‘This time we need Bobby: You are being assigned to Covington.’” said Bishop Muench.

“Kentucky?” the bishop quizzically thought. “It was like, I’m not ready for this’ and it had nothing to do with Kentucky. One builds up comfort with the known (New Orleans).”

The bishop said the transition was eased because of his relationship with outgoing Bishop William Hughes. And, his former classmate, Father Ray Hartman, also retired, lived in the diocese.

The bishop oversaw the massive restoration and refurbishment of the Basilica of the Assumption while in Covington.

But God wasn’t through with the surprises. Bishop Muench was called to be bishop of Baton Rouge two weeks after the renovations of the basilica were complete. He remembers thinking when the Baton Rouge diocese was established in 1961 that it was a nice part of the state but that he would never be assigned there now that it had become its own diocese.

He mused that when asked how he felt about going to the Diocese of Baton Rouge he said it was a wonderful diocese with a lot of gifts and that he would be closer to his elderly parents.

“My dad was upset. He said call people elderly at 120,” laughed Bishop Muench.

The bishop’s parents attended his installation on March 14, 2002.

He shared many warm memories about the later years of his parents, who moved back to Kentucky after Hurricane Katrina and lived at St. Joseph Cemetery for the Aged in Louisville. His mother received her dying wish to pass away with the Little Sisters of the Poor by her bedside. His dad lived to be 101.

Bishop Muench has served as bishop of the diocese longer than any of his four predecessors.

“It’s a wonderful place to be,” said the bishop. “I’m grateful for all the good the people...”

**With Thanks**

The Catholic Commentator greatly appreciates the contributions and assistance of the Archives Department of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, Dr. Boyd Helm, Bishop Robert W. Muench’s sisters, the Archives Department of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, the Clarion Herald, St. Joseph Seminary College, Catholic Life TV and, of course, Bishop Muench in putting together this commemorative edition.

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Most Reverend Robert W. Muench
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We were one,’ bishop’s sisters say of family

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

“We’re four different children but we’re one,” said Mary Muench Pringle, sister of Bishop Robert W. Muench. She was describing the closeness, the love and the faith-filled dynamic of the Muench family.

The Muench family emigrated to the U.S. from Germany, settling in Kentucky, according to Pringle. When Bishop Muench was three-years-old, his father, William Anthony; mother, Mary Kathryn (Allgeier); older sister, Jo Ann Muench Talken; and baby, Mary, who was 8-months-old, moved to New Orleans for his father’s job.

“There was no favoritism in the family,” said Pringle. “We were one, we were all part of one another. Even today we have a hard time when we are separated. Jo Ann being out of town in California; Marsha, Bob and I do a lot of things but we’re always missing a piece of us when Jo Ann’s not with us.”

Being so close and close in age also came with its challenges, as Pringle related times she caught her parents’ ire over scrapes created by her older brother. The memories of these episodes still fill her with joy and tears of laughter.

“He was always up to something,” she laughed. “I was his little drag along, whatever he wanted to do, whatever trouble he wanted to get in and I was so easy going that I got in, more trouble because of him and he would be Mr. Innocent, (saying) ‘Me? I didn’t do anything.’”

One particular incident that still makes Pringle laugh involved bedtime, when the children shared one large room upstairs in the family home. According to Pringle, her older brother would cause a noisy commotion then feign sleep when their father walked up the stairs to scold them.

“And, I used to tell Dad, ‘Really? Do you think I’d be sitting up there yelling by myself knowing what was going to happen?’ But, he (Bishop Muench) was always full of it with me and always dragging me in trouble,” Pringle laughed.

Early on, the family knew their brother would be a priest.

“It was kind of funny because a friend of my mom said, ‘You know, he is going to be a priest or a radio announcer,’” said Pringle. “But, (Bishop Muench) was always used and we sat there and I was his altar server. And, I used to tell Dad, ‘Really? Do you think I’d be sitting up there yelling by myself knowing what was going to happen?’”

Mary, and he’s mentioned that sometimes I got in, more trouble because of him. ‘His vocation was always there. Always,’ said Pringle.

Pringle then described how her 9-year-old brother spent playtime pretending to celebrate Mass as a priest, with her as an altar server.

“He would set up a little table outside the garage door, take the dictionary he used and we sat there and I was his altar server and I better listen to what he said and how he said it because he would tell me I didn’t do it right or whatever,” she laughed.

Bishop Muench left the family at age 13 and exploring in the woods. When Bishop Muench was appointed the general and auxiliary bishop of New Orleans, including as a religion teacher, director of vocations, vicar general and auxiliary bishop of New Orleans. When Bishop Muench was appointed the

SEE SISTERS PAGE 28B

Bishop Muench’s sisters, from left, Jo Ann Talken, Mary Pringle and Marsha Morse

Bishop Muench, We Love You

On behalf of our entire St. Vincent de Paul family and those we serve, thank you for your outstanding support and leadership. No words better describe your impact in our community than your motto, “Jesus Must Increase.” Your vision and dynamic leadership have allowed our Society to grow in a remarkable fashion to ensure that all of God’s children, especially those in need, will feel Jesus’ love. We would like to publicly recognize and thank you for being such a good shepherd for all the people of our Diocese.

Many charitable visions have become realities during the years that you have been our shepherd. The need has grown, and under your leadership, St. Vincent de Paul has made a real impact in our community. In the last twelve months, we served over 270,000 meals, filled prescriptions worth more than a million dollars, and provided over 27,000 guest nights of shelter. We just completed and opened the expansion of our Sweet Dreams Shelter, and we hope to break ground on a new Day Center/Emergency Shelter in the coming months. We are also pursuing our next vision of building a chapel on our main charitable campus.

Through your support of our efforts, you have exemplified the Gospel message of love and compassion, as well as faith in action. You have played such an important role in our visions and accomplishments, and we are forever grateful for your direction, counsel and encouragement. Thank you for making an impact that truly cannot be measured.
Friends for life

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

The first time Dr. Boyd Helm of Baton Rouge met Bishop Robert W. Muench was 1952. The fifth-grade boys attended St. Leo the Great School in New Orleans and both served as altar boys.

“It was a different time; it was safe,” recalled Helm. “So, as grammar school kids, we took the bus. We went to Canal Street every weekend. And, we had a project, Bobby and I, we were going to go to every radio station and sit in on the live broadcasts and just watch them do their thing.”

One of those stops was WSMB, atop the old Maison Blanche building, where the Ritz-Carlton Hotel is now located. Broadcasting legend Sid Noel who later became the iconic Morgus the Magnificent, was hosting his show when the two young boys, seated nearby, began to be disruptive.

“I can remember sitting there, he's doing his live advertisements, the bishop and I were talking and sort of laughing during his live broadcast and he (Noel) kicked us out,” laughed Helm.

Another innocent incident that still makes Helm laugh happened in eighth grade during lunch hour.

“The bishop, to this day, talks about this incident,” he said. “At St. Leo, you could not say one word during lunch. You sit next to each other and don't say a word. Sister Alice, the principal at that time, came up to us and said, ‘I would give up this ship if I thought that you two were just talking to each other.’ And, Bobby looked at her and didn't say anything and I looked at her and I said, ‘It's time to give up the ship, Sister.’ I think he's still embarrassed because Sister Alice was very important to Bobby because he says to this day that she is the one who gave him his priestly vocation. She's the one that sent him to the seminary and he attributed that to her until the day that she died. And, she was at his bishop (installation) ceremony here in Baton Rouge, in a wheelchair, because they were so close.”

The two best friends were headed for Cor Jesu High School, now Brother Martin High School, when the bishop had a change of heart and settled on going to “St. Ben Seminary.”

“So, I said to my mother, I'm going to go to seminary, too.” She said, “That's not a good idea.” So, I didn't go,” recalled Helm, who ended up finding his calling to be a physician while in high school.

Helm said he knew Bishop Muench would eventually land in Baton Rouge as leader of the diocese.

“We were blessed to have him here,” said Helm. “(My wife and I) are astonished at his devotion to his bishop status, to his priesthood, because even in the face of adversity and physical pains, he has not stopped. So, he just lets the pains go. He puts up with any orthopedic pains he may have and does his job because of the love he has for being the bishop of Baton Rouge.

“He's a very humorous person but he also likes his time alone because he's also a private person in a lot of ways. And, in a lot of ways, there's some shyness to him that he has to give up as being the bishop.

“My mother, who is 100, knows the bishop well because he was at my house all the time. So, to this day, the bishop calls her his second mother and every Mother's Day, he sends her a dozen red roses. She loves that and she loves Bobby. Now, she knew I was going to give this interview so she said, 'When you give that interview, do not embarrass Bobby with those stories.' So, I won't tell some stories,” laughed Helm.

Bishop Robert W. Muench baptizes Dr. Boyd Helm’s son in December 1968.

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Diocese of Baton Rouge Catholic Schools

See the Scrapbook and Videos from each Catholic Schools on the Catholic Schools website: www.csobr.org
Bishop is a ‘pastor’ at heart, Father Ranzino says

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

The first time Father Tom Ranzino, vicar general of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, met Bishop Robert W. Muench was at the Chrism Mass in 1993. Bishop Muench, then auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of New Orleans, was celebrating the Mass for the diocese following the death of Bishop Stanley J. Ott the previous November.

“I remember being a little nervous about him coming in because I didn’t know (if) he would accept any direction or what and I remember being pleasantly surprised that he was both affable and kind and really wanted to do what we normally did,” recalled Father Ranzino, who was chancellor over liturgy at that time. “That was first time working with him in any capacity.”

The two would not cross paths again until the spring of 2002, after Bishop Muench was installed as the fifth bishop of Baton Rouge. After learning who the new bishop of the diocese would be, Father Ranzino spoke to a colleague in Covington, Kentucky, where Bishop Muench had served as bishop prior to being appointed to the Baton Rouge diocese.

“(She said that) if he says something more than once, it’s really important and I took that as sort of an inside scoop so that when I first began to deal with him on more or less a regular basis, I really listened for what he began to repeat,” recalled Father Ranzino. “I eventually told him that, after a number of years. I said, ‘Bishop, I know when you say something more than once, I know it’s really important to you’ and he laughed. He says, ‘You know, I guess that’s true.’”

Father Ranzino credits the smooth transition for Bishop Muench by the fact that the bishop was “genuinely personable and interested in what we had been doing.” Working in the chancery allowed Father Ranzino to work closely with Bishop Muench and Father Than Vu, the vicar general at the time. It was an experience that allowed him to learn about the chancery and other departments within the diocese, including archives because of official materials. Father Ranzino also noted that Bishop Muench and Father Vu had a strong working relationship, with the bishop being able to “hand off to Father (Vu) certain areas of responsibility that Father (Vu) was very good at dealing with.”

After Father Vu’s death from cancer in 2015, Bishop Muench appointed Father Ranzino vicar general.

“I felt grateful that (Bishop Muench) had that trust in me and I thought, ‘Well, how can I bring to this position in the chancery my particular way of looking at dealing with issues, which I try to bring more people around the table than less?’” he said.

According to Father Ranzino, some
Archbishop Thomas J. Rodi
and the People of the Archdiocese of Mobile
Offer Prayers and Best Wishes to

Bishop Robert W. Muench

As he begins his retirement
after his dedicated service to God’s people

Believing that Deus Providebit,
We pray God will shower abundant blessings upon him.
Gautreau hopes bishop ‘takes time to relax’

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Marsha Gautreau calls it “divine intervention” that she became administrative secretary to Bishop Robert W. Muench 13 years ago.

“I had been in the chemical industry for about 15 years and my daughter was married and my son left for the military. One of my girlfriends passed away — she was so young. I decided that it was time to change careers and do something meaningful,” Gautreau said.

She resigned from her job thinking “something will come up.” Because her first job after graduating from high school was working for the church, she told her sister-in-law, who worked in one of the diocesan church parishes, that she wanted to go back to work for the church. The next day her sister-in-law called and said her office had received a fax that Bishop Muench was looking for an administrative assistant.

“When I went for the interview I can remember telling the bishop that I was trying to relate (the advertised position) to something that I was doing before — working in a big corporation. ‘You would be the corporate president, the priests would be the salesmen and everyone else would be the workers.’ It’s the same thing as a corporate office, it’s just a different industry. But I’ve been blessed for the past 13 years,” she said.

Gautreau said it is not hard to keep up with the bishop’s schedule, but it fills up quickly.

“So about a year-and-a-half in advance I try to schedule his confirmations and his other priorities. The challenge is when people call a month or two or three weeks in advance and ask him to be at a function and his calendar is already booked up,” Gautreau said. “It’s a challenge in a way that he (the bishop) has time to get around to everyone.”

But the bishop does his best to make himself available to everyone, according to Gautreau.

She said the bishop’s family is important to him and he goes on vacation with them each year in August.

And if family or clergy call, Gautreau connects them with the bishop.

Furthermore, the bishop “takes care of himself” — he drives himself, does his own grocery shopping, etc., according to Gautreau.

Because the bishop is known for his sense of humor and easily relating to people, some may ask, “Is he always that way?”

“Most of the time he is. There are times when the office of bishop has its trials and challenges, I would say 90 percent of the time, he’s upbeat and very easy going,” said Gautreau.

Gautreau said she has worked with Bishop Muench through various stressful situations over the year.

“We went through (Hurricane) Katrina together,” said Gautreau. “He was an unbelievably good shepherd with everyone who went through the devastation, and of course with the flood (in 2016) ...”

She added, “My favorite memories are whenever he shepherds the diocese when people are in need. When he’s out helping the needy and people who have been through devastating circumstances and visiting hospitals. Many people don’t realize he does a lot of the same things a pastor does. He gives a lot of spiritual direction. He’s very grounded (from his time as a priest) and that continues to guide him.”

Gautreau hopes the bishop finds leisure time in retirement.

“People can’t appreciate how busy he is and how little time he has for himself,” said Gautreau. “His calendar can’t be any busier than it is now. I hope he finds some quiet time for solitude and to slow down. I know he wants to volunteer and help, but I hope he takes time to relax.”

Farewell Bishop Muench

Congratulations on your retirement!
St. Patrick Parish expresses heartfelt thanks to you for your dedication and service to the Diocese of Baton Rouge.
We pray that God will bless you abundantly with peace and joy for years to come.

St. Patrick Catholic Church • Baton Rouge, LA
With Thanksgiving to
Bishop Robert W. Muench

The Diocese of Fort Worth,
Bishop Michael F. Olson,
the priests, religious, deacons, and laity gratefully acknowledge your guidance and care for the Diocese of Baton Rouge and prayerfully extend best wishes upon your retirement.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.
John 10:11
‘The liveliest bishop we had,’
Father Carville recalls

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Father John Carville remembers his first encounter with the man who would serve as bishop of the Diocese of Baton Rouge for 16 years.

With a smile, Father Carville recalled Bishop Robert W. Muench as “sort of skinny” who displayed a fierce devotion to the sport of handball. Although he was several years ahead of Bishop Muench at Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans, Father Carville said Bishop Muench’s handball talents were outstanding.

Years later, in 2001, Father Carville was pleasantly surprised when the Vatican announced Bishop Muench would be replacing then-Bishop Alfred C. Hughes, who had been appointed archbishop of the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

“When we (received the news) I said, ‘that makes sense,’” said Father Carville, who was serving his second term as diocesan administrator, the first being after the death of Bishop Stanley J. Ott. “I can’t say that we anticipated who it would be, but we were happy.

“(The Vatican) was thinking about someone who was close to us.”

Father Carville, who taught at the seminary for 10 years, remembers how Bishop Muench was the “gatekeeper” in the archdiocesan chancery for those wanting to see Archbishop Francis Schulte.

“(Bishop Muench) sort of put you at ease and told you what the archbishop wanted from you, and then you got ushered in,” he recalled.

Although their personalities differed, Father Carville said he always enjoyed working with Bishop Muench. He fondly remembers the enthusiasm the bishop has had regarding what was going on at the Catholic high schools.

“And so his penance services (at the high schools), which he structured very carefully, were big events where as before they were never that much,” added Father Carville, who also served as vicar general under Bishop Muench. “That impressed me.”

Father Carville said Bishop Muench was likely the “liveliest bishop we had.” He recalled Bishop Robert E. Tracy as being “such a forceful person” and Bishop Ott as a social person.

“Bishop Muench had the gift of making a large crowd laugh and feel at ease and happy with whatever ceremony or liturgical celebration that was going on,” Father Carville said.

He said the bishop’s frugality might be his greatest gift to Bishop-designate Michael G. Duca. Father Carville said because of Bishop Muench’s financial leadership, the diocesan finances are in “very good order.”

Father Carville said he always remembers Bishop Muench’s devotion to the sacraments and his “good homilies that often had a bit of humor in them.”
Chef Folse, bishop cook up close friendship

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

“I knew of Bishop (Robert W.) Muench back in 1984, when he was the auxiliary bishop of (the Archdiocese) New Orleans and working on the visit from St. John Paul II,” recalled renowned chef John Folse during an interview at the Catholic Life Center in Baton Rouge.

According to Folse, Bishop Stanley J. Ott visited Folse’s Donaldsonville restaurant regularly and recommended the chef as caterer for a dinner for the pope. Though plans fell through for that event, Folse later got another invitation to serve St. John Paul II at the bishops’ conference in Rome. He also attended Mass and had an audience with the pope at the Papal Palace of Castel Gandolfo, Italy, an event that Folse said changed his life and faith life.

Folse partnered with Bishop Ott to begin the Poor Man’s Supper, now known as St. Vincent de Paul Society’s Count Your Blessings Supper, 23 years ago. The event serves 350 people each year and Bishop Muench has been part of the program for six years.

“Bishop Muench has been the bishop that has influenced my religious work in the community, but also the philanthropic work, between the seminarians, well, you name it,” said Folse.

“When I met Bishop Muench, I not only met a bishop, I met someone who was going to become a very close friend,” he added. “He was always willing to spend time to talk about things that you really needed in your religious life, in your faith life. So we became friends early on. He immediately took up the same dinner that other bishops had done, but then he said, ‘Who else can we get involved?,’ so I started getting involved in many other ways, because he was willing to get out in the community. He was a priest of the people. People love Bishop Muench. He was so big and his smile was so huge the kids just gravitated toward him and he just loved children. And I was always moved by the way children reacted to Bishop Muench. And, if I called him for a TV show, he was always ready. He never said no. And, I know a lot of times he just didn’t have the time but his time was so generous to me and, of course, I could never say no to him, so whatever he needed. And I can remember walking into his dining room here for the first time and seeing that beautiful picture on the wall of the Good Shepherd and it was the first time looking at the picture of the Good Shepherd, with Jesus holding that little lamb. I thought to myself, I know exactly what that is, now. I know Muench and I know what the Good Shepherd really means because Muench just had that ability to attract people, regardless of faith. His motto of ‘Jesus must increase’ was incredible to me that every time we talked, every time we walked, Jesus’ name should be in it. Jesus must increase in our community and in our school.

“The most emotional day I ever had with Bishop Muench was when my dad died and I’m in church, standing at the altar with my family and there were all these people coming in who knew our family’s story, we lived in poverty, in the swamps of Louisiana. And, I looked down the aisle and commented to my sister, ‘Daddy had nothing, but look at these people. How did he get these people?’ And, at the back of the line was Bishop Muench and I told my sister, ‘Bishop Muench is in the back of the line and it’s 8 o’clock at
A great storyteller

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Spend a few minutes with Bishop Robert W. Muench and invariably his love of St. Joseph Seminary College will become apparent.

He attended high school at the abbey; in the days when many priests entered seminary after eighth grade. Bishop Muench also completed his college studies at the St. Benedict campus before attending Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans.

Even today, Bishop Muench is the chair of the abbey’s finance committee and sits on the board of trustees. Previously, he was chair of the physical plant committee.

“Bishop Muench loves to talk about his days here,” Abbot Justin Brown OSB said. “Whenever he has the opportunity, he talks about the positive experience he had here, the great times he had, how foundational that experience was to him as a priest.

“He credits his time at St. Joseph Seminary and the abbey for giving him a great love for the liturgy, for music, for prayer. He’s so grateful to the monks for that experience.”

Abbot Brown said his staff and the monks always find the bishop to be a positive and grateful alumnus, plus he always has a great story to tell.

That relationship took on greater importance after flooding in the spring of 2016 devastated the abbey. Some buildings took on several feet of water, causing temporary displacement of seminarians. Exacerbating the problem was the fact the abbey did not carry flood insurance, with damage topping more than $20 million.

The damage was so extensive that the popular retreat center did not open until earlier this year.

“(Bishop Muench) also has been very much involved in helping us since the flood in our recovery by being very generous by extending help from the Diocese of Baton Rouge to the abbey and seminary during this time,” Abbot Brown said.

He said his first memory of Bishop Muench was in the 1970s watching him in a “fierce” handball game, “beating one of the seminarians.” At the time, the bishop was the vocations director of the Archdiocese of New Orleans and Abbot Brown himself a seminarian.

The bishop’s prowess on the handball court is legendary, extending to his own seminary days.

“I remember him, from the moment meeting him, being very impressed with his spirit, his joy, his enjoyment of life and people,” Abbot Brown said. “Whenever he came around, he always added such a great spirit to any room, any group, any meeting and that goes back to that very first meeting of him.”

Bishop Louis F. Kihneman, III
And The People Of
The Diocese of Biloxi
Offer Prayers And Best Wishes
To Bishop Roger Muench
On Your Retirement.

Thank you for the gift of your ministry.
May God Shower You With Every Grace And Blessing.

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Bishop Muench a minister to the downtrodden

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Bishop Robert W. Muench has left an indelible mark on some of the most poverty-stricken and vulnerable families in the Diocese of Baton Rouge, according to longtime Society of St. Vincent de Paul director Michael Acaldo.

Since being installed as the diocese’s fifth bishop in 2002, the bishop has made the growth of St. Vincent de Paul a priority, and his efforts have paid off with an amazing uptick in services and assistance to those most in need, according to Acaldo.

Just in meals served to the homeless and needy, the total has grown from 100,000 in 2002 to 267,000 a year ago.

“So that gives you an idea of the number of meals and the number of people we’re serving, the difference we’re making and what really is for me, eye-opening,” said Acaldo, who has been steering St. Vincent de Paul for the past 29 years.

But the bishop’s influence extends beyond a few additional free meals. The annual toy giveaway, where Bishop Muench dons a Santa Claus hat and parcels out Christmas gifts to children, has grown from 200 to 800 this past year.

Anyone that has witnessed the joy emanating from Bishop Muench during this event will likely nod in agreement with Acaldo says the toy giveaway is something the bishop loves.

“He’s really St. Nick, he gets into it, he connects with the children and in a very powerful way, gives them a gift but reminds them, when they’re coming through the line that God loves each and every one of them,” he added.

The bishop is also present at the annual Thanksgiving and Easter dinners, offering up a prayer before the meal. He then engages with those in attendance, inquiring about their own lives and personal challenges, using his trademark humor to brighten their day and never leaving anyone without a powerful word of encouragement.

“When you see Bishop Muench at St. Vincent de Paul, you see a lot of energy and you see him energized,” Acaldo said. “I think it really goes back to serving Christ and understanding the importance the church has in spreading the Gospel message of love. We see the face of Christ in each person we serve and that kind of really motivates him and also makes it a special occurrence.

“It’s very, very powerful to be around when Bishop Muench is at St. Vincent de Paul.”

Acaldo said the bishop not only visits with the guests but also with the volunteers, sending a message that’s not just talking about his faith but also becoming involved. Acaldo said although Bishop Muench has many priorities, making time to serve the poor, serve the homeless and serve those without a voice in the community goes a long way and empowers people to ask themselves what they can do to follow that example.

“There are a lot of great things to get excited about when you talk about Bishop Muench,” he added. “He not only has that one-on-one, that power between one person and another, but his sense of humor is great because it brings people together, and it does so in a way that people focus on what their mission is.”

Under Bishop Muench, St. Vincent has also opened a new men’s shelter, es-

SEE SHELTER PAGE 25B

Bishop Robert W. Muench

As a counselor, teacher and bishop, you have shown tireless commitment to serving the people of God.
Your 50 years of service have been a great blessing to the Church.

We are grateful and thankful for the gifts of your ministry.

May God continue to grant you health and blessings in your retirement.

Congratulations!

+ Daniel Cardinal DiNardo
+ Auxiliary Bishop George A. Sheltz
+ Archbishop Emeritus Joseph A. Fiorenza
+ Retired Auxiliary Bishop Vincent M. Rizzotto
+ The Clergy, Religious and Faithful of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston
Congratulations

BISHOP ROBERT W. MUECH

Thank you for your years of service to the Church.

May the Lord grant you a peaceful and joyful retirement.

+MOST REV. MICHAEL MULVEY, STL, DD
BISHOP OF CORPUS CHRISTI

Bishop Robert W. Muench “has tried his best to be a good shepherd.”

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

During the dedication of the new church at St. Jude Parish in Baton Rouge, at one point Bishop Robert W. Muench sat in the new presider’s chair and smiled.

“Either I’ve lost about 80 pounds or you’ve got a new chair,” he joked, referencing the old presider’s chair that was, what pastor Father Trey Nelson called a “little narrow.”

That type of humor, and his concern for the people of the Diocese of Baton Rouge and especially the welfare of his priests, will be Bishop Muench’s legacy, Father Nelson said.

“I think Bishop Muench has tried his absolute best to be a good shepherd,” Father Nelson said. “I think he dearly loves the people, he dearly loves kids and I think he really is concerned about our priests.

“I personally believe that with all my heart.”

Father Nelson has had a unique, personal look into Bishop Muench as he had to make difficult decisions regarding the closing and merging of church parishes. But Father Nelson was quick to call the bishop “courageous” in making decisions that were not always popular but necessary.

In 2013, Bishop Muench asked Father Nelson to form what was then called The Committee, which later developed into the Planning Task Force. The Committee’s original intent, according to Father Nelson, was to look at two situations in the diocese where there existed some concern.

“When we started meeting, we realized the issue of pastoral planning is more than one or two places in the diocese, it’s a diocesan-wide issue,” Father Nelson said. “So we came to realize that our anxiety, our concern, our reality and what drives our work, and the reason we exist as a task force is a decreasing number of priests and an increasing number of Catholics.”

Although the bishop did not originally give The Committee a carte blanche trust, Father Nelson said about three years ago Bishop Muench “shifted into another gear, and he placed his complete confidence in us.”

“As with any bishop there would be some anxiety, and so with Bishop Muench there was what I would look back on as a normal amount of anxiety,” Father Nelson said. “(Today) we don’t make a step without speaking with him but it really helped us to feel a lot more at peace and a lot more confident in ourselves and the work that we do, knowing that he expressed that he had that much confidence in us.”

Father Nelson added the bishop makes no decision “solo” but relies on the task force for counsel.

“He’s concerned about how the people feel and he seeks enough counsel, and then we recommend what to do,” Father Nelson said. “He has the ball and he calls the play. It’s not easy.

“He takes it very seriously but he believes in what we’re doing. I think it’s very courageous, to be honest, on his part.”

Along with assessing the viability of parishes, the task force has also addressed such pastoral issues as how many Masses a priest can reasonably be expected to celebrate on a weekend, should seminarians need to learn Spanish, pastor preparation programs and other issues that directly affect the quality of life for clergy members. Father Nelson repeated that the bishop’s concern, along with bringing the Gospel message to his people, is the health and happiness of his priests.

He said the bishop gave no push-back and accepted the report “across the board.”

“There have been two things the bishop has said all along about pastoral planning and I think it’s important to know, see PLANNING PAGE 27B.”
Out of the darkness shines the light, hope of unity

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

One of the darkest moments in Baton Rouge’s history provided an opportunity for people to come together for long-needed conversations and healings with the establishment of the Diocese of Baton Rouge Racial Harmony Commission by Bishop Robert W. Muench.

“In the aftermath of the Alton Sterling shooting (July 5, 2016), the bishop really got involved and the Racial Harmony Commission started. He said this is not just a task force (which is formed on a temporary basis and to address a specific task and then disbands), but it is an ongoing commission on racial sobriety and to get people talking about racial prejudice and racism,” said Deacon Alfred Adams, director of the Office of Black Catholics of the Diocese of Baton Rouge and a member of the Racial Harmony Commission.

Bishop Muench said the events leading up to establishing the commission were “gut wrenching.”

“The dual incidences of the loss of life from security and the loss of life by security really challenged our soul as a city of Baton Rouge and as a diocese of the area of Baton Rouge,” said Bishop Muench.

He noted that St. Paul wrote, “We know that all things work for good for those who love God.”

“We don’t wish evil,” the bishop emphasized. “But sometimes it almost takes the evil to prod us to look at where we are and what we tolerate and what we need to change personally and as a community.”

He said in the aftermath of the event, he remembered that on Feb. 11, 1956, he was an altar server at St. Leo the Great Church in New Orleans when the letter of Archbishop Joseph F. Rummel was read in which he called racial segregation morally wrong and sinful.

Bishop Muench said on the Racial Harmony Commission there are “some of the most professional people to assist us in regards to this.”

“The bishop has come to listen, to be a student and learn. He has given us a platform. He has been nothing but supportive,” said Father Johnson.

He noted the work of the commission is bringing about change through dialogue, days of ecumenical service, the writing of a “Building Bridges” prayer for racial harmony for use by church parishes in the diocese and a multi-cultural prayer service on the feast of Corpus Christi at St. Joseph Cathedral.

Father Johnson said the Racial Harmony Commission strives to change racial prejudice at all levels.

“We are learning from each other to transform policies and institutions of racism, to heal hearts and minds. We’re taking a both/and approach. We believe that sin happens within people but also institutions.”

According to Father Paul Yi, chancellor of the Diocese of Baton Rouge and pastor of Ascension of Our Lord and St. Francis churches, in Donaldsonville, which has people of diverse backgrounds, the gift of the Racial Harmony Commission is the changing of hearts.

SEE HOPE PAGE 31B
As we celebrated your 50th anniversary in June, we were grateful to have had you with us for our 50th Jubilee in September 2010 at our parish. We wish you many more anniversary blessings and graces during your time of retirement. We thank you for being our Shepherd of our diocese for 16 years!

Immaculate Conception of The Blessed Virgin Mary
Denham Springs, Louisiana

‘Effective communicator’

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Bishop Robert W. Muench’s ability to put others at ease with his pleasant personality and always ready with a story that would evoke laughter established him as an effective relationship builder in the Louisiana Legislature, according to Rob Tasman, executive director of the Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Tasman has spent the past several years helping the state’s bishops finesse their way through the sometimes murky waters of the Capitol. He said Bishop Muench has been active with LCCB and always willing to offer his insight and expertise.

“I’ve seen him in action with legislators and just like every other individual I’ve seen him with, he’s always gracious, jovial and he brings a joy to the conversation,” Tasman said. “He puts people at ease but at the same time can communicate to them the important points that he needs to get across. He’s very effective at that.”

Tasman said prior to any legislative session, Bishop Muench hosts a luncheon for legislators, an event the lawmakers enjoy attending and they are typically eager to hear what he has to say.

“I think a testament to that is when the luncheon happens it’s a very free flowing conversation, very relaxed,” Tasman said. “I think the legislators appreciate that.

“Just to see him converse with them in a very casual, relaxed way, that means the world with legislators. When they’re dealing with an environment that is consistently tense and dealing with all kinds of conflict and they comment that he just always seems to put them at ease as usual.”

Lawmakers also appreciate the bishop’s availability, Tasman said, as they always feel the bishop has an open door policy. Tasman said the bishop has also made himself available at a number of different events, including prayer breakfasts.

“He’s in that environment; he’s comfortable there. The legislators know that and they feel that,” he said.

Tasman said he has certainly been helped by the bishop’s dedication to staying educated and informed on key issues. Additionally, he said Bishop Muench is always aware of what his brother bishops are saying through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

“When he speaks, he speaks from a very genuine place based on his own experiences,” Tasman said. “Anything having to do with human development, the environments people are in and education. (Education) is his bread and butter.

“Any time you have an opportunity to talk to him and he tells you he was (an educator) he lights up as bright as I’ve ever seen him.”

Beyond the education arena, Tasman said Bishop Muench brings wisdom to every dialogue, no matter the issue. He said the bishop is an attentive listener but also pastoral and holds himself to the truth of Catholic teaching.

“I always felt a personal connection and I will certainly miss that,” said Tasman, a New York native who shares a love of the Yankees with the bishop. “I’m glad to hear he is staying in Baton Rouge.

“I would love to stay connected with him and I would not hesitate to seek his wisdom.”

“For I know well the plans I have for you…”
Jeremiah 29:11

Prayerful best wishes to Most Reverend Robert W. Muench upon your retirement as Bishop of the Diocese of Baton Rouge

Most Reverend David P. Talley, and the clergy, religious and laity of the Diocese of Alexandria, Louisiana
CCDBR has expanded under bishop’s guidance

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge today bears little resemblance to what the agency looked like in 2008 when David Aguillard became the director.

The difference now is size. Aguillard credits the support from Bishop Robert W. Muench for how the agency has grown.

“(Bishop Muench) has been very generous with resources of the diocese and with his support; we’ve practically doubled in size, all of our real core, essential mission services,” said Aguillard.

He lists examples of the number of people helped by CCDBR, including Sanctuary for Life, a homeless shelter for pregnant women, which has gone from housing three women to 20; Joseph Homes, a shelter for ex-offenders, which went from taking in nine men to 14; and, Refugee Resettlement Services, which has grown from one attorney to a staff of five accredited representatives. Also, there is the new Families First Housing, an apartment complex for families trying to recover from hard times.

“First off, Bishop Muench just has a way of bringing joy and laughter to any situation that he comes into, but, also, it’s the support that he gives us and the confidence that he has in our board and in our agency’s leadership that really gives us a firm spiritual foundation from which to go forth and do the work that we do in service to the poor in our diocese,” said Aguillard. “He is always there whenever we need him, if it’s something as simple as coming to the office during a particularly stressful time to greet people as they come in in the morning, to being present at prayer services, helping us dedicate new projects, new additions, new furniture.”

Aguillard noted the bishop “has been very clear that our agency’s and our diocese’s response after disasters is really essential and it’s a priority of his.” He said the bishop has also helped CCDBR obtain grants from Catholic Charities U.S.A.

The grant money helped provide generators in church parishes throughout the diocese. According to Aguillard, Bishop Muench “understands that after a disaster, it’s the local community, it’s the church parishes where people have to turn.”

“He’s been in the shelters with us, comforting families who don’t know if they’re going to have a home to go to after they leave the shelters,” Aguillard recalled. “He stood out in the heat and the sweat, dressed in his black and in his Roman collar, handing out supplies in parking lots after disasters. And, I can remember the look of surprise and joy on people’s faces when they’ve seen that the bishop is out there.

“I can remember that look on their faces and I’m sure that they will remember the look on the bishop’s face and the care and concern that he showed for them at those times.”

Aguillard said Catholic Charities is now better prepared than before Hurricane Katrina ravaged the New Orleans area in 2005. He said there is a much better understanding “that both the physical resources and material resources that we can bring to bear are just as important as the spiritual and emotional support.”

“At Catholic Charities, with the flexibility that (Bishop Muench) has given us, we know that we can pause for a few days, if not a week or so and pause, and...
Family life, youth priorities for bishop

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

“God love you.”
This signature concluding statement by Bishop Robert W. Muench in his homilies illustrates the core of who he is and is one of his most important tools when it comes to shepherding souls in the Diocese of Baton Rouge, according to Dina Dow, director of the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis in the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Dow believes that people will remember Bishop Muench for his warm personality and reminding people of God’s love. “The way he pauses and lets it sink in. It’s a reminder ‘remember God loves you,’” said Dow.

“And then we (Office of Evangelization and Catechesis) can come in and say ‘and this is why.’”

She noted, “One of the blessings for this office is that we’ve always just supported his mission in evangelization and catechesis for the diocese. I thank him and the team with that mission.”

“It’s a great thing when a bishop recognizes that evangelization and catechesis is important enough to have a department for it,” she added.

Dow noted that the readings on Good Shepherd Sunday during the Easter Season emphasized that a shepherd makes sure people are close to the Lord. She said Bishop Muench emphasized this in his ministry.

Shannon Baldridge, coordinator of Certification and Catechesis, saw how Bishop Muench especially worked to make sure the youth of the diocese knew God loves them when she worked for the youth office.

“Bishop Muench has always had such a great heart for youth ministry in our diocese. I saw this come out many times while I worked with the youth office for several years,” said Baldridge. “He was always at our major events like (the) Diocesan Youth Conference and World Youth Day. He supported those events and asked the clergy to support them also. He also made himself available for many other smaller youth events. The youth on our Diocesan Youth Board always loved to talk to him and exchange jokes with him. His support for that ministry was invaluable to the work we did.”

Bishop Muench also wanted people to understand how love is expressed through the context of the family.

“The Office of Marriage and Family Life felt the support of Bishop Muench in its ministry to families since he recognized that the family, as the ‘domestic church’ is the primary place in which Christians learn to recognize and experience the love of God,” said Darryl Ducote, director of the OMFL.

“He especially encouraged the efforts of the office to prepare couples for marriage and to provide resources to strengthen couples already married, even offering his ‘Imprimatur’ (permission to print) to resources created for marriage enrichment.”

Bishop Muench also showed his support for family life by being out among the people, according to Ducote.

“He took a personal interest in affirming married couples by consistently celebrating the annual Anniversary Mass for couples who were celebrating 25, 50 and 65 years of marriage. He proclaimed the sanctity of life and welcomed the efforts of the OMFL to foster respect for life at all stages of development, including such initiatives as Life Fest, 40 Days for Life, Parish Respect Life Coordinators, etc. He often referred to his experience within his own family as the reason of his dedication to family ministry,” Ducote said.
Sister Adele recalls bishop’s warmth, support

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Bishop Robert W. Muench has always been a warm presence among religious women and men.

Bishop Robert W. Muench has been a warm presence among the religious throughout his administrative career, according to Sister Adele Lambert CSJ, who has served in leadership positions of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph and has known the bishop since his days with the Archdiocese of New Orleans and now the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Sister Adele served as executive director of the Archdiocesan Office of Social Apostolate from 1992 to 2002 and worked for a year for the archdiocese in the Office of Continuing Education for Priests. She also served at several schools in the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

“He greeted everyone warmly who came to the administrative building as well as his visits to the schools and to the events we had in the archdiocese,” said Sister Adele.

She said both in the archdiocese and the Diocese of Baton Rouge, one of his greatest desires was to “grow the church,” not only in administrative departments, but in spiritual life and vocations.

In 2004 Sister Adele became the first president of St. Joseph’s Academy in Baton Rouge in the school’s 143-year history. “He loved to come to St. Joseph’s (Academy), not just to visit the administrators, but the girls as well,” said Sister Adele. Retired since 2012, she continues to be active in the CSJ Associates Program.

Sister Adele noted that the bishop was “gracious in accommodating us, especially when we were in the throes of graduation and end of the year activities.” “Particularly at graduation, he offered a wonderful and warm event, with the liturgy and the graduation,” said Sister Adele.

She said the bishop has also shown great support for religious men and women in the Diocese of Baton Rouge. Each February, he has celebrated a Mass honoring religious men and women in the Diocese of Baton Rouge. After Hurricane Katrina, Bishop Muench was supportive of the Sisters of St. Joseph when their provincial home in New Orleans flooded. “This was a horrific situation for us,” said Sister Adele. “We were sending our elderly sisters from place to place. “He was compassionate and he did promise to assist us. And he kept his promise. When he went to our residence (retired facility built for the retired Sisters of St. Joseph in Baton Rouge), he blessed our chapel and altar. I do remember it as a beautiful occasion and a gift from the bishop to

See Adele Page 21B
A true leader in education

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

When Dr. Melanie Verges accepted the job to take the helm of Catholic schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge in 2009, the first thing she asked her new boss, Bishop Robert W. Muench, was his vision for the school district.

“He said, ‘We have extremely good schools in the diocese. I'd like it to become a little more creative and to expand the ministry’ and so I took that as a directive,” said Verges.

The decision to have all Catholic schools in the diocese accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) had already been made when Verges became superintendent and she said it was that call to action that created a united front among herself, the bishop and school leaders.

“That brought us together as a collaborative unit and I do believe that's what the bishop intended, is that the schools work as partners instead of as separate silos,” she said.

Verges also said that, as a result, diocesan principals know each other “better than they ever did.” She also noted that test scores continue to rise and that six of the schools have been named National Blue Ribbon Schools. However, that doesn't tell the whole picture, according to Verges, the true ministry of education goes beyond books and report cards.

“My favorite quote from Bishop Muench is, “The most important thing you teach in Catholic schools may not be measurable today,” she said. “So, we have to always keep in mind that we have a bigger ministry, a bigger mission, than just test scores and what we learn day to day. And, I think a true leader reminds us of that and Bishop Muench is a true leader.”

Bishop Muench has always been at home in the classroom. Bishop Robert W. Muench has always been at home in the classroom.

Bishop Muench will also be remembered for his confirmation Masses, Sunday Masses at the cathedral and all the special events he participated in Baton Rouge, said Sister Adele.

“She further said the bishop was strong in his outreach to catholic charities and addressing issues such as racism and poverty.

“We certainly couldn’t ask for anyone better in the wonderful outreach that he did,” said Sister Adele.

ADELE

From page 208

the sisters.”

With gratitude for your years of service and dedication

Thank you from Saint Joseph Abbey and Seminary College

SAINT JOSEPH ABBEY + SEMINARY COLLEGE
Vocations a high priority

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Bishop Robert W. Muench kept vocations to the priesthood and religious life in the Diocese of Baton Rouge in the forefront by talking about it directly with young people or when celebrating Masses, said Father Matt Lorrain, director of seminarians.

“He would make an appearance at any retreats that we had, he would usually visit any high school retreats,” said Father Lorrain.

These moments are especially remembered by seminarians at St. Joseph Seminary in St. Benedict.

Bishop Muench confirmed seminarian James Vu at St. Thomas More Church in Baton Rouge in October 2014.

“I remember when Bishop Muench gave us a talk before the ceremony. He told us that soon we will be heading off to college and that he wanted us to keep striving in our faith. Without it, we would fal,” said Vu. “He also told us jokes. The one I especially remember is what people have named the ‘Pope Yes’ joke. (Then Monsignor) Muench was showing Pope St. John Paull II around New Orleans (in 1987). They had passed by a Popeyes restaurant and the pope said that New Orleans must really love him because it said ‘Pope Yes.’”

“I love how Bishop Muench is very down-to-earth and very approachable,” said Vu.

He added, “The bishop had a huge impact on my discernment to the priesthood. I remember in high school, I would always request going to the bishop for confession. To this day, I still don’t know why. The bishop was very helpful and gave me good advice in my discernment.”

During Vu’s high school senior retreat he went to Bishop Muench for confession.

“After confession, the bishop asked me if I was still interested in the seminary. I had been interested before, but the plan was to go to LSU for a year first. If I was still interested, then I would apply to seminary after,” said Vu. “The bishop told me that if I was thinking about it now, why would I not enter in now? I had nothing to lose. And since then, I have not regretted this decision. The bishop has given me something to look for in the priesthood.”

Seminarian Tres Turner said, “Bishop Muench has been the bishop as long as I can remember, and for me, he has been the symbol of the good shepherd in our diocese. I can remember my seventh-grade year getting picked from my middle school, Our Lady of Mercy (in Baton Rouge), to go to the Catholic Schools Week Mass. He was the celebrant, and I was able to talk to him after Mass. I remember being surprised that he was cracking jokes because I didn’t know priests, let alone bishops, were allowed to do that. He was definitely an early sign for me that priesthood was something more than a sad, lonely life.

“Since then, he was always present in my life as a greatly loved pastor. He also did my confirmation in 2015 at OLOM, and he was, again, making jokes – some of them I might have heard him say more than once. It’s amazing to be...

SEE VOCATIONS PAGE 23B
everyone switches hats and switches uniforms, for that matter, and becomes disaster response workers,” said Aguillard. “We can do that and get back to our jobs as the federal and the state (relief agencies) get their operations geared up, and, we can do that because we know that the diocese is there to support us.”

That support and flexibility in diocesan resources has also been imperative in helping CCDBR’s Refugee Resettlement Services to expand and apply those resources toward the greatest need at that time, whether it’s a disaster or “unaccompanied children coming across our borders.”

“So we have that flexibility to respond to the refugee and immigration crisis as they arise but also I think it’s important to understand why we have that flexibility, and why that is a priority of the bishop,” said Aguillard. “He understands and gives us that spiritual foundation to understand that service to refugee and immigration is rooted to the earliest days of the Christian church.”

Prison Ministry, another agency of CCDBR, has also been a priority of the bishop, according to Aguillard, with the bishop making regular visits to prisons throughout the diocese.

“We have a lot of prisons in this part of the world,” said Aguillard. “As a matter of fact, it’s been said East Baton Rouge Parish is the prison capital of the world because there are more prisons per capita here than any place else on the planet. But, year after year, Bishop Muench goes to those prisons. He meets with the people, he meets with the men on death row. And, you know what he says at the end of every visit? He will tell each individual, each and every prisoner, ‘You are important.’ And, I think that that signifies not only that they are important to the bishop but they are important to Christ as well. Just as important as I am, just as important as you are.”

VOCATIONS ▼
From page 22B

able to be sealed in the Holy Spirit by such a wonderful person and caring pastor. Of course, when I entered seminary, he was always present in my life as a seminarian – and using the same jokes again.”

Father Lorrain said that by the time a priest was ready to be ordained, he had interacted with them enough that they were someone he had come to know and love.

“The ordinations were moments of great joy and that was visible in the way he presided at the liturgy, celebrated the ordination, congratulated

the priest and thanked his family for having promoted his vocation; those are joyous occasions,” said Father Lorrain.

And Bishop Muench’s support continued after ordination. He visits priests who have been hospitalized to offer his prayers and support and expresses a vote of confidence in a pastor when installing him at a church parish.

“The installment as a pastor also involves the parish leadership, so it’s a nice opportunity for our bishop as our chief shepherd to also visit the local parishes,” said Father Lorrain.

Bishop Muench prayers with Catholic Charities employees during disaster relief efforts.

Baton Rouge Magnificat Chapter
farewell wishes to Bishop Muench!
May God bless you on your retirement and grant you good health and happiness in the years ahead.

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May the days to come be filled with Good Health & Happiness.
God bless you
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The Most Reverend Roger J. Foys, D.D., the priests, deacons, religious and lay faithful of the Diocese of Covington, Kentucky, send our congratulations, best wishes and prayers to the Most Reverend Robert W. Muench, our former Bishop, on his retirement after 50 years of ministry.
SHELTER ▼
From page 14B

Established a pharmacy in 2003 that has already been expanded, opened a new dining room in 2014 and is putting the final touches on doubling its Bishop Ott Sweet Dreams Shelter for young women and their children. Once completed, St. Vincent de Paul will have more than 174 beds combined for homeless men, women and children.

“Without the bishop’s support we just can’t do what our faith calls us to do and in a real powerful sense, because he’s so active,” Acaldo said. “He gets the St. Vincent de Paul mission.”

The bishop has had strong ties to St. Vincent de Paul for his entire life, witnessing his dad serve the poor through the society in New Orleans for more than six decades. From that experience was born a love of witnessing to the needy and spreading the Gospel message of putting one’s faith into action.

“It’s been great; Bishop Muench has been so much fun to work with through the years and we’ve grown much over those (16 years) that it really is remarkable to see the difference that a shepherd of the diocese can make,” Acaldo said. “And for us it’s been a true blessing.”

THANK YOU, BISHOP MUECH.

The LORD bless you and keep you!

The LORD let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you!

The LORD look upon you kindly and give you peace!

NUMBERS 6:24-26

SSA CONSULTANTS

Bishop Edward J. Burns and all in the Diocese of Dallas
Offer Congratulations and Best Wishes to
Bishop Robert W. Muench
For 50 years of faithful ministry to the Church
And 16 years as Bishop of Baton Rouge
May God bless you abundantly in your Retirement
Bishop Muench,
As you leave your office, know your legacy will remain here forever.

Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.
For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothe me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.

Mt 25:34-35

Your Staff and Family of The Catholic Life Center
do. "There's a high level of generosity and there's a high level of faith. There are many great things happening, not because of me, but in spite of me."

Bishop Muench said he has inherited the incredible legacy of the previous bishops while doing some things to bring in his own style. He had television cameras installed in St. Joseph Chapel and St. Joseph Cathedral to televise Masses, implemented the Wednesday night "The Light is ON for You" Lenten confessional services and authorized Baton Rouge to host a national Cultivating Unity of Priests meeting.

He also established the Pastoral Planning Task Force and the Racial Harmony Commission. He broke ground for a new Archives Department building that was dedicated July 27. The bishop was also shepherd during some critical moments in the history of the diocese, such as Hurricanes Katrina and Gustav, the shooting of Alton Sterling and the subsequent lone gunman's shootings of six area law enforcement officers, three of whom died. There has also been the closing of church parishes, because of demographic changes and the priesthood shortage.

He's also been on hand at many Society of St. Vincent de Paul events and enjoyed distributing the gifts as St. Nicholas.

I remember that day that he and I went to the hospital the day the policemen were shot," recalled Father Ranzino. "He made a personal visit to the mother of one of the policemen who had died, who was one of my parishioners (at St. Jean Vianney Church in Baton Rouge)."

Father Ranzino said the event moved the bishop to create the diocesan Commission on Racial Harmony. Another area that is important to Bishop Muench, according to Father Ranzino, is the spiritual, emotional and physical well-being of the priests in the diocese.

"It's quite humbling to me to see what a powerful commitment that is to the men of our clergy and how Bishop Muench has been a true pastor to those men," he said. "Basically, the diocese has got your back."

In fact, he said, some centers that work with the clergy say "we don't have dioceses like yours who stick with the men in such a way as to walk with them through this time in their lives." And, that is a testament to the bishop's pastoral ministry.

"I think at his heart he is a pastor," said Father Ranzino.

"I have heard him in conversations with priests who are having difficult times," said Father Ranzino. "There's no more pretense of anything other than here is one man talking to another man, and while we never forget he's a bishop, he is really trying hard to be a father and I can tell you, it's not easy to be a bishop and father at the same time, because sometimes you have to be a bishop and that means decisions have to be made that are hard. In all of those times, Bishop Muench goes out of himself, both to care and to console."
ninth bishop of Covington, Kentucky, it was like a homecoming of sorts, with extended family members already living in Kentucky.

“We always had some wonderful trips to see him when he was in Covington, Kentucky,” said Morse. “It was always hard to leave him.”

In 2001, Bishop Muench was appointed to fill the vacant See in the Diocese of Baton Rouge, a blessing for both the faithful and the family.

“And, Bob (Bishop Muench) kept saying, ‘This doesn’t really happen, to be this close to home,’” said Morse. “And, he kept telling us, ‘Don’t expect it, don’t expect it.’”

Despite the demands on his schedule, the bishop maintains close relationships with his siblings and their families, performing marriages, baptisms and first Communions. And, he has formed special bonds with his nieces and nephews, taking special care to spend “15-20 minutes and they could talk about anything,” according to Morse.

“That’s the kind of connection he has with each of them, and he loves them all and watches over them all, like they are his own,” said Morse.

“He has a special connection with the youth,” said Pringle. “And he’s just as good with the elderly as he is with the youth. They have a special place in his heart, also.”

Three years after Bishop Muench was installed as the fifth bishop of Baton Rouge, Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and the bishop jumped into action.

“Mom and dad lost everything in Gentilly,” said Morse. “But, I tell Bob (Bishop Muench) all the time, there was a reason you were brought here ... more than just being bishop.”

“Bob (Bishop Muench) was able to handle the tough times in Baton Rouge through his faith in God,” said Pringle. “That’s what we were raised with and that’s the only road you went down. That’s just what we knew and it’s never let us down. We’ve all had tragedies in our lives; we’re not exempt. And, it’s always been our foundation. We’re very, very blessed to have always had this. It’s just been a God-given blessing.”
Thank you

Bishop Muench for your years of support and encouragement.

Enjoy your retirement.

THE STAFF OF THE CATHOLIC COMMENTATOR
“Let’s not get tired of doing what is good, for at the right time we will reap a harvest — if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have the opportunity, let’s practice doing good to everyone, especially to the family of faith.”

Galatians 6:9-10

Archbishop Gregory M. Aymond, Archbishop-emeritus Alfred C. Hughes, Auxiliary Bishop Fernand J. Cheri, O.F.M., the clergy, religious, and laity of the Archdiocese of New Orleans extend their prayerful best wishes to Bishop Robert W. Muench on the occasion of his retirement as Bishop of Baton Rouge. May his example of “doing good to everyone” continue to shine forth in Baton Rouge and here in his beloved hometown of New Orleans.
Congratulations on your retirement and for faithfully serving the Church for 50 years.

God Bless from your Brother Martin family!

FOLSE ▼
From page 12B

night. ’I said, ’What is he doing?’ I just couldn’t believe. And, I said, ‘I’m going to go get him and bring him up to the front of the line,’ and I said, ‘No, he wouldn’t want that.’ He came up the whole line to my dad’s coffin and came up to all of us and he said, ‘Your dad is where he wants to be, he’s with your mother.’ He says, ‘Your dad always said the only woman he ever loved was in the graveyard. And one day he was going to see her again and today is that today.’ I mean think of that comfort, right?”

Folse said he has worked closely with the bishop on other events for St. Joseph Seminary and Helping Hands and considers the bishop a close friend. He said the bishop gives everyone the same amount of importance, regardless of “socioeconomic levels, color of skin, creed; doesn’t matter to him.”

“When I see him, whether he’s meeting with dignitaries, whether he’s doing ribbon cuttings, whether he’s doing the greatest Mass at the men’s conference with a 1,000 men, and for him to stand on the altar and say ‘I am overwhelmed by what I see,’ I wanted to say, ‘Bishop, it’s under your watch. It hadn’t happened before. It’s been because you inspired these men. It’s because of you, Bishop’ and I know that to be true,” Folse said.

HOPE ▼
From page 16B

“One of the graces that came out of this is that we can identify misunderstandings that come from hearts that need to be evangelized and converted,” said Father Yi.

Bishop Muench agreed the heart is the first place to look when rooting out racism.

“We need to look at this by taking a look inward,” he said. Is there any prejudice, racially motivated practices or biases elsewhere or inside of me? Do I have to agree with everyone’s opinion to get along with them or am I called to really be a neighbor and maybe disagree with someone’s opinion, but do relate with them as a fellow human being with equal dignity and integrity that every human being has. This needs to be prayed about, reflected upon and concrete changes need to be made to help us live as disciples of Jesus Christ.”

BISHOP ROBERT W. MUECH
The Catholic Commentator 31B

From page 12B

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Thank you, Bishop Muench

You blessed our community with your prayers, presence and service for the past 16 years. Enjoy your retirement.