The Catholic Commentator

A NEW ERA

Out of the darkness of unspeakable tragedy, a light is rising, spreading a pharos of resurgence, and, perhaps most importantly, one of faith.

Christ the King Church and Catholic Center in Baton Rouge, through the efforts of pastor Father Andrew Merrick and many others, has turned the former Phi Delta Theta fraternity house, where LSU freshman student Max Gruver died a year ago during a fraternity hazing incident, into a community of nine Catholic male students living together, sharing their faith while also developing and deepening their own prayer lives.

“I thank God for the opportunity for all of the things he has done in our lives and to be able to take what was a terrible tragedy and bring about a sort of victory to that,” said LSU senior Brother Bonny Van

When the bell tone sounded on Sept. 11, hundreds of students at St. Joseph’s Academy in Baton Rouge quickly began to fill the bleachers in the Student Activity Center. In the front row of the chairs lined up on the floor sat the Sisters of St. Joseph, always considered special guests of the school. Having taken their seats long before the students filed in, the sisters chatted quietly among themselves and with school leaders. Among them was Sister Helen Prejean CSJ. Modestly dressed and diminutive in stature, she blended in with the other bespectacled ladies seated around her. Then, she took the stage.

“What a joy!” said the 79-year-old nun, author of “Dead Man Walking” and “The Death of Innocents: An Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions.” “Because this is a great age to be a woman. I stand here and I see sanctity, joy and compassion and all of our sisters here with me, Sisters of St. Joseph, and all of you.”

With her voice gaining strength as she spoke, Sister Helen stood in front of a vintage photo of herself as the SJA May Queen of 1957. Months after that photo was taken, Sister Helen graduated from SJA and joined the Congregation of Sisters of St. Joseph. According to Sister Helen, three main lessons from SJA stayed with her throughout her ministry: the Catholic faith; a challenging education; and the call “to raise our voice.”

“I learned to write, I learned to speak, I learned public speaking at this school and I use it every day of my life now to stand up as a woman and be a leader, and our faith is right at the heart of that,” said Sister Helen.

She told the audience that she had just finished writing a memoir called “River of Fire.” She said the book, which will be released this summer, is about the fire of our faith.

“Catching the fire is when our faith comes alive, when a wind blows on the coals of our soul and something in us, when we see something, we go, ‘That’s not right’ or ‘That needs to change,’” she said. “Our conscious kicks in and we know we gotta raise our voice in

Sister Helen inspires SJA students

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

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HITTING HIS STRIDE – Bishop Michael G. Duca, seen kissing the cross held by New Orleans Archbishop Gregory M. Aymond during the bishop’s installation ceremony Aug. 24, has kept a busy schedule. In the past two weeks, Bishop Duca has held a prayer service for deacons in the Diocese of Baton Rouge and their wives; celebrated the Rite of Admission to Candidacy for the priesthood for diocesan seminarians Danny Jude Roussel and Mathew Thomas Dunn; and, celebrated game day Mass at Christ the King Church in Baton Rouge for LSU’s home opener against Southeastern Louisiana University.

LATIN FESTIVAL – Large crowds enjoyed music, food and fun at St. Pius X in Baton Rouge. Rey Diaz plays the trumpet during a concert by Mariachi Jalisco. See more on pages 12-13.

Photo by Debbie Shelley | The Catholic Commentator
The movement of the Holy Spirit

By Dina Dow

The Mass readings during the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time focus on two movements of the heart: humility and preservation. The reading from the Book of Numbers is about the coming of the Spirit of God. Moses, in distress, cried out for help. God answers his plea as the Spirit of God descended into the meeting tent. There, the gathered elders, who were with Moses, stood in the glory cloud, received the Spirit of God and vocalized in praise. In addition, two others, on the list but outside the tent, received the same gift with the same outcome. Those who were in the tent were surprised that these two had received the same power of the Spirit and were prophesying in the camp, apparently ahead of all the others. How could that be? They were not there? Are those who were in the tent given a higher privilege or gift? Moses, appreciative of the wonder of God also knew the unlimited ways of God. “Would that all the people of the LORD were prophets! Would that the LORD might bestow his spirit on them all” (Nm 11:29). God allows people with various experiences be given similar gifts with just as much zeal and passion. The Holy Spirit moves in many places and on all levels.

Similarly, in the Gospel, Jesus defends a man who is performing miracles in his name. Jesus is not bothered by this, for only in God’s name are demons cast out. Jesus reminds the apostles, “For whoever is not against us is for us” (Mt 10:33). Even small things done in the name of Jesus (i.e. sharing a cup of water) are powerful witnesses of his glory. The example he shares is of a little one (child). He stated the gravity and repercussions of sin committed if it causes this little one to sin. It is interesting the timing of this reading. The Holy Spirit is indeed moving swiftly, in fact, the Spirit is blowing the winds of justice.

How do we respond to the temptations we face? If by removing bodily appendages we are called to get to know the men very well to be able to judge their character, their prayer life, their maturity. So it’s a very good process.

Father Matt Lorrain
Director of Seminarians

“[The church] has an annual evaluation to get to know the men well enough to be able to judge their character, their prayer life, their maturity. So it’s a very good process.”

Steps to the priesthood

On Sept. 15, at Sacred Heart Church in Baton Rouge, seminarians Matthew Dunn, left, and Danny Roussel prepare for Mass on Sept. 15 at Sacred Heart Church in Baton Rouge. Both men received Admission to Candidacy for the priesthood by Bishop Michael G. Duca. Photo by John Yale

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BAA to begin Oct. 1

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Fresh off a record-setting campaign that topped the $1 million mark for the third time in the past four years, the Bishop's Annual Appeal will soon be launching with a renewed sense of optimism, said Tammy Abshire, stewardship director for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

The BAA, which raised a record $1.05 million a year ago, is set to begin Oct. 1.

"We were thrilled and so thankful to our donors that made last year such an overwhelming success," Abshire said. "This year the excitement has been heightened by the arrival of Bishop (Michael G.) Duca. He has certainly hit the ground running in preparing for the BAA."

"We are also incredibly grateful for the support of Bishop (Robert W.) Muench for so many years and wish him a blessed and prayerful retirement," she added.

New for this year is The Shepherd's Society honoring Bishop Duca. He will be charter members of The BAA to begin Oct. 1.

"This was never more relevant than during the flood of 2016, when so many were in need. We are grateful to all of our donors and to their pastors, who through their own faithful leadership plant the seeds of mercy in so many," Bishop Duca said. "When we give, we honor Christ. We follow the shepherd's lead."

The BAA has steadily grown, from $850,000 in 2012 to $1.05 million in 2017-18.

"The remarkable growth of the BAA speaks to the generous spirit of parishioners in the Diocese of Baton Rouge," Abshire said. "They continually live up to the reputation this diocese has for the reputation this diocese has of optimism, said Tammy Abshire, stewardship director for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

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The Catholic Commentator N ATIONAL | INTERNATIONAL September 28, 2018

WASHINGTON (CNS) – Pledging to “heal and protect with every bit of the strength God provides us,” the U.S. bishops’ Administrative Committee Sept. 19 outlined actions to address the abuse crisis, including approving the establishment of a third-party confidential reporting system for claims of any abuse by bishops.

It also instructed the U.S. bishops’ canonical affairs committee to develop proposals for policies addressing restrictions on bishops who were removed or resigned because of allegations of abuse of minors or adults.

It initiated the process of developing a code of conduct for bishops regarding sexual misconduct with a minor or adult or “negligence in the exercise of his office related to such cases.”

The committee also said it supported “a full investigation into the situation” surrounding Archbishop Theodore E. McCarrick, former cardinal-archbishop of Washington, “including his alleged assaults on minors, priests and seminarians, as well as ‘any responses made to those allegations.’”

The statement, released by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, came out of the committee’s semiannual meeting held Sept. 11-12 at USCCB headquarters in Washington.

The Administrative Committee consists of the officers, chairmen and regional representatives of the USCCB. The committee, which meets in March and September, is the highest authority of the USCCB outside of the full body of bishops when they meet for their fall and spring general assemblies.

“This is only a beginning,” the committee said in its Sept. 19 statement. “Consultation with a broad range of concerned parents, experts and other laity along with clergy and religious will yield additional, specific measures to be taken to repair the scandal and restore justice.

“We humbly welcome and are grateful for the assistance of the whole people of God in holding us accountable,” the committee said.

The committee acknowledged its members had assembled for their meeting in Washington at a “time of shame and sorrow.”

“Some bishops, by their actions or their failures to act, have caused great harm to both individuals and the church as a whole,” the committee said. “They have used their authority and power to manipulate and sexually abuse others.

“They have allowed the fear of scandal to replace genuine concern and care for those who have been victimized by abusers,” it continued. “For this, we again ask forgiveness from both the Lord and those who have been harmed. Turning to the Lord for strength, we must and will do better.”

Full descriptions of the actions the committee took are as follows:

– Approved the establishment of a third-party reporting system that will receive confidentially, by phone and online, complaints of sexual abuse of minors by a bishop and sexual harassment of or misconduct with adults by a bishop. It will direct those complaints to the appropriate ecclesiastical authority and, as required by applicable law, to civil authorities.

– Instructed the USCCB Committee on Canonical Affairs and Church Governance to develop proposals for policies addressing restrictions on bishops who were removed or resigned because of allegations of sexual abuse of minors or sexual harassment of or misconduct with adults, including seminarians and priests.

– Initiated the process of developing a code of conduct for bishops regarding the sexual abuse of a minor; sexual harassment of or sexual misconduct with an adult; or negligence in the exercise of his office related to such cases.

– Supported a full investigation into the situation surrounding Archbishop McCarrick, including his alleged assaults on minors, priests and seminarians, as well as any responses made to those allegations. “Such an investigation should rely upon lay experts in relevant fields, such as law enforcement and social services.”

As the initiatives get underway, the Administrative Committee asked all U.S. bishops “to join us in acts of prayer and penance.”

“This is a time of deep examination of conscience for each bishop. We cannot content ourselves that our response to sexual assault within the church has been sufficient. Scripture must be our guide forward. ‘Be doers of the word and not hearers only,’” it said, quoting the Letter of St. James.

“We humbly welcome and are grateful for the assistance of the whole people of God in holding us accountable.”

U.S. bishops’ Administrative Committee

“Acting in communion with the Holy Father, with whom we once again renew our love, obedience and loyalty, we make our own the prayer of Pope Francis in his Aug. 20 letter to the people of God, ‘May the Holy Spirit grant us the grace of conversion and the interior anointing needed to express before these crimes of abuse our compunction and our resolve courageous ly to combat them.’”

Church plans third-party abuse reporting system

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Satisfying spiritual thirst

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

“What just happened?” people may ask when the Holy Spirit fans an initial spark of an idea into a roaring fire displaying God’s glory. The organizers of Women of the Well, a Catholic Women’s Ministry, asked this question as they watched the response to their invitation to women who are thirsting for more in their spiritual life to “come get a drink of living water.”

According to Becky Eldredge, who founded Women of the Well with Stephanie Cloutatre-Davis, the idea first began last summer when she served as a panelist at the Convoction of Catholic Leaders, “The Joy of the Gospel in America,” in Orlando, Florida.

“The whole convocation set the peripheries,” said Eldredge. “How do we bring the joy of the Gospel to all people? So we got this invitation from the bishops and cardinals to ‘go home, notice what you notice, pray and then respond.’”

She and Davis led a silent women’s retreat at Rosaryville Spirit Life Center in August and noticed after retreat ended, the women spent two more hours talking. “I had read ‘The Joy of the Gospel,’ and it talked about walking with people and encountering Christ,” said Davis. “So this time when the women were together we said, ‘Something’s stirring here.’”

Davis and Eldredge facilitated a women’s day of reflection at the Catholic Life Center this past October and the response exceeded their expectations. Women of different ages, prayer lives and backgrounds attended.

“We thought we would have maybe 30 women and over 65 women showed up on a Tuesday,” said Eldredge. “Once again it was a hungering for community. Women who were hungering and looking for something they could do in the midst of the realities of their lives. So these side conversations kept happening after the October retreat.”

Women from different church parishes then gathered at Eldredge’s house for coffee. Davis said, “They were asking ‘How can we meet the need here?’”

This past October Eldredge also spoke at a “Women’s ALIVE” gathering in St. Robert Newminister Parish in Ada, Michigan. “I was blown away,” said Eldredge. “There were about 200 women. They were gathered around round tables and there were speakers and prayer. They prayed together during dinner. I came back and said, ‘Y’all, there’s something to this format.’”

Davis said, “As we kept praying and talking about the general format, women began taking little bitsy parts. One would say, ‘Hey, we could host a host at every table if one woman would commit to hosting and bring a bit of food and some wine.’”

The first event hosted by this committee of women was an Advent evening of reflection, “Making Room for God’s Greatest Gift” at St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge.

“We were expecting about 60 women and about 200 women showed up. And I can remember our entire committee saying ‘What just happened?’ We were watching all these women come in and the candles were lit and they were saying, ‘Oooh,’” said Eldredge.

Another women’s evening of reflection, “Mary’s Blues,” was held during Lent at St. Thomas More Church in Baton Rouge. It enjoyed the same success.

The theme of the woman of the well will progress in upcoming events from coming to the well, the encounter with Christ, then being sent out.

Dina Dow, director of the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis, spoke about spiritual, intellectual and physical thirst and the invitation to come to the well at an evening of reflection Sept. 23 at St. George. There will also be an Advent evening of reflection speaker Tammy Vidrine, director of campus ministry at Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University in Baton Rouge and a Lenten evening reflection with speaker Kate Anderson, a cancer survivor who went on to earn her juris doctorate degree.

Along with the speakers are musicians.

“We want to celebrate the talent of our local women,” said Eldredge.

Because the events’ locations shift to different churches, it’s a chance to celebrate the diversity and charisms of the parishes within the diocese, said Davis and Eldredge.

The committee meetings are held through video conferences, said Eldredge. “One time we had 11-12 women on screen and at one point there were four different kids popping in,” beamed Eldredge. “There was another woman who video conferred us from her car because she was a realtor, and she was in her car waiting to show a house. But she stopped because our conferences are about an hour and very intense and we get a lot done.”

And their work is something that deepens women’s spiritual lives.

“I find the evenings to be quite stimulating. Having the opportunity to join hundreds of women and share my faith is nourishing for me. Listening to other people’s stories fills me with hope for the future. I am exhilarated by interacting with women who realize that God journeys with us in our ordinary day-to-day lives,” said Claudia Maxson.

Faye Coopender spoke about the organizers openness in recruiting the input and talent of women. She attended the St. Alonzo conference and suggested that next time people be given more time for table conversation.

“My comment was welcomed and affirmed, and I was invited to join the core team for the next event,” said Coopender. “And that’s how it’s been each time I’ve been a participant in planning or participated in a retreat evening. I’ve felt welcomed, heard and loved. The grace with which this team of women interact is a testimony to their desire to be witnesses of Christ’s love in the world today. All are truly welcome.”

Davis and Eldredge do not credit the ministry’s success to their own efforts, but the collaboration of women yielding the fruit of evangelization.

And above all they credit Jesus and Mary. “I think Mary is such a great companion. I think she’s a big part of this in drawing us to her son,” said Eldredge.

For more information, visit womenofthewellbr.com.
Divorced and Communion/ Missing Mass and mortal sin

Q I am in my 50s and have now been divorced for three years. I was married in the Catholic Church and have always attended Sunday Mass regularly and received Communion. But I have begun to wonder whether I should still take Communion.

I asked a priest recently in confession, and he said that it was OK, but I still feel unsure about it. (Also, I have kept my marriage vows so far, but if I were to become involved with someone else, would it still be OK to go to Communion?)

(Kentucky)

A Yes, in your present situation you may continue to receive the Eucharist. Many people are under the misimpression that a divorce by itself separates a person from membership in the Catholic Church and disqualifies that person from receiving holy Communion. That is not so; sometimes the end of a marriage can occur with little or no fault on the part of at least one of the spouses.

And since you have been to the sacrament of penance, I am going to assume that you have already confessed whatever may have been your own responsibility for the breakup. However, it’s your last sentence that troubles me.

Your divorce does not prohibit you from friendships with women or female companionship. But if you were to become involved sexually with someone to whom you were not married in the church, you would not, of course, be eligible to receive the Eucharist because, in the church’s eyes, you would be living in the state of serious sin.

(If you are considering a new romantic relationship, why not see a priest and look into the possibility of an annulment from your first marriage so that the way would be clear if you decided to marry that person with the church’s approval?)

Q My sister was upset with her adult daughter and her husband (who is a convert to Catholicism) when they took holy Communion recently after having missed Mass. She told her daughter that they had committed a mortal sin by missing Mass and then, again, by receiving Communion without first going to confession. (She had brought up the matter before with her daughter.)

My question is this: Is my sister being judgmental and wrong, or would this be considered helpful guidance in getting her daughter and her family back on God’s path? Her daughter resents her mother for doing this, and the daughter’s husband is angry. My fear is that they will become alienated from the church and stop bringing their kids up Catholic. Can you help me to help my sister? (Sacramento, California)

A Your sister is right on her theology but, perhaps, wrong on her strategy. Clearly, the church teaches that the obligation to attend Sunday Mass is a serious one. The Catholicism of the Catholic Church states: “The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants). ... Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin” (No. 2181).

Gravity of matter, of course, is just one of three conditions necessary for mortal sin: the others being complete consent of the will and full knowledge of the sinful character of the act or omission.

For serious reasons, such as for example the children’s upbringing, a man and a woman cannot satisfy the obligation to separate, they (quoting from a homily he had given a year earlier) “take on themselves the duty to live in complete continence.”

(No: I would deem as “serious reasons” what you describe as “multiple social, financial and health issues.”)

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

Peacemakers are God’s agents dispensing love, mercy, compassion and forgiveness to make the world as God intended it to be, according to Father Charles Atuah MSP, pastor of St. Catherine of Siena Church in Donelsonville, in speaking about the seventh beatitude given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

“God is full of love,” said Father Atuah. “You cannot speak about peace if there is no love. Love is the foundation upon which peace stands.”

“We must put down the hatred in our heart,” Atuah said. “We have to speak out and advocate for peace.”

Atuah said, “For a child is given to us; upon their shoulders dominion rests.”

Atuah rolled out. “Wow!”

He noted, “From the beginning God knew what man needs most. God came down to us chronologically as a man with peace.”

“When the world was at peace, people may try to bypass God’s missions and the gifts that he has given them and put on a temporary ‘Band-Aid’ application that doesn’t get to the heart of the matter. The answers are found in the heart, according to Father Atuah. “If we do not have it in our heart it is cosmetic, it doesn’t last,” said Father Atuah. “Things calm down, but as soon as people lose the value of the gift (from God) we’re back to square one. The trouble resumes, the crisis comes back.”

“It must come from within the persons themselves,” said Father Atuah, tapping on his heart. “We can only get it when we align ourselves with him.”

The best resource manual concerning peace includes the Scriptures, because in it people read about the message of peace coming from God and the people he has used in salvation history as agents of peace, said Father Atuah.

One of those agents was the prophet Jeremiah, he said. His story highlights the importance of telling and listening to the truth to bring peace. God told Jeremiah to tell King Zedekiah that the king of Babylon would attack Jerusalem and everyone that remained in it would be killed. When King Zedekiah called Jeremiah in and listened to him, there was peace for both. But when King Hezekiah and some of the nobles remained it did not go well for them, said Father Atuah.

There are also stories about peace in the midst of the storm. Even as King Saul raged in jealousy over David before he became king, God “wrote straight over crooked lines” by forging a bond of peace and friendship between David and King Saul’s son, Jonathan, said Father Atuah.

St. Paul also wrote about peace, said Father Atuah. In writing “Rules for the New Life” in the book of Ephesians, St. Paul wrote, “All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice.”

In a time when there was dysfunction about what was “clean” and “not clean” to eat, St. Paul wrote to “welcome anyone who is weak in faith, but not for dispute over opinions.” He also told them to “not judge one another” and talk and relate to them in a way they feel appreciated.

“We can look at the whole ministry of St. Paul and how he endured suffering for the sake of the kingdom of God,” said Father Atuah.

He further noted that the New Testament is dedicated to Jesus’ mission to bring peace.

Father Atuah encouraged people to also follow the example of the saints and martyrs because they promoted and worked for peace.

Present day people who are examples of peacemakers include Immaculée Ilibagiza, a survivor of the Rwandan Genocide, Father Atuah said.

For 91 days, Ilibagiza and seven other women hid in a 3 foot x 4 foot bathroom.

After the genocide, Ilibagiza, whose entire family was brutally murdered, came face-to-face with the man who killed her mother and one of her brothers and she forgave him.

Father Atuah, who belongs to a society founded in Nigeria, also pointed to fellow priest Stephen Ojapah MSP as a source of inspiration in promoting peace. Only a few years into the priesthood, Father Ojapah is working to create harmony among Muslims and Christians as the director of dialogue and ecumenism in the Diocese of Sokoto in Nigeria.

Father Atuah proudly showed an article and photo about a meeting between Father Ojapah and monarchs from Zamfara State to look for ways to ensure peace and justice as a means to checking incessant killings in the state.

“He’s moving mountains and he’s a young priest. And his life is endangered, but he is not afraid and is at peace because he is doing the will of God,” beamed Father Atuah.

Love is the foundation of peace
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stjohnschool.org

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smhsbr.org

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cristoreybr.org

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**Catholic High**
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catholichigh.org

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- 4:30 – 7 p.m.
- Open to 6th – 8th grade boys and their parents

**St. Thomas Aquinas High**
Hammond
985-542-7662
stafalcons.org

- Thursday, November 8, 2018
- Beginning 6 p.m.
- Open to 7th – 8th graders and their parents

**Ascension Catholic High**
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acbulldogs.org

- Thursday, January 31
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**Catholic of Pointe Coupee**
New Roads
225-638-9313
catholicpc.com

- Wednesday, February 6
- Beginning 5:30 p.m.
- Open for PreK-12th grades and their parents

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The Catholic Commentator

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By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

The lives of the unborn will hopefully be among many saved during Baton Rouge's annual 40 Days for Life, Sept. 26 – Nov. 4, according to Danielle Van Haute, who co-chairs the event with Clelie and Charles Carpenter.

The Baton Rouge event is part of a national 40 Days for Life peaceful vigil of prayer and fasting for the end of abortion.

Overall, the days have been “filling up nicely,” but there is still more need for coverage, especially during the event's first week, said Van Haute.

“Again this year, we've had a good response from other denominations,” said Van Haute. “It is meant to be an interdenominational effort so we all come together as one voice for the unborn and women.”

The Baton Rouge event is part of a national 40 Days for Life peaceful vigil of prayer and fasting for the end of abortion.

Last year, more than 35 ministries and organizations participated and 1,500 people came to pray. There were 14 babies saved during the event.

“That has been the norm since we started in 2011. We typically have 1,300 – 1,500 people coming to pray for the unborn. And that’s really staggering when you think about it,” said Van Haute.

“I think even when you see the fruit of our prayer, or even when our numbers are smaller than what we would like to see, those are lives being changed. We will never know this side of heaven the results of our prayer and fasting.

“It’s not just babies who have been saved. It’s the moms who have been spared the pain of abortion, it’s the fathers, it’s current and/or future siblings, it’s extended family members, all of society. Abortion has a ripple effect that is staggering. We do speak about the life of the child, but there are so many other lives that are being spared as well.

She reassured people who have never prayed at 40 Days for Life “there are a large number of folks praying, so you won't come out as a lone voice.”

She said the most important role people play at 40 Days for Life is simply to be a “presence.”

“ ‘This is a great opportunity to reach out to a friend or members of your Bible study or ministry. Bring a friend,’ ” said Van Haute.

She urged people to come out for whatever amount of time they can give, noting that some come during their lunch hour or for a few minutes after work.

“Whatever time people are able to spend out there is wonderful and helpful,” said Van Haute.

For more information, visit 40daysforlifebr.com.
Catechists encouraged to listen with their hearts

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

With the colorful backdrop of the story of the road of Emmaus, catechists from across the Diocese of Baton Rouge were encouraged to get involved in the lives of the people they are leading to Christ during the Convocation Celebrating Catechists of the Diocese of Baton Rouge on Sept. 6 at the Catholic Life Center.

The convocation began with a talk by Bishop Michael G. Duca, which focused on the Scripture passage of Jesus’ encounter with the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

The disciples were walking to Emmaus after Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection and did not fully understand yet the great act of salvation that had just occurred. “They were walking on this journey. Jesus then came and walked alongside them and asked, ‘Why are you down? What’s going on?’” said Bishop Duca.

They didn’t recognize Jesus, and he did not chide them for their lack of understanding, noted the bishop.

“He first listened to them. He listened to what was going on in their hearts. He listened to what was going on in their minds,” said Bishop Duca.

And he noted that the disciples had an attraction to Jesus’ message as he unfolded Scriptures to them.

He urged catechists to have the same approach as Jesus in revealing the fulfillment of salvation through himself.

“Get to know them and get to know how they are thinking. Ask ‘What’s going on?’” the bishop said.

He noted that the disciples on the road to Emmaus recognized Jesus when he broke bread with them.

“Once they break the bread they know who he is and ‘poof’ he’s gone,” said Bishop Duca.

But the effects of that powerful encounter stayed with them, according to the bishop.

“There were radical changes in their understanding of what ‘messiah’ means and the kingdom of God,” said Bishop Duca.

Likewise, catechists help mold people into disciples of Jesus by accompanying them and introducing them to him.

Furthermore, they should help them realize Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

By walking the faith journey together with their students, “You will be transformed by Jesus yourself,” Bishop Duca said.

“You may ask ‘Where is Jesus in my life that he may accompany me?’” said the bishop, who thanked the catechists for their hard work in the church.

Next Father Andrew Merrick, director of vocations for the Diocese of Baton Rouge, talked about being a witness for vocations.

What people need most of all to hear the call to a religious vocation is a deep personal encounter with God, said Father Merrick.

He said when Jesus first encountered the disciples in Galilee they had been fishing all night and caught nothing. He told them to put out in the deep and they caught a large number of fish. They then abandoned everything and followed Jesus.

Father Merrick noted that the word vocation comes from the Latin word vocātiō, meaning “a call” or “summons.”

In a vocation, therefore, there is a caller and receiver, according to Father Merrick.

“There’s a relationship, and unless we have a relationship, there’s no way to respond to a vocation,” said Father Merrick.

He noted that when Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI met with the U.S. bishops during his trip to the United States in 2008, he said concerning religious vocations, “To the extent that we teach young people to pray, and to pray well, we will cooperate with God’s call. Programs, plans and projects have their place; but the discernment of a vocation is above all the fruit of an intimate dialogue between the Lord and his disciples. Young people, if they know how to pray, can be trusted to know what to do with God’s call.”

“That’s it, teach them to pray;” repeated Father Merrick for emphasis.

“Our job as teachers is witnessing the power of living out a vocation and then teaching them how to pray and the relationship of a disciple to Christ so they can listen to his voice and respond,” said Father Merrick.

He said that newly ordained priests noted the power of eucharistic adoration in choosing to step into their vocation.

He said that a strong role model to help young people discover their call in life is St. John the Baptist, who when he saw Jesus walk by said, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Danielle Van Haute, director of the Respect Life Program for the Office of Marriage and Family Life, spoke about witnessing for life.

Van Haute emphasized the importance of “respecting the dignity of the child of God in my midst” no matter their circumstances.

She said it is important that people know they are different because of their relationship with Christ so they can spread the message of the dignity of the human person in an authentic way.

“When we sit down with someone we delight in the person in front of us,” said Van Haute, who likened that experience to “seeing the face of Christ in others and having a love for humanity because we see him.”

Next, Olivia Gulino, associate director of youth and young adult ministry for the Diocese of Baton Rouge, spoke about witness to the “nones.”

There are three kinds of “nones,” Gulino said: those who consider themselves agnostic (31 percent); nothing in particular (20 percent); and the “nones” (49 percent).

She said it is important that people understand their lack of faith and the importance of human dignity.

Van Haute emphasized the importance of human dignity to the “nones.” While she said the “nones” may not be interested in religion, she said that human dignity is important to all people.

She said people need to “be open and hospitable to them with love and respect.”

The Church & Community Fair will be held on Oct. 7 at St. Paul the Apostle Church in Baton Rouge.

The fair will feature live music by Kenny Neal, a raffle drawing, a silent auction, bounce houses, live music by Kenny Neal and more.

For more information, visit stpaulbrouge.org.

Church & Community Fair
Sunday, October 7 from 10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church
3912 Gus Young Ave., Baton Rouge, LA

Live Music by Kenny Neal
The First Raffle Drawing is for $10,000!
Live Music – Barbecued Ribs – Fried Chicken Wings
Burgers – Hot Dogs – Nachos – Cotton Candy – Beverages
Popcorn – Snowballs – Homemade Cakes & Candies
Silent Auction – Bounce Castle
Games & Prizes – Dunk Tank – Video Truck
Kiddie Ferris Wheel – Kiddie Merry-Go-Round

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**Bishop Michael G. Duca’s**

**FALL 2018 CONFIRMATION SCHEDULE**

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**EVENING PRAYER SERVICE** – Bishop Michael G. Duca led an evening prayer service Sept. 11 for diocesan deacons and their wives. He then hosted the group for dinner and conversation. Shown with the bishop, from left, are Deacon Tim and Gloria Messenger, Father Jamin David, Leona and Deacon Tommy Benoit and Lisa and Deacon John Veron. Father David is director of the Office of Diaconate Formation. Deacon Veron is director of the Office of Diaconate Ministry and Life and Deacon Messenger and Deacon Benoit are assistants in the Office of Diaconate Formation. Photo provided by Deacon Dan Borne

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**Apostolic visitor outlines plans for expansion at Medjugorje shrine**

WARSAW, Poland (CNS) – The Polish archbishop tasked with overseeing Bosnia-Herzegovina’s Medjugorje shrine has outlined plans for expansion, including more Masses in different languages and facilities for young pilgrims who flock to the site of the alleged Marian apparitions.

“Medjugorje represents Europe’s spiritual lungs, a place where millions discover God and the beauties of the church,” said Archbishop Henryk Hoser, retired archbishop of Warsaw-Praga.

“We now have to re-create its infrastructure, firstly by securing its liturgical space. We also need to expand its areas for retreats and provide new places for celebrating the Eucharist, especially for pilgrims,” he said.

In May, Pope Francis appointed Archbishop Hoser apostolic visitor to Medjugorje, where six young people claimed in 1981 that Mary had appeared to them.

Many people see “only the sociological side of the church, which is also the face of sinners,” and fail to comprehend its religious mission, the archbishop said Sept. 16 at a new Catholic youth center in Warsaw.

“We all bear responsibility for the church – we’re all called to be apostles, evangelizers and teachers, according to the gifts we’ve obtained from God,” he said.

“Apart from the youthful saints who are sprinters, there are also long-distance runners who move slowly, maturing over long years but also reaching the goal of great sanctity,” he said.

In July, Archbishop Hoser said he hopes more priests will come to provide sacraments and catechesis training at Medjugorje, according to Poland’s Catholic Information Agency, KAI.

With rising numbers of mostly young pilgrims and visitors, people wait in very long lines and, in summer, temperatures of over 100 degrees at the shrine’s 50 confessionals, he said. Roofing is also needed for Medjugorje’s main esplanade, as well as better facilities for conferences and charitable work.

Many groups come from countries in Western Europe, “where the church has atrophied” and is “suddenly experiencing God’s grace,” Archbishop Hoser said.

“What’s also remarkable is there are now networks in many countries of pilgrims who’ve been to Medjugorje, who are organizing, meeting, praying together and engaging in concrete activity for their local community and church,” he said.

Over 40,000 apparitions have been claimed since 1981 at Medjugorje.

Diocesan commissions studied the alleged apparitions in 1982-1984 and again in 1984-1986, and the then-Yugoslavian bishops’ conference studied them from 1987 to 1990. All three commissions concluded that they could not affirm that a supernatural event was occurring in the town.

The report of a papal commission set up in 2010 to study the alleged apparitions has not been made public, but some of its points were revealed after Pope Francis spoke about the commission’s work.

Pope Francis acknowledged that pilgrims to the Marian site deserve spiritual care and support, but he also expressed doubts about claims of the continuing apparitions of Mary in Medjugorje.

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Pilgrims pray in front of a statue of Mary on Apparition Hill in Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina, in 2011. CNS photo | Paul Haring
Catholic Charities distributes disaster relief to areas hit by Florence

RALEIGH, N.C. (CNS) – The Carolinas were hard hit with record rainfall and flooding rivers from tropical storm Florence since it made landfall Sept. 14. And although the storm was downgraded from a hurricane to a Category 1 tropical storm, it still caused extensive water damage.

At least 41 people died in storm-related incidents, tens of thousands of homes were damaged and about 500,000 homes and businesses were still without power Sept. 17, according to the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Prior to the storm, Catholic Charities of South Carolina was preparing to help those in need. Kelly Kaminski, director of disaster services for Catholic Charities, said the agency activated its Emergency Operations Center and disaster services team Sept. 10 and had been coordinating with county emergency management teams, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Catholic Charities USA.

It has been working with local partners to have water, cleaning supplies, baby items and other needed supplies readily available in areas along the coast.

Catholic Charities USA has set up its website donation page and text-to-give a platform to help individuals and families impacted by Hurricane Florence. As it did in response to last year's hurricanes, the agency forwards 100 percent of funds raised to the local Catholic Charities agencies that serve the affected communities.

“We are praying for those affected by the storm,” said Dominican Sister Donna Markham, president and CEO of Catholic Charities USA. “Unfortunately, those most impacted by natural disasters are the individuals and families who are already struggling to make ends meet.

“But thanks to the generosity of our donors, the most vulnerable have their immediate needs met and the long-term recovery support they need to rebuild their lives,” she said in a statement.

Catholic Charities USA said its staff members are prepared to deploy to local agencies that may need additional support. Its mobile response unit also is standing by to be sent to the region. The vehicle can be packed with nonperishable food items, health and hygiene kits and bottled water, all of which are ready for distribution. A trailer connected to the vehicle contains a washer and dryer that will allow survivors to clean their clothes. The mobile response unit also can be used as a field office.

Two charity organizations, Food for the Poor and Matthew 25: Ministries, had teamed up and coordinated efforts with Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Raleigh to distribute disaster relief supplies to the hardest hit areas.

Food for the Poor received three tractor-trailer loads of goods from Matthew 25: Ministries for the relief effort with water, hygiene items, cleaning supplies, paper towels and toilet paper to be distributed by Catholic Charities.

Daniel Altenau, director of communications and disaster services for Catholic Charities in Raleigh, said a disaster can be one of the most traumatic things a family can experience.

“We are working with local partner agencies to address the immediate needs of families across central and eastern North Carolina,” he said.

Altenau said Catholic Charities was grateful for the support from Food for the Poor, noting: “We know that no one can recover from a disaster this big alone, and no single agency can meet all the needs of survivors. But, as a community, we can care for our neighbors in need.”

Those wishing to donate to Catholic Charities USA disaster relief can text CCUSADISASTERS to 71777 or call (866) 950-9398. The latest information on the situation can be found at CCUSA.faith/disaster.

CATECHESIS ▼

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particular and religion is unimportant in my life (30 percent); and nothing in particular, but religion is very or somewhat important (30 percent).

“Nones” are a growing part of the population, noted Gulino. Thirty-nine percent of people ages 18-29 consider themselves “nones.” And today’s younger adults are four times more likely to have the previous generations to classify themselves as “none.”

The most common reason the “nones” leave is because they question a lot of teachings and aren’t getting answers; they have an opposition to positions by churches on social and political issues; they dis-like religious organizations; they don’t believe in God; they consider religion irrelevant to them; or they dislike religious leaders, Gulino said.

Young adults are looking for the true sense of community and the sacred through cultural means, noted Gulino. The new “sacramentals” include brunch, coffee, wine, draft beer, vaping and social media.

They also seek community through such things as artists; the “rituals” of concerts; chefs and foodies; workout classes and crossfit; running clubs; pet centered groups; and issue-centered activities. And none of these preclude deep conversations, according to Gulino.

The way that the church and catechists can bring the “nones” back to the church community is re-evaluating youth ministry, asking tough questions and listening to and evaluating young adults needs. Youth and young adults need to be approached authentically, have a sense of being valued and belonging, be heard and be challenged.

Giving a message of hope, Gulino urged the audience members to “always look to the Lord and do what he has called us to do.” She said that throughout Jesus’ ministry he was reaching out to the poor, homeless and marginalized and welcomed the questions of people who came to him.

“That’s where we need to be. Even if all we do is change one person,” said Gulino.

The convocation ended with the commissioning of catechists led by Bishop Michael G. Duca.
Rey Diaz plays the trumpet during a concert by Mariachi Jalisco, a Cuban band that plays Mexican music, at the Latin Festival Sept. 16 at St. Pius X Church in Baton Rouge.

According to Julia Scarnato, executive director of the Hispanic Apostolate of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, the first Latin Festival was held in 1986, originally a project of the youth ministry of the Hispanic Apostolate. It was designed to bring together Baton Rouge area Hispanics in order to share the diverse cultures in the country. Originally called the Feria Hispana, the event took place on the grounds of St. George Church in Baton Rouge.

The Feria Hispana continued at St. George until 1995 at which time it was moved to the Catholic Deaf Center, with its name changed to Festival Latino.

In 2013, due to the steady growth of the Hispanic community, the festival found a new home on the state fairgrounds in Baton Rouge.

Scarnato said, “We are especially welcoming of students from high schools, colleges and universities who are eager to learn about and interact with our cultures. We welcome all feedback from these young folks and are glad to receive their comments. As we reminisce about the last 31 years, it is a joy to realize how the Latin Festival has grown in many aspects. As more than 4,000 people come each year, we draw extensive media coverage, especially as we have been able to draw internationally recognized stage and music performers. However, our success does come with considerable expenses.

“In order to sustain and realize fundraising success, we count on the generosity of our sponsors, the majority of whom derive from Hispanic business enterprises. As a non-profit organization we are very grateful to these sponsors which include attorneys, restaurants, car dealerships, communication specialists and entertainment locales.

“The Mayor-President of Baton Rouge, Sharon Weston Broome, has attended and eagerly supported this annual celebration of the Baton Rouge Area Latino population.”

Scarnato said, “This was due to the rental cost of permits at some previous venues.”

She concluded, “It is a gift from God for the Hispanic community to have this kind of event to bring the family together and feel that our values are still alive and that the Hispanic Apostolate is always there to promote initiatives that promote culture and respect.”

Riding a mechanical bull was the highlight of the Latin Festival for many children.
Program allows students the opportunity to dream

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Coedere Herbert allows himself to dream, envisioning a life as a parasitologist and possibly a singer. Although those dreams might seem a bit lofty for the Cristo Rey Baton Rouge Franciscan High School freshman, those seeds for success are currently being planted through the school’s Corporate Work Study Program.

The innovative program allows students to earn a majority of their education cost, gain job experience and realize the relevance of classroom learning while performing job functions in Baton Rouge businesses. The program allows students, who come from some of the neediest families in the area to develop their personal, social, technical and professional skills that will help them advance in their careers.

The corporate partners pay an annual fee to Cristo Rey. Students traditionally work at the job one day a week.

“The program is very important because it gives us experience and more responsibility,” said Herbert, who is working at Gulf Coast Bank in Baton Rouge. “I hope to develop more communication and people skills so I can know how to talk to people without getting nervous. And it could help me in my future career.”

Students recently met their corporate sponsors during the annual Match Day at LSU. Emotions ran high as the incoming freshmen were matched with their new employers.

“I started dancing because I got the job I wanted,” said freshman Derrick Boyd, who will be working at Price LeBlanc in Baton Rouge and has designs on becoming a chemist. “It will be interesting and also help me in my future career.”

Tears began rolling down the young face of Imani Brown when she learned she would be working at Phelps Dunbar. A self-proclaimed entrepreneur who operates her own business selling a variety of items via social media, Brown said the position at the Baton Rouge law firm is the job she was targeting.

“I will be able to gain experience, helping me in ways to improve my business,” she said, adding that her mother also cried at the ceremony.

“We are getting an education and we are getting job experience,” Brown added. “We are working in adult places, you are learning and being treated the way you always wanted to be treated once you hit puberty, once you hit maturity, and not like a little child.”

The response from the corporate community was equally as enthusiastic. Troy Guidry, a sales manager for Baton Rouge Coca-Cola, said one of his company’s priorities is serving the community, and that after meeting with Cristo Rey officials, “we felt that this program allowed us to continue giving back to our community.”

“Being able to work with four young, bright adults to teach them about what we do here at Coca-Cola and for them to gain business experience was important to us,” he said.

Guidry added the students will work in sales, marketing, human resources and the print shop, performing such duties as receptionist, filing, assisting in setting up meetings, helping produce point of sale material and assisting with marketing programs.

“We are teaching and mentoring the young adults to give them knowledge and experience of how business works, how to dress, act appropriately, work ethic, expectations, etc.,” Guidry said. “I do think it is a foundational program that will lead to future leaders.

“We feel we are making a difference in the lives of these young adults and assisting them to be successful in their future endeavors.”

Training for students begins even before they are sent off to work at one of the 46 corporate work study partners. During the summer, they are trained in basic business fundamentals such as how to shake hands, how to speak to adults and how to act in an office setting. Each student must wear his or school uniform to their job.

“This will help us mature because you have to act like an adult,” said Cesar Rodriguez, who is working at Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center. “We will be getting taught like an adult and getting treated like an adult, not being treated like kids anymore. So you are being forced to learn how to act like an adult.”

By her own admission, A'mya Chirse is quite shy but since starting Cristo Rey she has become more open, saying, “I used to talk to nobody.”

She hopes her job as office coordinator at City Year in Baton Rouge, a nonprofit organization that helps high school students remain in school, will help her to continue to develop her people skills.

“I want to (be able to) go to a stranger (in social settings) and greet them and tell them what I do,” she said. “I can definitely learn life skills.”

The Baton Rouge office of Postlethwaite & Netterville is one of the founding Cristo Rey corporate sponsors. According to Missy Judice, who works in human resources at the nationwide accounting firm, the experience has been as rewarding for staff as for the two students who will be working at the downtown Baton Rouge location.

“They definitely fit in and have made an impact on our lives by just getting to know them as individuals and trying to help them develop,” she said, noting the pleasure she has experienced in witnessing how a student in her department has blossomed.

“It’s rewarding for me to be able to see (the student) do those things and succeed at those things (in areas which she has been instructed) such as spreadsheets, filing, etc. “It’s good for us as well as them.”
NEW MEMBERS – Court Regina Coeli #2063, Baton Rouge, instituted a new Junior Catholic Daughters of the Americas Court at St. Jude the Apostle Church in Baton Rouge. Adult sponsor Carol Goldsmith and Regent Linda Jones, along with Second Vice State Regent Pam Melancon, were instrumental in instituting the Junior Court, which is one of 10 in the state. The mission of JCDA is to nurture personal and spiritual growth through activities that focus on Christ’s message, service and community. Membership is open to young ladies ages 6 to 18 years of age. Pictured are JCDA’s newest members, from left, back row, Deacon James Morrissey, Margaux Mayeux, Susanna Shields, Caroline Losavio, Audrey Ours, Annabelle Ours and Father Trey Nelson, pastor of St. Jude; front row, are Alexandria Ours, Natasha Latasas, Kate Stacey, Margaret Losavio, Belle Camp and Annie Losavio. Other new members include Landry Mayeux and Julia Mayeux. Photo provided by Linda Jones

BACK THE BLUE! – The August service project for Holy Ghost School in Hammond honored the Hammond Police Department. For a donation of $1 or more, students wore jeans and a red, white or blue shirt in support of “Back the Blue” campaign. Members of the police department visited the school’s morning assembly. Nearly $1,300 was collected from this stewardship. Pictured standing, from left, are Sgt. George Bergeron, Lt. Avery Rohner, Officer Corey Morse, Officer Lyle Newell, Officer Chase Zaffuto and Officer Drew Miller. Students pictured, from left, are Kinsley Englade, Brady Daniel, Wyatt Louviere, Ellis Louviere and Lainey Dunn. Pictured in front are Officer Darren Johnson and K-9 Officer Koa. Photo provided by Cindy Wagner | Holy Ghost School

CATHOLIC PROUD

Congratulations to the 17 CHS seniors who were recognized by the 2019 National Merit Scholarship Program. 11 SEMIFINALISTS, 6 COMMENDED

Commended: Hunter Antie, Kyle Becnel, Hunter Dairon, Sean Kennedy Jr., Caleb Sanders and Philip Tullier.

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GOSPEL ▼

From page 2

or have known others who are divorced or thinking about one. When couples suffer, the entire church suffers. How are we called to help those who are in need during this most difficult time? Who can I turn to when all seems hopeless? How can people recognize the gift of their spouse in front of them each day? What happens when the person married and the person later are not the same? How can we work this out? All these questions have been asked over and over. There are numerous ways to heal a hurting marriage. It is never too late. The first step is prayer. The second is to seek help starting with your pastor, a spiritual director and the Office of Marriage and Family of your local church or the Diocese of Baton Rouge. Healing is a start. If indeed, a marriage ends with a divorce, then for the couple, a new path should begin with the healing of an annulment. The journey of an annulment is one of self-inspection, recommitment to God and an opening the doors of forgiveness and reconciliation. It is not a trial nor condemnation. Rather it is yet another way the church offers empathy and guidance for her people, an invitation to restored life.

Finally, the second part of the Gospel and the Letter to the Hebrews bookend the message of the readings focusing on humility. Just as Jesus humbled himself to taste suffering and death, so too are we called, as a child of God, to look upon the cross as a sign of love, humility and victory. God walks with us in our joyful moments and our most painful moments. As a child holds the hand of their parent, so also we should place our hand with trust and surrender into the hand of our loving Father. To die to self and rise with Christ is a life long journey. But be reminded that at the center of the cross is Jesus’ heart and from there flows water and blood: life and mercy itself. Trust. Believe. Receive. Behold.

Dow is the director of Evangelization and Catechesis for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.
En el Festival Latino

Por Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

En un despliegue festivo de color, la comunidad hispana se reunió bajo un cielo caluroso pero de un azul muy vivo, para celebrar la contribución de las culturas del mundo en el Festival Latino, el 16 de Septiembre en la Iglesia de St. Pío X en Baton Rouge.

De acuerdo con Julia Scarnato, directora ejecutiva del Apostolado Hispano de la Diócesis de Baton Rouge, el primer festival latino se llevó a cabo en 1986, un proyecto originalmente del grupo de jóvenes del Apostolado Hispano. Fue diseñado para reunir a hispanos del área de Baton Rouge para compartir las diversas culturas en el país. Originalmente llamado Feria Hispana, el evento se llevó a cabo en las instalaciones de la iglesia de St. George en Baton Rouge.

La feria hispana continuó en St. George hasta 1995, cuando fue cambiado al Centro Católico de Sordos y se le cambió el nombre a Festival Latino.

En 2013, debido al crecimiento de la comunidad hispana, el festival encontró un nuevo hogar en las instalaciones de la iglesia de St. Pío X en Baton Rouge.

“Esta ubicación nos daba un lugar más conveniente para acomodar las multitudes que continuaban creciendo” dijo Scarnato.

El año 2016 marció el trigésimo aniversario del festival. Sin embargo, debido a la devastación que siguió a la histórica inundación en Baton Rouge y sus alrededores, el festival tuvo que posponerse. “Por los últimos treinta y un años la tradición ha continuado, trayendo a gente por todo un día de deliciosa comida, música en vivo, diversión familiar y amistad. Nuestro festival latino le da la bienvenida a residentes de Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Lafayette y áreas aledañas. Es un medio para reunir a la comunidad cruzando las líneas étnicas, siendo su principal patrocinador la Diócesis de Baton Rouge.

Realizado en su totalidad por voluntarios, este festival es el proyecto principal de recaudación de fondos del Apostolado Hispano.

Dijo Scarnato: “Le damos la bienvenida especialmente a estudiantes de preparatoria, colegios y universidades que están deseosos de interactuar y aprender acerca de nuestras culturas. Recibimos con gusto toda la retroalimentación de estos jóvenes y nos da gusto recibir sus comentarios.

“Cuando hacemos memoria de los últimos 31 años, da gusto darse cuenta como el festival ha crecido en muchos aspectos. Como el festival reúne aproximadamente 4000 personas cada año, tenemos cobertura de los medios de comunicación extensiva, especialmente cuando hemos traído artistas reconocidos internacionalmente.

“Sin embargo nuestro éxito viene con gastos considerables. “Para poder sostener y tener éxito en la recaudación de fondos, contamos con la generosidad de nuestros patrocinadores, la mayoría de ellos cuentan con negocios hispanos. Como organización no lucrativa, estamos muy agradecidos con estos patrocinadores que incluyen abogados, restaurantes, agencias de carros, especialistas en comunicación y artistas locales. La alcaldesa-presidenta de Baton Rouge, Sharon Weston-Broome, ha asistido y apoya esta celebración de la población latina del área de Baton Rouge.”

Hablando del cambio a San Pio, Scarnato dijo: “Esto se debió al costo de la renta de otros locales.”

Concluyo: “Es un regalo de Dios para la comunidad hispana tener este tipo de evento para reunir a la familia y sentir que nuestros valores están todavía vivos y que el Apostolado Hispano está siempre ahí para promover iniciativas que promueven cultura y respeto.”

Mariachi Jalisco, una grupo cubano, toca música mexicana en el Festival Latino el 16 de septiembre en San Pío X en Baton Rouge. El Festival Latino celebra la diversidad de culturas en el país. Fotos de Debbie Shelley | The Catholic Commentator

St. Thomas More

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MOVIE REVIEWS

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

The Nun
Warner Bros.
Made with a big budget, this fifth film in “The Conjuring” franchise pulls out all the stops in an attempt to rank as the “That’s Entertainment!” of Catholic-themed horror films. But a surfeit of questionable elements, including the tasteless treatment of a relic deserving of the deepest possible reverence, makes this inappropriate for many. A creepy white-faced demon nun (Bonnie Aarons) skitters through catacomb tunnels and pops out of the darkness in an ancient, sprawling Romanian abbey for a nice series of jump-scares. A priest (Damian Birchir) and, unlikely as it seems, a cheerful novice (Taissa Farmiga) are dispatched by Vatican officials to investigate. The remainder of the movie consists of the familiar Catholic shtick of flags and corrupt officials who robbed her of her daughter (Makenzie Moss) both benefit from the upbeat presence in their lives of a racecar driver (Andrew W. Walker). As Mom struggles to regain her faith and pay the bills, the speedster grapples with his inability to slow down on the wrong side of the law. Mom is helpful, but rather insipid, director and co-writer Harold Cronk’s film, inspired by a country music song, is suitable for a wide audience. How much of an impression it will leave on viewers of any age is another question. Mature themes and stylized combat violence. A-II; PG

God Bless the Broken Road
freestyle
Evangelical drama in which an Afghan War widow (Lindsay Pulipher) and her young daughter (Makenzie Moss) both benefit from the upbeat presence in their lives of a racecar driver (Andrew W. Walker). As Mom struggles to regain her faith and pay the bills, the speedster grapples with his inability to slow down on the wrong side of the law. Mom is helpful, but rather insipid, director and co-writer Harold Cronk’s film, inspired by a country music song, is suitable for a wide audience. How much of an impression it will leave on viewers of any age is another question. Mature themes and stylized combat violence. A-II; PG

Peppermint
STX
Jennifer Garner goes on the rampage in this gory, over-the-top revenge fantasy, directed by Pierre Morel. Garner plays a mild-mannered Los Angeles housewife whose mechanic husband (Jeff Hephner) flirts with, but backs out of, a scheme to rob a local drug kingpin (Juan Pablo Raba) only to have the gangster order him to rubout anyway, a crime during which their 10-year-old daughter (Cailee Flemming) is also slain. Though she identifies the assassins, the fix is in at their trial and they walk free, after which she goes underground and transforms herself into a gun-toting, martial arts-skilled killing machine. Her slaughter spree eventually draws the attention of two of the LAPD officers (John Ortiz and John Gallagher Jr.) involved in her original case and that of the FBI (represented, most prominently, by Annie Ilonzeh) as well. Screenwriter Chad St. John tries to paper over the heroine’s wrongdoing by making her the champion of the denizens of L.A.’s skid row on whose behalf she improbable rids them with aplomb. A benign view of vigilantism, excessive bloody violence, drug use, a few profanities, at least one milder oath, pervasive rough and much crude and crass language. O; R

Unbroken: Path to Redemption
Pure Flin
More artful than many faith-motivated movies, this sequel and conclusion story continues the biography of Olympic runner-turned-war-hero Louie Zamperini (likable Samuel Hunt). Having survived the downing of his plane over the Pacific, a long period adrift at sea and torturous captivity by the Japanese, events related in the 2014 original, helmed by Angelina Jolie, Air Force bombardier Zamperini returns home, goes on the road to sell war bonds and falls for a cheerful and devout Florida native (Merritt Patterson). But all the while he is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Troubled by nightmares and visions in which his chief tormentor (David Sakurai) returns to haunt him, he falls prey to alcoholism. Though his wife is patient and his older brother (Bobby Campo) helpful, it will take no one less a personage than the Rev. Billy Graham (played by his grandson Will) to straighten things out. Catholic viewers may have mixed feelings about the protagonist’s departure from the church in which he was raised. But director Harold Cronk’s drama adapted, like its predecessor, from Laura Hillenbrand’s 2010 best-seller, is both appealing in its promotion of faith and forgiveness and suitable for a wide audience. Mature themes, scenes of domestic violence, a vague scatological reference. A-II; PG-13

White Boy Rick
Columbia
Somber fact-based drama, set in 1980s Detroit, chronicling the unlikely adventures of Rick Wershe (Richie Merritt) who, at the age of 14, became the youngest FBI informant in history, posing as a drug dealer. He then went on to sell narcotics for real in an attempt to break out of the seemingly endless cycle of poverty in which he, his gun salesman father (Matthew McConaughey), and crack-addicted sister (Bel Powley) were trapped. Demange’s gritty slice of working-class life largely ignores the consequences of Wershe’s actions. Additionally, although it celebrates the close bonds Wershe shared both with his dad and his troubled sibling, the film also briefly glamorizes an adulterous relationship, making this fare for the most discerning only. Some gory violence, benignly viewed adultery, drug use, rear and upper female nudity, frequent profanities and a few milder oaths, pervasive rough and crude language. L; R

The Nun
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Made with a big budget, this fifth film in “The Conjuring” franchise pulls out all the stops in an attempt to rank as the “That’s Entertainment!” of Catholic-themed horror films. But a surfeit of questionable elements, including the tasteless treatment of a relic deserving of the deepest possible reverence, makes this inappropriate for many. A creepy white-faced demon nun (Bonnie Aarons) skitters through catacomb tunnels and pops out of the darkness in an ancient, sprawling Romanian abbey for a nice series of jump-scares. A priest (Damian Birchir) and, unlikely as it seems, a cheerful novice (Taissa Farmiga) are dispatched by Vatican officials to investigate. The remainder of the movie consists of the familiar Catholic shtick of lay exorcism “authorities” of decades ago, lifted, by director Corin Hardy and screenwriter Gary Dauberman, to the heights of the old-time Hammer Studios horror outings. Navigating the close boundary line between sacred and profane, sometimes without success, the movie is likely to make grown viewers more of an impression it will leave on viewers of any age is another question. Mature themes and stylized combat violence. A-II; PG

Searching
Screen Gems
Gripping thriller in which a doting widowed father (John Cho) discovers he knows less about his teen daughter’s (Michelle La) life than he thought after she mysteriously disappears, and he has to aid the detective on the case (Debra Messing) by investigating the high schooler’s online social interaction for clues about her fate. The trial takes a number of surprising twists and turns, at least one of which places this off-limits for most younger moviegoers. Mature themes, scenes of domestic violence, some physical violence and gore, a single crude term. A-III; PG-13

God Bless the Broken Road
freestyle
Evangelical drama in which an Afghan War widow (Lindsay Pulipher) and her young daughter (Makenzie Moss) both benefit from the upbeat presence in their lives of a racecar driver (Andrew W. Walker). As Mom struggles to regain her faith and pay the bills, the speedster grapples with his inability to slow down on the wrong side of the law. Mom is helpful, but rather insipid, director and co-writer Harold Cronk’s film, inspired by a country music song, is suitable for a wide audience. How much of an impression it will leave on viewers of any age is another question. Mature themes and stylized combat violence. A-II; PG

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## 2018–2019 SCHOOL TUITION & REGISTRATION FEES

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*Tuition figures may vary depending on in-parish or out-of-parish residents or Catholic or non-Catholics.
How would Jesus vote on capital punishment?

When Jesus was executed, all four evangelists state that two others were crucified with him. The other two, according to St. Matthew and St. Mark were “revolutionaries” and both verbally abused Jesus. St. John doesn’t mention their crime or have them say anything. St. Luke, however, just calls them “criminals” and has one “reviling” Jesus while the other rebukes his fellow criminal, saying, “the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.” They probably were revolutionary, since that was a crime demanding crucifixion in Roman law.

St. Luke changes the scene for a purpose. He records that Jesus forgave all who were reviling him. “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” This forgiveness included the people, the Roman soldiers, the Jewish rulers, and, presumably, the bad thief or revolutionary, plus the good thief-revolutionary, whom tradition has named St. Dismas.

To him Jesus said “today you will be with me in paradise.” St. Luke wants us to remember that Jesus’ death won for us all, even those of us judged worthy of execution, a place in heaven.

Then what would Jesus say to Pope Francis, who recently removed any exceptions to the church’s disapproval of capital punishment in the Catechism of the Catholic Church? He ordered that capital punishment should be declared simply “inadmissible.” I think he would say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” In doing this, Pope Francis continued a trend begun by St. Pope John Paul II who taught that capital punishment was against human dignity and the sanctity of life in his 1995 encyclical, “The Gospel of Life.”

In its original 1992 edition, the Catechism of the Catholic Church in No. 2266 read: “Preserving the common good of society requires rendering the aggressor unable to inflict harm. For this reason, the traditional teaching of the church has acknowledged as well founded the right and duty of legitimate public authority to punish malefactors by means of penalties commensurate with the gravity of the crime, not excluding, in cases of extreme gravity, the death penalty.”

However, in 1997 a revision of the Catechism by St. John Paul II was published which referred to the death penalty only in No. 2267, permitting “recourse to the death penalty if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor.” But, then added “the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity are very rare, if not practically nonexistent.”

It is interesting for us in the Diocese of Baton Rouge that in a lengthy article in the journal “Faith and Reason,” Aug. 17, Tobias Winright, attributes this 1997 change in the catechism partly “to the influence of Sister Helen Prejean, whose letter about precisely this matter was delivered to (St. John Paul II) on Jan. 22, 1997, seven days before Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger announced that a change would be made in the catechism to reflect recent “progress in doctrine” about the death penalty. Sister Helen is a Baton Rouge Sister of St. Joseph who is famous for her work promoting the abolition of the death penalty. She is also author of the book which became a movie, “Dead Man Walking.”

Pope Francis has received a lot of push-back on his declaring capital punishment simply “inadmissible.” Critics argue that the Old Testament approves of it. There are two offenses in the first five books for which death is the penalty murder, adultery, blasphemy and profaning the Sabbath are examples. Winright says that the most frequently quoted example is, “If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, etc.” found in Exodus 21, Leviticus 24 and Deuteronomy 19. This passage is called the “Lex Talionis” or the “Law of Retaliation.”

But we Catholics are not fundamentalists in our approach to the Bible. We try to understand what God is doing through the words of the inspired writer by examining the time the passage was written, the purpose the author had in writing the book, and the assumptions the people of that time lived with. For instance, the lex talionis passage about killing and other harm (life, for life, eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth) was intended to lessen the violence of a time, 2,000–1500 B.C., when people would seek vengeance 70-fold (Gen 4:23). So it was a move toward less violence, mercy.

Life became more civilized as the centuries of the Old Testament went on, which was God’s purpose. By the time the prophet Ezekiel was writing in exile in Babylon (597 - 527 B.C.), God told the prophet: “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked should turn from their ways and live.” And God himself did not kill Cain when he murdered his brother Abel nor David when he had Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba, killed.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops first went on record as opposing the death penalty in 1974, and again in 1980. The Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops most recently issued a statement opposing the death penalty on April 18, 2017. We are the only first-world democratic country in the West still executing people. If you Google capital punishment, you will find that 95 percent of executions occur in China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iraq and the United States. Not exactly the countries we wish to imitate. The argument for capital punishment from deterrence of violent crime becomes absurd when we compare our violent crime rate with Canada, the UK, France, Germany and Italy. They all are far less violent than we are.

Capital punishment is, as Pope Francis says, “inadmissible.”

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 johny...
Bridging the unbridgeable gap

The prophet Isaiah offers us a helpful image here (Is 65, 25). Drawing upon a messianic dream he tells us how that gap will finally be bridged. It will be bridged, he submits, in the messianic age, when we’re in heaven because it’s there, in an age when God’s grace is finally able to affect universal reconciliation. That’s the “the wolf and lamb will feed together” (or, as this is commonly read, “the lion and the lamb will lie down together.”) The lion and the lamb will lie down together. But lions kill lambs! How can this change? Well, that’s the unbridgeable gap between heaven and hell. That’s the gap between the victim, the powerless and the powerful, the bullied and the bully, the despised and the bigot, the oppressed and the oppressor, the victim and the racist, the hated and the hater, the older brother and his prodigal brother, the poor and the rich. That’s the gap between heaven and hell.

If this is what Isaiah intuits, and I think it is, then this image contains a powerful challenge which goes both ways: It isn’t just the lion that needs to convert and become sensitive, understanding and non-violent enough to lie down with the lamb; the lamb too needs to convert and move to deeper levels of understanding, forgiveness and trust in order to lie down with the lion. Ironically, this may be a bigger challenge to the lamb than to the lion. Once wounded, once victimized, once hated, once spit on, once raped, once beaten by a bully, once discriminated against because of gender, race, religion or sexual orientation, and it becomes very difficult, almost impossible existentially, to truly forgive, forget and move with trust towards the one who hurt us. This is a tough saying, but life can be grossly unfair sometimes and perhaps the greatest unfairness of all is not the injustice of being victimized, violated, raped or murdered, but that, after all this has been done to us, we’re expected to forgive the one who did it to us while at the same time knowing that the one who hurt us probably has an easier time of it in terms of letting go of the incident and moving towards reconciliation. That’s perhaps the greatest unfairness of all. The lambs has to forgive the lion who killed it.

And yet this is the invitation to all of us who have ever been victimized. Parker Palmer suggests that violence is what happens when someone doesn’t know what else to do with his or her suffering and that domestic abuse, racism, sexism, homophobia and contempt for the poor are all cruel outcomes of this. What we need, he suggests, is a bigger "moral imagination." He’s right, I believe, on both scores: violence is what happens when people don’t know what to do with their sufferings and we do need a bigger moral imagination. But understanding that our abuser is in deep pain, that the bully himself was first bullied, doesn’t generally do much to ease our own pain and humiliation. As well, imagining how ideally we should respond as Christians is helpful, but it doesn’t of itself give us the strength to forgive. Something else is needed, namely, a strength that’s presently beyond us.

This is a tough teaching, one that should not be glibly presented. How do you forgive someone who violated you? In this life, mostly, it’s impossible; but remember Isaiah is speaking about the messianic time, a time when, finally, with God’s help, we will be able to bridge that unbridgeable chasm.

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 ronrolheiser.com and facebook.com/ronrolheiser.

The sweetest thing of all

One of the most captivating songs in the musical, “Fiddler on the Roof,” is “If I Were a Rich Man.” The main character, Tevye, a poor Jewish milkman, lists all the grand things he’d do if he were wealthy, but in the end, admits what he’d really most like to do is spend time in prayer and to “discuss the holy books with the learned men seven hours every day.” That, he says, “would be the sweetest thing of all.”

Many of us might feel a bit like Tevye, financially constrained and caught up in very busy lives, but yearning to spend much more time learning about our faith. Although the hours of the day or finances can pose specific limitations on our ability to continue our education in the faith, there are, actually, more opportunities today than ever before to expand our knowledge of religion, the sacraments and the historical context of the local and universal church. I used many of these pathways of learning to write my eighth book (coming out in September 2018), and I’m delighted to share them here.

The first and most obvious way to continue learning about faith and to come in contact with people who practice it is to be more active in church: volunteer for service at liturgy, attend Bible studies and reading groups, speak with long-term parishioners who hold in their memories a wealth of information about the parish and its history. Also, listen carefully at Mass. Take in the Scripture readings as if it were the first time hearing them, and note the ongoing histories presented in them. With open ears and heart, words we’ve heard for years can suddenly carry fresh insight.

In writing my upcoming book, I wanted to give strong context to the development of ministry with persons with disabilities, and so went to the Vatican website, and dove into papal speeches, church documents and timelines of activities. All of these were readily available, free of charge, and offered tremendous lessons for today and beyond.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website also has an online archive of statements, documents and other information that forms a powerful body of work for study. Catholic radio and television networks such as Relevant Radio and EWTN, and news sites like Catholic News Service not only report on current events, trends and social issues, but provide a faith context for them and links to resources to better understand specific beliefs or church teachings.

Degree programs might seem impossible for some of us, but online courses through Catholic universities and other faith-based institutions are increasingly available and within reach of even the busiest stay-at-home mom or overscheduled father. And many of these offer degree and non-degree options, certificates and in some cases financial aid, too.

Age can seem to be an impediment to lifelong learning. As we watch streams of younger students head back to school in September, we might think we’re too old to embark on our own course of study. But reports from experts say otherwise: Learning actually helps slow cognitive aging, and anyone can learn something new if they truly try. My own attempts at learning Italian last year might have been clumsy, but they were, after a time, effective. One of the first people I worked for once told me that of all the things I could acquire during my lifetime, education was the one of the few things no one could ever take away.

God’s love, too, is unshakeable.

And the combination of faith with lifelong learning about it? Priceless!

Pratt’s website is maureenpratt.com.
**Coming Events**

**September 28, 2018**

**Hungarian Festival** – The Hungarian Harvest Festival will be held on Saturday, Sept. 29, 6 p.m., at the American Legion Hall, 26200 Hwy. 43, Springfield. There will be a traditional harvest dance, food, and wine auction. For tickets or more information, call Nicole McMorris at 985-974-8045, Julia Orsso at 225-567-3224 or Pauline Fribise at 225-294-3797.

**LifeFest** – The Office of Marriage and Family Life of the Diocese of Baton Rouge will host LifeFest Saturday, Oct. 6, 9 a.m. – noon, at the Ball Room of the Catholic Life Center, 1800 S. Acadian Thwy., Baton Rouge. The event is free, but reservations are recommended by visiting mlldsbr.org.

**Festival of Friends** – St. John Primary and St. Theresa Middle School will hold its Festival of Friends on Friday, Oct. 5 – Sunday, Oct. 7 at St. Theresa Middle School, 70737, 212 E. New River St., Gonzales. There will be fair acts, warrior color bash and mini-pot jamabalaya cooking contest. For more information, call St. Paul at 225-383-2537.

**St. Paul Fair** – St. Paul the Apostle Church, 3912 Gas Young Ave., Baton Rouge, will host a church and community fair on Sunday, Oct. 7, 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. There will be live music, food, games and rides, a dunk tank and video truck. For more information, call St. Paul at 225-383-2537.

**Entering Canaan** – A Day of Prayer and Healing for women and men who have experienced abortion, Enter Canaan, sponsored by the Office of Marriage and Family Life of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, will be held on Saturday, Oct. 13, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. To register and for confidential information, call Tara at 225-568-6004 or email enteringcanaanbr@yahoo.com.

**Marriage Encounter Weekend** – Married couples looking to enrich their marriage can attend a Worldwide Marriage Encounter Weekend Friday, Oct. 12 – Sunday, Oct. 14 at the Bishop Robert E. Tracy Center, 1800 S. Acadian Thwy., Baton Rouge. Register online at lams-wwme.org or call 1-800-586-5469.

**Theology on Tap** – Stephanie Cloutre-Davis will speak on “Drinking Good Spirits” at Theology on Tap on Sunday, Oct. 14, 6:30 p.m., at the St. Alphonsus Church multi-purpose building, 14040 Greenwell Springs Road, Greenwell Springs. The event is sponsored by the St. Alphonsus Adult Formation Ministry. To send in the required RSVP call 225-261-4644 or email icnci@alphonus.org with the number of people attending.

**Morning of Reflection** – St. John the Baptist Church, 4727 McHugh Dr., Zachary, will host a morning of reflection, “Gifts of the Holy Spirit,” on Saturday, Oct. 13. The program, sponsored by St. John’s Handmaids of the Lord prayer group, starts with breakfast at 8 a.m. at the parish hall followed by a talk at 9 a.m. by Father Michael Semana. At noon the group will make a procession to the church grounds for the America Needs Fatima living public square rosary commemorating the 101st anniversary of Our Lady of Fatima apparitions. Attendance is free, but reservations are encouraged by calling 225-654-9470 or emailing jasjohnson@yahoo.com.

**Public Square Rosary** – A public square rosary for our nation honoring the 101st anniversary of the Blessed Mother’s appearing at Fatima will take place on Saturday, Oct. 13, noon, behind St. Jude the Apostle Church, 9150 Highland Rd., Baton Rouge.

**Feast of St. Gerard Mass** – Redemptorist High School alumni and their family, friends and past faculty are invited to a Mass celebrating the feast of St. Gerard Majella on Sunday, Oct. 14, 10 a.m., at St. Gerard Majella Church, 5554 Plank Road, Baton Rouge. Lunch will be provided afterward at the Redemptorist St. Gerard Elementary School cafeteria.

**Redemptorist Homecoming** – The Redemptorist High School Legacy Homecoming will take place on Saturday, Oct. 27, 4 – 8 p.m., at the Old Bogan Fire Station, 427 Laurel St., Baton Rouge. The event is sponsored by the Redemptorist High School Alumni and Friends. For more information, visit rshsalumniandfriends.org.

**Pro-life Mass** – A pro-life Mass will be held on Tuesday, Oct. 2, 5:30 p.m., at St. Agnes Church, 749 East Blvd., Baton Rouge. For more information, call 225-383-4127.

**Displaced Carmelites** – The Secular Order of Displaced Carmelites will meet on Sunday, Oct. 14, 1:30 p.m., at the Our Lady of Mercy Parish Activity Center in the St. Gabriel Room, 444 Marquette Ave., Baton Rouge. For details, call Ethlyn White at 225-343-3181 or 225-803-3391 or email robertwhite456att.net.

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some way. We have to act in some way.

All of those things I first learned here.”

Sister Helen explained how her journey began in taking on the death penalty by “just trying to listen to God’s call, and to act.” Later, inspired by a talk by Sister Marie Augusta Neal about Jesus preaching the Gospel to the poor, Sister Helen moved to the St. Thomas Housing Project in New Orleans where “African-American people became my teachers.”

“This was the other America,” she explained. “I’d grown up in white privilege all over the place. My daddy was a successful lawyer and we had black servants when I was growing up. I never questioned that.”

One day, according to Sister Helen, someone with the Prison Coalition Office asked if she wanted to be pen pals with someone on death row.

“I said, yeah, sure I could do that,” she recalled. “Because I was there to serve poor people and I know that on the streets, capital punishment means ‘them without the capital get the punishment.’ Only poor people in this country are selected for death. Did y’all know that?”

Sister Helen said she was surprised when the person she wrote to, Patrick Sonnier, wrote back and so began a correspondence that eventually led to her being appointed as his spiritual adviser so that she could visit him in prison at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola. Sonnier was executed in the electric chair at midnight April 5, 1984 for the murders of two teens in Iberia Parish. As his spiritual adviser, Sister Helen was the only person allowed in the room during the execution.

“When I came out of the execution chamber that night, it was in the middle of the night, it was dark, I’d never watched anybody be killed in front of my eyes, and I threw up. I vomited. And I remember thinking and it has stayed with me, when God calls us and it is deep in us, it’s going to stay. And it happened right outside the gates of Angola, in the dark,” she said.

“We are women of action,” she said. “When we see something, we raise our voices in the quest for justice.”

For SJA students, the message was empowering and powerful. Microphones positioned throughout the auditorium allowed for students to line up with questions for Sister Helen. Questions ranged from how the students themselves could begin to raise awareness against the death penalty to how families get justice for those who are imprisoned but are innocent. One student was even inspired to reach out to the incarcerated and asked how to become pen pals with someone on death row.

“I liked the way she had the Louisiana culture behind her talk. It was really easy for me to connect with her, and I really agree with her on the idea that life is meant to be treated with dignity,” said SJA freshman McKinley Howard. “And, the death penalty and life imprisonment – I don’t feel like that gives dignity to people.”

“I guess I’ve always thought (the death penalty) is okay,” said Anya Stuart, another ninth-grader. “She’s really kind of changed my mind. I see it more from a Catholic point of view and inspirational just how into it and passionate she is about the death penalty,” said McKenna Ramsey, a junior at SJA.
Michael Vu, adding that “one of the biggest rules of the house is to continue a dedicated prayer life.”

Establishing a house for young Catholic students to live in community and to be a place of growth in the discipleship of Christ has been Father Merrick’s vision since he came to Christ the King two years ago. He said he wanted to develop a community to be more configured to the mind and heart of Christ as disciples growing together, and to help students to be formed in the four pillars of formation — spiritual, human, intellectual, pastoral and apostolic.

He originally believed a house for men, and hopefully another for women, would take about five years to develop. But that changed a year ago when Gruver, who attended Mass at Christ the King during his 29 days at LSU, died when he was allegedly forced to drink what amounted to a lethal amount of alcohol during the hazing incident.

Several weeks later, after the fraternity was expelled from the campus, Father Merrick contacted the fraternity about subleasing the vacant house, which is owned by LSU, but fraternity officials expressed no interest at the time.

“Some refused for varying reasons, but everybody across the board was enthusiastic about the idea.”

For Vu, a Catholic High graduate, the decision was easy, saying he “had a desire to live in brotherhood with guys who were pursuing the same thing I am.”

The students are governed by a set of rules that include maintaining cleanliness in the house, attending a weekly dinner that includes Scripture study, as well as prayer.

“Have we seen growth and a steady enthusiasm from all of the guys,” Trufant said. “One of the guys said he felt he had taken concrete steps forward with some of the things he has struggled with.”

“There is an emphasis of commitment and reliance on each other in order to grow in healthy ways,” he added. “I see growth in prayer life, joy in community and consideration of others.”

Vu said the weekly gatherings have opened him to a different perspective that he would not have otherwise been exposed to, “so it’s been really, really good.”

“Having a brotherhood of men supporting me in the things I am struggling with; little things like waking up on time or big things like relationship issues; that’s been really, really awesome,” he said.

Father Merrick, who said the house could accommodate up to 14 students, admitted the purpose is not necessarily for the young men to discern for the priesthood but said any Catholic man who is pursuing a growth in his faith will eventually discern whether the Lord is calling that person to the vocational life. He said it’s possible in the future that a number of priests could come from the house.

“T’m definitely discerning but the married life right now,” said Vu, whose brother Joseph is a pastor at the cluster parishes of St. Anne Church in Napoleonville, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Plattenville and St. Philomena Church in Labadieville, and brother John is scheduled to be ordained in May. “Witnessing my brothers go through (the discernment process), I’ve been made keenly aware of the fact that if Christ calls there is no saying no to that.”

And perhaps that would be a blessed light to come from an unspeakable darkness.