Fr. Uter personalizes Christmas messages

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Shortly after Labor Day, when the only signs of Christmas are at retail outlets and drug stores, Father Frank Uter takes a seat at his kitchen table in his rectory and pens personal tidings in Christmas cards to each of the 4,100 families at Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs and its mission church, Sacred Heart in Livingston.

He has carried out this tradition for decades, across the Diocese of Baton Rouge at the various church parishes where he has served. During that time he has likely used many gallons of ink.

Father Uter’s inspiration for sending out the personalized Christmas cards came from Pope Paul VI’s 1975 encyclical, “Evangelii Nuntiandi” or “Evangelization in the Modern World.”

“Evangelization has always been part of the church’s ministry since the ascension of our Lord,” said Father Uter. “But our focus primarily was within the parish and her ministries and religious education. But Pope Paul VI reminded us how important it is to evangelize, to reach out beyond the pews.”

Father Uter attended workshops on the encyclical, and in 1976 he was assigned as pastor to St. Mary of False River Church in New Roads.

“T h a t  w a s  m y  f i r s t  p a s t o r s h i p , ”  h e said.

The St. Mary staff had Christmas cards printed up and were going to print labels and send them out.

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Father Frank Uter writes messages in Christmas cards that will be mailed out to parishioners at Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs and its mission church, Sacred Heart in Livingston. Photo by Debbie Shelley The Catholic Commentator

“T h a t  w a s  m y  f i r s t  p a s t o r s h i p , ”  h e said.

The St. Mary staff had Christmas cards printed up and were going to print labels and send them out.

Sticker campaign spreads nationally

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Perhaps never before has a governmental agency flub presented such an opportunity for evangelization.

Yet, that is what happened from the fallout of the Louisiana Secretary of State’s office running out of ‘I Voted’ stickers Tuesday, Nov. 6, when voters went to the polls. The governmental faux pas created a tsunami of complaints on social media, with people asking why they were unable to get the sticker, which is ubiquitous on election day.

At one point, Father Michael Alello, pastor at St. Thomas More Church in Baton Rouge, posted on his social media account, “Don’t worry, you will get an “I Prayed Today” sticker today when you come to Mass.”

Even the personable Father Alello, who admitted his post was a “sarcastic joke,” could not predict the impact that post would have not only in the Baton Rouge area but across the country. Shortly after reading the post, Todd Husers, who first met Father Alello when the young priest was serving as parochial vicar at St. John the Evangelist Church in Prairieville, called his friend and asked, “How many stickers do you want?”

“He told me I was crazy, which I probably am,” said Husers an insurance agent, who remains a St. John parishioner.

“I had no intention of making stickers,” admitted Father Alello, who maintains an active social media presence and believes that medium is one of his ministries. “It was simply a sarcastic joke to play on what was going on in the community at the time.”

A week later, ministers at St. Thomas More were distributing 2,500 stickers at the weekend Masses, as were ministers at St. John. Additionally, Father Josh Johnson ordered stickers to be distributed at Holy Rosary Church in St. Amant.

That was my first pastorate,” he said.

The St. Mary staff had Christmas cards printed up and were going to print labels and send them out.

“I got a few parishioners together that were active in the parish and a few
What should I do?

By Dina Dow

The liturgical season of Advent is upon us. This year there are 23 days in Advent, yet at the time of this publication, there will be 17 days remaining. This means Christmas Day is 18 days away.

However, wait a moment before jumping ahead to Christmas. Rushing through Advent is like rushing the cooking time of a roast, which ends up being under-cooked; it is not quite ready. Advent tends to be over-shadowed by the secularism of the season. People's anxiety levels increase the closer Christmas draws near for various reasons: impending travel, purchasing gifts, socializing events. Still others are struggling with the loss of a loved one, illness, economic strife and other life issues.

The Mass readings for the second and third Sundays in Advent offer an invitation to set aside our anxieties and awaken to the splendor of the Lord. Imagine the most beautiful sunrise ever seen. We stop, take a mental image and feel the surge of something beyond ourselves. Advent is this holy pause, a slowing down, and gently step into the Nativity of our Lord.

The second Sunday of Advent helps steer our course toward the Incarnation with a sense of gratitude, joy and confidence. The prophet Baruch tells God's plan to lead the “scattered” suffering back together. This is a great thing. This reminds us to place our sorrows into the hands of God, thus allowing him to lead us home in joy. Counting our blessings over our sorrows increases our gratitude, even though the sorrows seem to consume us.

Advent is also a time for us to think about how we may have subtly drifted away from our relationship with God, or how others we know have seemingly drifted. What causes this drift? It depends. Some are moving so quickly (12,300 mph perhaps), others struggle to face the day, while still others just do not think about it. Whatever the reason, it is in these times we are to be a light of joy to another through prayer and action. In fact, in the Letter to the Philippians, St. Paul prays with “joy and confidence.” His prayers ask that their love will increase in knowing, Jesus, in awareness of his life and in discerning the value of good moral actions. We can ask for the same, praying, “Lord, help me to know, to love and to serve you.”

St. John the Baptist knew this so well. Placed in the historical context, the Gospel of Luke describes the state of the union by listing the earthly power in the early years of Jesus’ life. Here stands St. John the Baptist on the threshold of covenants. Behind him are generations following God’s plan for salvation. Some paths are straighter than others are. In front of him is the path, the way, and only way. However, the way must be prepared. If we are moving 12,300 mph, we may not be able to stop fast enough, to make ready and to relish this moment. We must remember those who have gone before us to clear the path. Our calling is similar: to make straight the path for those who follow us as we hand on the faith to our children, family, friends and strangers. Who prepared the way for me? How can I prepare the way for others?

What should I do?

St. John the Baptist, as written in the Gospel of Luke, is asked, “What should I do?” as he just proclaimed to those within earshot to prepare the way for the Lord. People from all states-of-life ask him this question. He shares fundamental answers, “Share clothing and food with the needy, don’t steal, avoid threatening someone and giving false accusations, and be content with what you earn.” Some are thinking he is the long-awaited Messiah with such powerful conviction. Ultimately, he tells them someone greater that he is coming with a baptism like no other.

SEE GOSPEL PAGE 15
Domestic Church helps couples grow in marriage

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Erin Franco remembers a time early in her marriage when she had difficulty looking at her husband.

As a young couple she and her husband, Michael, believed their love for each other would allow them to withstand any of life’s difficulties but babies, changing jobs, financial hardship and other stressors tested that love.

“I remember there were weeks (when they were experiencing financial setbacks) that I was so angry and confused that I could barely look at my husband, let alone have a safe, honest conversation about how we are doing as a couple,” she said.

The saving grace for their marriage is not “something that reinvents the wheel” they said, but a movement for sacramentally married Catholic couples that began in Poland 40 years ago with support from St. John Paul II.

The movement, Domestic Church, gives couples lifelong formation in personal, marital and family spirituality.

The Franco’s initial reluctance to participate eventually turned around as they embraced the values it nurtures. They are now coordinators for Domestic Church in Baton Rouge.

Initially, the Francos were not interested.

“Looking back – and I’ll be honest – there are two reasons for that. First, Michael and I were not ‘movement’ kind of people or so we thought. We were wary of that term for some reason,” said Erin. “Secondly, I don’t think we were interested up until that (first Domestic Church) retreat because we hadn’t encountered enough struggle yet.”

But as pressures mounted on their marriage, Erin begged Michael to go on a men’s retreat. Returning from the retreat, Michael said he would go on a marriage retreat, but changed his mind as the afterglow of the event faded.

However, Erin had already signed up for the retreat saying, “Sorry babe, we have to go now.”

While praying at adoration during the retreat the couple said they felt the Holy Spirit tell them, “I want this for you guys.”

Since then they have heralded the life-giving elements of Domestic Church.

The movement focuses on catechism, formation and accessing the treasures of the church’s teachings on marriage, family life, prayer, Scripture and the sacraments, according to the Francos.

Couples begin by going on an evangelization retreat in order to experience the Gospel and saving power of Christ as a couple. Then the couples have the opportunity to join a circle of four other couples and a priest. The couples are of different ages and walks in life, whose insight the Francos find enriching.

The circle meets once a month in the homes of its members to share the joys and sorrows of the journey, pray together and go over new formation material for the month. They also look at their progress in spiritual growth according to seven promises: daily individual prayer, daily study of Scripture, daily couple prayer, daily family prayer, monthly couple dialogue, the rule of life and yearly retreat.

The circles are a “gentle accountability” and couples aren’t expected to be perfect. However, sometimes they are encouraged to “meet in the middle,” especially when it comes to faith.

Sometimes when the Francos meet with their circle of couples, they realize they haven’t prayed together as much as they could have. But they receive encouragement and information that strengthens their resolve to continue their journey.

And that includes setting priorities when it comes to their marriage, according to Michael. Sometimes it takes saying “no” to good things they could do separately in order to spend free nights talking and spending time together.

“We take time to watch LSU ball games together or other extracurricular activities,” said Michael, who met Erin at Christ the King Church and Catholic Center at LSU.

It can be difficult for the Francos to find time to pray together, and sometimes it may be a simple Our Father prayer at the end of the day.

And there’s some vulnerability involved as they open up to each other.

“I’m not typically one to pray out loud. I’m more of ‘pray silently,’ said Michael. “That’s been a constant hurdle you can say to pray spontaneously out loud.”

See CHURCH PAGE 15
Faith Fund offers a way out of payday loan debt

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Consumers shackled by the traditional high interest rates of payday loans now have an avenue to establishing financial stability.

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, with the assistance of several partners, recently launched Faith Fund, an innovative program that will allow borrowers to pay off those loans while also receiving financial advice and budgeting education.

“Our mission is not just to advocate (for the less fortunate) but our mission is to do things (to) serve the poor,” CCDBR executive director David Aguillard said. “It’s part of our Catholic mission that we offer solutions.”

Aguillard noted that consumers often turn to payday loan companies when experiencing a cash crunch. But many of those companies, including national organizations, charge interest rates that can range from 500 percent to nearly 700 percent, he added.

Consumers are often caught in the web of paying off one loan then immediately taking out another loan. Given the escalating principal compounded by high interest rates, many people find themselves ensnared in a financial crevasse that offers no escape.

Lester Dale, director of the CCDBR program, said he met one person who had eight different payday loans. Eventually, the individual was paying $800 of a $900 paycheck to pay back loans, creating a situation where the individual had to continually borrow more money.

“The interest rate is how (payday loan companies) pay their bills,” Dale said, adding he once watched five individuals pay off loans only to get the money back via a new loan.

He said Faith Fund is simplistic in its approach and features three specific steps that not only offer immediate financial relief but also helps the person repair their credit score and live within their means while planning for the future.

The first step is to complete an online application that will be followed by a phone call either from Dale or the New Orleans Firemen’s Federal Credit Union, one of the program’s sponsors.

Other partners include Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center, the Baton Rouge nonprofit agency MetroMorphosis and the Catholic Campaign for Human Development.

The applicant will then come to the north Baton Rouge office where Faith Fund is housed and meet with a credit union representative.

If approved, the credit union calculates the amount owed and pays off that balance to the payday institution. The individual’s loan from the credit union is paid monthly rather than every payday at a greatly reduced rate of 5.99 percent.

Loans are capped at $1,500.

“Monthly it’s a savings, versus paying the entire loan back every pay period,” Dale said. “They (individuals) see more money than what they have been doing in the past.”

Additionally, the borrowers are required to attend monthly financial counseling sessions for one year, where financial consultants will analyze the revenue coming in and what is being spent. After each session, the individual is given homework to complete, such as making calls to credit card companies or making arrangements to pay off bills.

The consultants also offer advice on how to cut back spending so a savings plan can be established.

Consumers are also afforded the opportunity to enroll in a credit repair program through the credit union at no additional cost, and those individuals will be allowed to open up a savings account with an annual $5 charge.

“I’m very excited about this program,” Dale said, adding that since Faith Fund was rolled out in October, 97 people have applied for loans, with the majority being approved. “It’s convenient, it’s right in the community, easy to get to us.”

Aguillard said the seed was planted several years ago on the heels of a failed proposal in the Louisiana Legislature that would have capped the interest rate payday loan companies can charge. As recently as May, a legislative committee rejected a proposed bill that would have created a payday loan product offering loans from $500 to $875 to be paid off in three to 12 months.

That bill would have also capped the interest rate at 167 percent.

Currently, state law mandates lenders cap the loan at $350 for up to 30 days. Aguillard originally believed that “if these (payday loan) organizations have effective rates of 500 percent, surely...”

SEE LOANS PAGE 15

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Former inmates enjoy holiday meal at Joseph Homes

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

One early evening during late fall, the darkness of night surrounded the St. Vincent de Paul dining room in Baton Rouge, but inside, the dim lights were aided by the bright smiles of the men seated at the tables.

Clad in dark winter clothes, their eyes, their faces, their shoulders and their demeanors told their stories ... even as they verbally shared their journeys that brought them there to the Thanksgiving celebration of Joseph Homes of the Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Joseph Homes provides temporary housing for former inmates who are now homeless. Joseph Homes resident Marcus Cretian of Arnaudville was released in June from Dixon Correctional Institute in Jackson. He told the group about riding the bus one early June morning and talking to a fellow bus rider about trying to find a job.

Major Smith, another fellow bus rider, overheard the conversation and mentioned a job opening to Cretian. It was a simple gesture, but a life changing one for Cretian. It was a simple gesture, but a life changing one for Cretian.

“From the Bishop Ott Shelter, Cretian moved to Joseph Homes where he would walk to the bus station at 4:30 every morning to get to his job at an industrial company. Six weeks later, he had saved enough money to buy a car.

“It was a blessing to be reunited with brothers that (had) been in the same situation with me and seeing people doing better ... and helping one another,” Cretian stated of the Nov. 15 gathering. “That’s what it’s all about helping: loving on each other and helping somebody to the next level.

“And most of the guys, when they look at me, I make it look easy, but it wasn’t easy. You just have to stay focused and that’s what I did.”

Staying focused and staying connected appear to be the main ingredients of success for these returning citizens who are ready for a second chance at doing things right.

Barry Williams, 58, of Alexandria was released Nov. 8 from the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola where he had spent the last 41½ years.

“This here (Thanksgiving dinner) makes me feel like I’m free,” said Williams. “Once I stepped on this concrete (outside of Angola), that’s what I always said when I was locked up, if I ever get my feet on that concrete, I’m going to be a nice person.”

The meal, complete with turkey, ham and all the trimmings, was prepared by offenders at the State Police Inmate Barracks and served by Joseph Homes residents or former residents. It’s an annual event that is full of smiles, hope and thanksgiving.

Williams was released one week earlier from Angola after serving 41½ years in prison.

For the men, there was something else: a bond that was as strong as family because of time spent behind bars. During the introductions, former Angola prisoner Robert Brown, also known as Rodan, explained why he still comes around.

“I did 50 years in Angola,” said Brown. “Whenever I can, I usually hang around and try to help the fellows out. A lot of them wasn’t as fortunate as I was. (When) I came home, I had somebody to come home to.”

Now, this group of men is coming home to each other. And, that could be just the support and love that will help Williams stay positive. It was certainly a surprise when he walked into the dining room to see so many familiar faces from a familiar journey.

“It was a shock, it really was strange,” said Williams. “I figured there were going to be people (from) the streets. I didn’t figure it was going to be a bunch of people I (already) know, you see what I’m saying? Now, I’m more comfortable, being around the people that I knew for 40 years. Even if they give you 25 years, 30 (years), 15 (years) ... I know those people, you heard me?”

Barry Williams, left, enjoys a Thanksgiving meal with Joseph Homes residents, supporters and volunteers. Williams was released one week earlier from Angola after serving 41½ years in prison. Photo by Bonny Van | The Catholic Commentator

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Can Lutheran receive Catholic Eucharist? Possible to confess online?

Q One of my sisters who is Lutheran recently moved to an area where there is no Lutheran church, so she started attending Mass at a nearby Catholic parish. She has been receiving the Eucharist at Mass even though she is not Catholic. She says that she asked the Catholic pastor and he said that it was OK. Is it? I find this completely wrong because when I converted to the Catholic faith 30 years ago, I was required to complete RCIA classes. Has anything changed on this? (Chesapeake, Virginia)

A As a general rule, the church’s Code of Canon Law provides that Catholic ministers lawfully administer Catholic sacraments only to Catholics (Canon 844.1). That same canon does go on to say that there are certain situations in which believing non-Catholics might be admitted to the sacraments, but only under very specific circumstances.

Canon 844.4 explains that “if the danger of death is present or if, in the judgment of the diocesan bishop or conference of bishops, some other grave necessity urges it, Catholic ministers administer these same sacraments licitly.” In effect, simply that the non-Catholic acknowledges the reality of Christ present in the sacrament of Penance and about to go into battle or someone gravely ill in a nursing home whose own minister rarely visits.

This same canon does give some latitude to a bishop in determining what qualifies as “a grave necessity,” so I would think that the safest course would be to contact your own diocesan office. (It may be that your diocese has already issued guidelines; and it could hinge, for example, on just how inconvenient it would be for your sister to attend the nearest Lutheran church.)

Q Is Catholic confession available online? This would be so convenient. (Baton Rouge, Louisiana)

A Certainly at this time, there is no provision in the church’s sacramental practice for online confession and absolution. Implicit in the church’s Code of Canon Law (Canon 959 ff.) is the notion that the penitent is in the physical presence of the confessor.

“This cannot in any way be substituted by a technology application. One cannot talk in any way about ‘a confession via iPhone,’” he said.

The sacrament of penance is designed to be, for the penitent, an encounter with Jesus Christ through the person of the priest. It is difficult for me to see how the internet would permit that close personal contact with the Lord. The additional concern I would have is for the privacy that is so integral to the sacrament of penance, the danger that an internet confession could be recorded or hacked.

Having said this, I do not think that the physical presence of the absolving priest is necessarily by divine mandate; so online confession could conceivably be permitted by the church sometime in the distant future, provided that the privacy concerns could be addressed – but I wouldn’t wait for that to happen before confessing my sins!

Q Is there a fee for nullity? (I was married in a Methodist church and now want to get remarried in a Catholic ceremony.) (City of origin withheld)

A In 2015, Pope Francis, in speaking to the Vatican’s marriage tribunal, expressed his desire that all annulment processes should be free of charge. (He also intimated that a fair number of marriages might actually be invalid and that tribunal judges should seek to “determine if there was an original lack of consent, either directly because of a lack of a valid intention, or because of a grave lack of understanding of marriage itself.”)

Previous to this, diocesan marriage courts customarily charged a fairly nominal fee for processing an annulment – to cover the cost, for example, of having the testimony evaluated by a psychologist. (Fees were waived in cases of financial difficulty.) Since 2015, though, certainly most dioceses – if not all – have eliminated the fees entirely.

Ance, in your case the issue of fees is irrelevant since you don’t need a full-fledged marriage annulment. I am not entirely sure, from your question, whether the woman you now want to marry in a Catholic ceremony is the same woman you married earlier in the Methodist church.

If it is – and assuming that you had not received a dispensation from the Catholic Church to marry her in the Methodist ceremony – what you would need to do is to go to confession and tell the priest that you were married in a ceremony not approved by the Catholic Church. Then you would be clear to marry her in a Catholic ceremony.

If, however, your earlier (Methodist) marriage was to a different woman, you do need to get that marriage cleared away before being married in a Catholic ceremony.

What you would need now is just a declaration that this earlier marriage was never recognized by the Catholic Church a decree from a Catholic tribunal stating the “absence of canonical form.” This is far simpler than a marriage annulment and much quicker. Your first step should be to talk to your parish priest – or any priest you know – and he will guide you through the process.

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.
Seeking guidance from ‘an average Joe’

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator
(Second in a series)

Imagine St. Joseph’s reaction when he learned his betrothed Mary, whom he had not yet had relations, is with child.

Did St. Joseph’s heart pound as he felt his dreams shatter? Hurt and confused, did he withdraw from Mary and struggle with anger and self-pity before deciding to divorce her quietly? And when he resolved to end things civilly an angel appeared and further turned his world upside down by telling him his betrothed is carrying the son of God.

Joseph, why were you so quiet? Why didn’t you shout out to the world while all those things happened?

Because humble, obedient St. Joseph followed his dreams and was willing to go where God sent him without knowing where it would take him, says deacons and lay faithful of the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Concerning Mary’s news about her pregnancy, Scott Smith, vice-chairman of the Men of the Immaculata, said, “St. Joseph responds as Christ would. St. Joseph sacrifices himself, his pain, indignation and shame, rather than cast it off onto Mary.”

St. Joseph received help in facing such turbulence in his life through dreams, noted Deacon Mike Chiappetta, deacon assistant at Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs.

Deacon Chiappetta pointed out that St. Joseph had four dreams: when the angel told him to not be afraid to take Mary into his home; to flee to Egypt; to return to the land of Israel; and directing him to live in Nazareth to keep his family safe.

“I know from personal experience that dreams are a powerful tool for God to speak to us without our ‘screens,’ prejudices and biases getting in the way,” said Deacon Chiappetta.

The deacon is involved in hospice work after he was led through dreams to help loved ones have a peaceful death.

Scott said God continually spoke to St. Joseph through dreams, which helped him stay strong during times of trial and tribulation.

“God’s own screams as an incarnated newborn would have certainly infiltrated his sleep and dreams,” quipped Scott.

With dreams serving as a directional for God’s plan for the Holy Family, St. Joseph responded with trust.

“As men, we are often too proud to ask for directions much less fully trust in God’s will without understanding and even before the angel’s appearance.”

Which allowed St. Joseph to step forward with confidence.

“I know we tend to focus on the great responsibility that St. Joseph takes on, but as a father, I see another dimension to this. God has my back,” said Scott. “That’s how I would feel as Joseph. Joseph won’t have to bear this burden alone. There’s an extremely rough road ahead, but God’s angels will never be far off. I would be emboldened to, as St. John Paul II says, ‘Put out into the deep.’”

Deacon Chiappetta agreed, saying “God is always two steps ahead. And we don’t need to know it.”

Because of his trust, St. Joseph took care of the Holy Family even if it went “beyond the parameters of comfort and security for him,” noted Deacon Chiappetta.

By turning over his plans to care for the Blessed Mother and Christ child to God, St. Joseph is a powerful intercessor for families, agreed Hermann, Scott and Deacon Chiappetta.

“St. Joseph has been a powerful intercessor for my family. I remember receiving my first job out of law school on the ninth day of a St. Joseph novena that my wife and I prayed together,” said Scott.

And St. Joseph leads and intercedes quietly, according to Hermann.

“But with 30 of 33 years of Jesus’ life veiled with the walls of the Holy House in Nazareth, we know St. Joseph taught Jesus how to live and work within society while knowing all along that he was the son of God. The second greatest saint, having lived as a humble husband and father and craftsman, never a word of his was recorded in Scripture. That is why it was so difficult for the people of Nazareth to grasp how Jesus could be the son of God, coming from such a humble home, shrouded in peace and tranquility,” said Hermann.

When reflecting this Advent on the life of the unassuming husband of Mary, people can see it wasn’t because of St. Joseph’s greatness, but his availability that he was chosen to play an important role in God’s incarnation, said Deacon Chiappetta.

“In masculine terms, God was looking for ‘an average Joe,’ he said. “You don’t have to be wealthy or have high status to accomplish the works of the Lord. No matter who you are or where you are in the social structure, you have something to offer.’’

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40 Days for Life sees increased participation

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Nearly 1,500 people participated in the annual 40 Days for Life campaign, a slight uptick from a year ago, according to Danielle Van Haute, Respect Life director for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Additionally, Van Haute said she knows of at least 23 women who did not go through with a planned abortion as a direct result of volunteers standing vigil at the Delta Clinic of Baton Rouge, a facility where abortions are performed.

“For the women who chose the leave (Delta Clinic) is certainly cause for rejoicing, for both the mom and the baby,” Van Haute said.

She added each year has brought a tangible measure of increased participation.

“Some years it’s an increase in individuals that come out to pray; every year has brought new groups and many years it’s both,” Van Haute said.

Organizers said more than 40 organizations participated, joining many individuals who stood vigil on their own. Van Haute said the numbers also included many families who came together to pray on the day their particular church parish adopted to stand vigil.

“40 Days is really itself a source of renewal for those in the pro-life community,” she said. “It’s encouraging to see so many groups coming out to pray and to know that you are not alone.

“And many, many more joined in prayer and sacrifice from home.”

She said the mission of the national 40 Days for Life campaign, traditionally held during October to coincide with Respect Life Month, is to bring together the body of Christ in a spirit of unity during a focused 40-day campaign of prayer, fasting and peaceful activism, all with the purpose of repentence, to seek God’s favor to turn hearts and minds from a culture of death to a culture of life, thus bringing an end to abortion.

She said there are many ways by which the success of the campaign is measured.

“We know, however, that even when we are not able to see the results that we would like, no prayer or sacrifice, however small, is lost,” Van Haute said. “It’s always important, after an event, to take an objective look at how things went and get feedback from others. There’s always room for improvement.”

During the 40 days campaign, pro-life supporters set up a vigil during operating hours of the Delta Clinic. Supporters stood vigil at the Women’s New Life Center, next door to Delta, and across the street from the clinic.

Cardinal: No one has right to demand a pope’s resignation

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – People can disagree about problems and the best ways to resolve them, but no one should launch a formal accusation against a pope much less ask for his resignation, German Cardinal Gerhard Muller said.

“Such public attacks put into question the church’s credibility, he said in an interview with the Italian website Vatican Insider Nov. 27.

“I am personally convinced that Pope Francis is doing everything possible to oppose the phenomenon of abuse against minors and to foster a new spirituality among priests who must act with the heart of Christ and do what is good for all people, above all for children and young people,” he said in a lengthy question-and-answer piece.

Asked about Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano’s public call for Pope Francis to resign because he felt the pope knew about the alleged sex abuse involving U.S. Archbishop Theodore E. McCarrick’s but still failed to act, Cardinal Muller said, “No one has a right to indict the pope or ask him to resign.

“Clearly it is possible to have different opinions about existing problems and the ways to resolve them, but we have to discuss this,” each according to his or her role and in a discreet way, the cardinal said.

Such discussions must never become “a public controversy with attacks that end up calling into question the credibility of the church and her mission,” he said.

The former head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which is charged with handling cases of clerical sex abuse, said, “We all have to cooperate in order to overcome this crisis (of abuse) that wounds the credibility of the church.”

“Unfortunately, we have these groups, these ‘parties’ – the so-called ‘progressives’ and ‘conservatives.’ We are all united in the revealed faith and not by the biases of political ideologies,” he said.

One way the abuse crisis unfolding in the United States could be handled, for example, he said, would be for the pope to create a commission of cardinals he trusts to study the situation and then offer proposals based on “solid information.”

Beyond the problem of opposing opinions, warring factions, propaganda in the media and mutual suspicion, he said, “we need a solid foundation of information. This is the only way we can make decisions for the future.”

The cardinal was asked about the Vatican’s request that the U.S. bishops postpone voting on several proposals to address abuse during their annual fall general assembly in mid-November. The Congregation for Bishops had requested that no vote be taken on proposals such as standards of episcopal accountability and conduct and the formation of a special commission for review of complaints against bishops for violations of the standards.

Cardinal Muller said bishops and the pope each have their own responsibilities, “but everyone must collaborate.”

The church’s existing laws are “sufficient” and “the norms of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith already exist,” said the cardinal, who led the congregation from 2012 to 2017.

He said it would have been better to avoid debate and public controversy by having more discussions well beforehand in Rome and not at the last minute.

“The Holy Father is one person and he cannot take care of everything. This is why there are dicasteries of the Roman Curia, to collaborate with and come up with a well-developed proposal to bring to the pope.”
Learn The 3 Reasons Why Every Person in Louisiana (Even YOU!) Needs A Legal Estate Plan. You Can Take Care of Your Affairs Before It’s Too Late!

“Tis the Season of family gatherings and an opportunity to spend more time with family and friends, near and far. We may learn that “Aunt Sadie really needs more day to day assistance than she did just 6 months ago!” or “My sister is debating marrying a second time because her fiancé’s 3 children from his previous marriage are extremely influenced by his ex-wife.” Or “My parents have heard that if my special needs brother receives an inheritance in his name, it will make him ineligible to receive very valuable governmental benefits forever, and who will care for my brother when they are gone?” Or Old sibling rivalry rears its ugly head and the family dinner tends to cause….indigestion! Let’s face it: Holidays are fun and exciting, but can be stressful, too, because we are surrounded by people who we care about and the issues they are concerned about.

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Author & Estate Planning & Administration Attorney

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Author & Estate Planning & Administration Attorney
Laura Poché

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Learn The 3 Reasons Why Every Person in Louisiana (Even YOU!) Needs A Legal Estate Plan...
By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

In the days leading up to Thanksgiving Day, Denise Terrance of Baton Rouge was coordinating the finishing touches for a typical holiday feast with turkey, dressing, gravy, sweet potatoes, green beans, strawberry sauce, rolls and dessert.

But, unlike most people who were cooking for loved ones, Terrance was preparing for almost 2,000 people at two separate locations in Baton Rouge: the Raising Cane’s River Center and the St. Vincent de Paul dining room. It’s something she has done for the past two years since SVDP took over the event at the River Center from Holiday Helpers.

“It can be overwhelming but you can’t think about it,” admitted Terrance, who relies on kitchen staff and volunteers to help.

For these events, cooks prepared 110 turkeys and hundreds of pounds of cornbread dressing, potatoes and green beans. Terrance, who has two adult children and seven grandchildren living in Maryland, worked for Child Nutrition Services for the Diocese of Baton Rouge before taking over the SVDP dining room 15 years ago.

“My thing has always been food and the love of children and the love of people,” she said. “I love what I do, I love taking care of people. It’s not a job, it’s a mission.”

Once the cooking was done and the serving begun, Terrance had just one goal: to make sure each guest felt special and welcomed for this holiday of thanksgiving. She feels so strongly about it that she would love others who provide Thanksgiving meals to join forces with SVDP at the River Center.

“It’s a wonderful thing to be giving out dinners, but if they would collaborate with us, then we could do so much,” said Terrance. “Guests could come inside, feel the love, feel welcomed, have a delicious meal sitting with people and talking instead of just getting a to-go plate and eating by themselves.”

There were scores of volunteers from the community ready to serve at the River Center. They included church members, Girl Scout troops, cadets from the Louisiana National Guard Youth Challenge Program, individuals and many area community service groups.

At the St. Vincent de Paul Dining Room, the scene was the same but because of limited seating, the line of patrons stretched almost a block from the front door. And, in the courtyard were tents filled with bags of toiletries, clothes, shoes, canned goods and fresh fruit for guests to take with them.

“We tried this (the tents) a few years ago and it does two things for us,” said Michael Acaldo, president and CEO of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of Baton Rouge. “One, we only have 120 seats to serve 600 meals and that’s a challenge and so we want to serve as many people in as short of a time as we can. Second, by giving someone a gift – a knit cap or a pair of gloves or a coat or whatever it may be that they need this holiday season – it’s a win-win situation. People are excited to see what they’re going to get, they get something they need, they get a hot nutritious meal and they just can’t beat it.”

“It’s not about giving them the meal. It’s about giving them the love on that day,” emphasized Terrance.
**Ascension sets up satellite school**

By Bonny Van  
The Catholic Commentator

On Tuesdays and Thursdays mornings at 9:30 a.m., students ranging in grades from pre-K to 12, arrive at St. Anne Church in Sorrento to attend class.

For the younger students, that means work-sheets and other activities appropriate for their grade level. For middle school and high school students, it means logging onto computers and streaming live from classrooms located on the west bank of the Mississippi River.

These 35 students attend Ascension Catholic High School in Donaldsonville but when the Sunshine Bridge was shut down Oct. 12 after a barge slammed into a support beam, the Sunshine Bridge was shut down Oct. 12 after a barge slammed into a support beam, the commute for students and faculty on the east side of the river went from 15 minutes to an hour each way.

“It’s more productive and I get more work done, rather than being distracted in a normal classroom,” said Hunter Walker, a senior who lives in Sorrento. “You have to be more independent but you can definitely catch up on a lot more work than at typical school.”

Walker, who is also a member of the cross country and track teams, said he has to run on his own rather than with the team on the days he’s not commuting.

One week after the bridge was shut down, Ascension Catholic School principal Sandy Pizzolato designated a single bus stop in Sorrento for a 6:30 a.m. pickup to transport students to school via the Veterans Memorial Bridge in Gramercy. In the afternoons, riders load the bus 20 minutes earlier than normal in order to avoid traffic tie-ups and the drop-off is at the same Sorrento location.

By the second week of the bridge closure, Pizzolato began to search for a satellite location to give families and faculty a break from the two-hour daily commute. That’s when St. Anne Church was approached for accommodations.

“We’re just helping each other out,” said Father Keun-Soo Lee, pastor of St. Anne.

“The parents and students have been so appreciative of our efforts to provide this service to them,” said Pizzolato. “One student expressed how happy he was that he didn’t have to wake up at 5 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays just to get to school on time for 8.”

Pizzolato admits the challenge has been to make sure all of the materials are available from teachers at each grade level, a burden that has fallen on the teachers.

“Without their support to pre-plan and make copies of materials for us to use at the satellite location, this would not be successful,” she said.

Becky Wild, technology coordinator for Ascension Catholic School, assists students at St. Anne Church in Sorrento parish hall. The church has become a satellite location two days a week for students who live on the east bank of the Mississippi River. Pictured, from left, are Connor Shalley, Andrew Bright, Cody Waguespack and Hunter Walker. Phot by Bonny Van | The Catholic Commentator
Lists Masses both alphabetically by towns and by time of day • Lists Spanish and signed Masses for Hearing Impaired Masses.

The most current schedules for the churches in the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Coming January 19, 2018
Catholic Schools Week 2018

Of special interest to parents, The Catholic Schools Week section will feature information about the Catholic schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge, current registration for the next school year, distinguished graduates and more.

Deadline for this section is January 9, 2018.

Call Wanda Koch at 225-387-0983 or email wkoch@diobr.org.
Instant Family
Paramount
After taking in three siblings (Isabela Moner, Gustavo Quiroz and Julianna Gamiz) from foster care, a good-hearted couple (Mark Wahlberg and Rose Byrne) faces a series of challenges that disrupt their previously placid lifestyle and leave them wondering if they can cope with the commitment they’ve made. Drawing on his own real-life experience, director Felix Van Groeningen effectively, although succinctly, in this adaptation of two memoirs by journalist David Sheff (Steve Carell) and his oldest son, Nic (Timothée Chalamet). There are no solutions offered in this drama, no speeches and no moralizing. Instead, as directed by Felix Van Groeningen from a script he co-wrote with Luke Davies, the story finds Dad trying to be supportive to the point of exhaustion until he realizes that his son has to solve the problem for himself. Frequent drug use, a scene of implied non-marital sexual activity, pervasive rough language. A-III; PG-13

Beautiful Boy
Amazon
The sheer randomness of drug addiction in this case, to crystal meth and the ensuing raw family pain are covered effectively, although succinctly, in this adaptation of two memoirs by journalist David Sheff (Steve Carell) and his oldest son, Nic (Timothée Chalamet). There are no solutions offered in this drama, no speeches and no moralizing. Instead, as directed by Felix Van Groeningen from a script he co-wrote with Luke Davies, the story finds Dad trying to be supportive to the point of exhaustion until he realizes that his son has to solve the problem for himself. Frequent drug use, a scene of

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

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

Creed II
MGM
Viewers will know what to expect from this extension of the “Rocky” franchise long before they buy a ticket. Yet the tried and true, against-the-odds formula still works somehow. Early on in this chapter of the saga, the boxer of the title (Michael B. Jordan), with the help of his hard-driving trainer (Sylvester Stallone), becomes world heavyweight champion. He also proposes to his live-in girlfriend (Tessa Thompson), a singer who suffers from hearing loss. But the rise of a rival (Florian Munteanu), he feels compelled to take on sets up an emotionally fraught match since the up-and-comer is the son of the Russian fighter (Dolph Lundgren) whose blows killed the champ’s dad in 1985’s “Rocky IV.” Working from a script Stallone co-wrote with Juel Taylor, director Steven Caple Jr. handles themes of disability, family estrangement and good sportsmanship with dexterity and manages to instill suspense into this sequel to 2015’s “Creed,” the seventh successor to Stallone’s 1976 original. Possibly acceptable for mature teens. Some intense physical violence, promarital cohabitation, about a dozen crude and at least one crass term. A-III; PG-13

Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald
Warner Bros.
Sharper sequel to the 2016 original, once again set in the 1920s, finds the shy, critter-collecting main character of that film (Eddie Redmayne) caught up in a multilayered struggle among powerful forces within the world of wizardry created by screenwriter J.K. Rowling. As the villain of the title (Johnny Depp) schemes against non-magical humans, the only opponent capable of defeating him (Jude Law), mysteriously remains in the background. When not on the malefactor’s trail, the protagonist pursues romance (with Katherine Waterston) and tries to maintain his relationship with his bureaucrat brother (Callum Turner). Returning director David Yates works up more energy than marked the last outing, though the overly complicated plot and a heavy reliance on special effects and cuddly animals weakens the proceedings. But the magic on display is unlikely to draw even impressionable youngsters toward the dark side and the script promotes tolerance and a preference for peace. Much stylized bloodless violence, occult themes, some gruesome images, a possible reference to homosexuality. A-II; PG-13

Green Book
Universal
High-minded saga of race relations in 1962 is hobbled by sentimentality and doesn’t so much lean into stereotypes as take flying, cringe-worthy leaps. It’s based on a real concert tour through the Midwest and South taken by African-American can pianist Don Shirley (Mahershala Ali) in the company of Anthony “Tony Lip” Vallelonga (Viggo Mortensen), an assistant maitre d’ at New York’s Copacabana nightclub who served as both chauffeur and bodyguard. Shirley was famous at the time for his recordings of jazz and swing tunes (since, in that era, promoters thought audiences wouldn’t accept a black classical musician). Director Peter Farrelly, who co-wrote the screenplay with Vallelonga’s son, Nick, and Brian Currie, shows the journey as a series of individual challenges, depending on the venue. The film has merit despite its flaws, although it’s never clear that either character is experiencing anything along the lines of personal growth. Pervasive racial slurs, references to homosexuality, fleeting rough language. A-III; PG-13

Ralph Breaks the Internet
Walt Disney
Sweet animated follow-up in which the two arcade game characters central to 2012’s “Wreck-It Ralph,” the burly eponymous demolition specialist (voice of John C. Reilly) and his best friend (voice of Sarah Silverman), a diminutive race car driver, find both their resourcefulness and their relationship put to the test when a difficult-to-replace broken part leaves the business’ owner (voice of Ed O’Neill) ready to trash her game. Taking to the internet in search of the rare item, they encounter a new and challenging environment, one he resists but she enthusiastically embraces. Directors Phil Johnston and Rich Moore (Johnson penned the script with Pamela Ribon) deliver a picturesque and often funny adventure that carries reassuring lessons about loyalty and forgiveness. Only the easily frightened mayhem, some peril, fleeting potty-themed puns need worry. Cartoonish mayhem, some peril, fleeting scatological wordplay. A-II; PG

Robin Hood
Summit
Vicious anti-Catholicism permeates this otherwise merely dosey take on the classic legend. Taron Egerton as the titular outlaw teams with a Muslim warrior (Jamie Foxx) he met while fighting the film’s chronologically unmoored version of the Third Crusade to thwart the evil schemes of the sheriff of Nottingham (Ben Mendelsohn) and his more powerful patron, an unnamed cardinal (F. Murray Abraham). Eve Hewson as a feisty Marian provides both the traditional love interest and, eventually, some battlefield backup while Friar Tuck (Tim Minchin) offers meager comic relief. The image of the church that emerges in director Otto Bathurst’s would-be hip updating of his ancient source material is not merely unflattering but grotesque and morally obscene. Anti-Catholic animus, much harsh, sometimes gory violence, including torture, nongraphic sensuality, at least one use of profanity, a milder oath, occasional crude and crass language. O; PG-13

The Catholic Commentator ENTERTAINMENT December 7, 2018
GOSPEL ▼
From page 2

The baptism of St. John calls for repentance, to straighten the crooked lines in our life. The baptism of Jesus sanctifies the waters of repentance, opens the floodgates of heaven where flows the graces ignited by the Holy Spirit into our life. This fire within is meant to be fed by the graces we continually receive in the sacraments and the life of the church.

But wait ... why are we discussing baptism as we prepare for Christmas during Advent? Because the same baby wrapped in swaddling clothes laying in the manager is the same person who will swaddle us in his glory through the waters of baptism and gain for us everlasting life by his death on the cross.

God gives us the “should.” We should praise him: shout for joy, be grateful and sing joyfully. We should be confident and unafraid of his providential love and care. We should pull all our strength and courage from him through the example of Jesus Christ. We should rejoice in the Lord, always: being radiant beacons of kindness, lessening anxiety, asking God for all we need, and receiving his peace to guard our hearts and move our minds toward his son. We know what we should do.

We should embrace the hope of knowing why God sent his son. We should cultivate faith through prayer and knowledge. We should love with the Sacred Heart of Jesus. We should joyfully walk the path Christ has opened, beginning with the newness of the church.

Advent is a time to pray more deeply, share more lovingly and slow down exponentially. Advent is a time of preparing to receive the only gift we ever truly need, a gift seen by few but known to many. It is the gift of God’s pure love. “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths: all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (Lk 3:4, 6).

Doua is the Director of Evangelization and Catechesis for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

CHURCH ▼
From page 3

Taking hold of Michael’s hand, Erin said, “I love to pray out loud, I can talk in front of people all day long. I’ve learned to scale back a little bit and I learned to hugely respect his efforts and I think he respects, in turn, my efforts. It’s one of those mysterious things. It’s about our vocation and how we grow spiritually together.”

Their effort yields spiritual awards.

“It’s about strengthening what you already have and keeping growing individually in your spiritual life. But it’s about a conjugal spiritual life – a spiritual life together. And that is such a game changer for a marriage when no matter how you are personally with God, you grow together regularly and intentionally. It’s huge,” said Erin.

From the couple’s core strength of faith, it can evangelize and catechize the rest of their family. Their children include Gabriel, 9, Faith, 7, Georgia, 5, Roman, 2 and Aidan, 1.

“It also gives you the tools to bring the faith to your children,” said Michael, a native of New Orleans and alumna of St. Pius X Elementary School and Brother Martin High School, both in New Orleans. Erin grew up at St. Jude Church in Baton Rouge and is an alumna of St. Jude School and St. Joseph’s Academy.

Being nominated as the national couple is exciting, but the Francos are just as thrilled about spending time assisting other couples strengthening their own marriages. They said their “fiat” comes from having a heart for helping couples who are struggling because they have “been there.”

Surrounded by family, shortly before experiencing the wonderland odyssey of “The Nutcracker” later that night, the Francos said Domestic Church has been a joyful journey.

“We don’t have a perfect marriage, but I think we have a deep peace we never had before,” Erin said.

For more information, visit domesticchurchfamilies.com.

ACROSS
1 The character of St. Mary’s
6 “...the appearance of the living creatures seemed like burning ___...” (Ezek 1:13)
10 Altar linens
14 David married his widow
15 Friend who’s française
16 Burn soother
18 Slow, musically
20 Unit of capacity
21 A type of school
22 Responsibility
23 You have finished the ___ (2 Tim 4:7)
25 Geographical area of the Church
27 Irish bishop-saint whose feast day is February 6
30 “___ Deniers”
32 OT prophetical book
33 Not a base
35 Egyptian deity
36 Judas blood money bought it (Mt 27:6-8)
41 “Feed my ___” (Jn 21:17)
43 A Old Testament high priest
44 Dominic who is patron saint of choirboys
45 The ___ of David
46 Musical instrument
48 Thin
49 Religious instruction, formerly (abbr.)
51 Bric-a-___
53 Monopoly purchases (abbr.)
54 First book of the Bible
58 Soon
60 Something to pump
61 “___, wonders...” (Gen 33:18)
63 Land with a cavalry in Ezekiel
67 Get rid of
68 Artist Chagall
69 An ex of Donald
70 Latin 101 verb
71 Type of angel that Michael is
72 Continually find fault with
73 Scholarship criterion
74 Visit

DOWN
1 Papal order
2 “...saw Elba”
3 Dryer residue
4 He is not good that the man should___ (Gen 21:8)
12 Water lily
13 Contract
24 “When we eat this bread and drink this...”
26 Gods
27 Hawkeye’s 4077
28 Delta follower, to a ham
29 Place
31 He accompanied Joshua as he reconnoitered the land of Canaan
34 “He ___ into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead”
36 Church leaders
38 Mary, ___-Virgin
39 “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’” and hates his brother, he is a ___”
40 Spanish titles
41 They are particu-... (Mk 4:20)
42 They are above abs
44 Brother of Naphthali
50 The Good Thief
52 The second ___
54 Fixed
55 Unven
56 Carcophony
57 Begin
59 Pertaining to warships
62 Medieval Spanish chest
64 Pledge
65 Grandson of Leah
66 Pistols

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Solution on page 18

LOANS ▼
From page 4

there is a competitive product that can be structured that is more economical for the working poor.”

However, he quickly discovered the challenges of developing a financially sustainable model so CCDBR submitted a grant application to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. The original application was sent back but CCDBR was encouraged to reapply with an improved business plan.

Two years later, armed with a revamped model that included the recommendations of Baton Rouge financial experts, CCDBR reapplied and received a $75,000 grant for three years.

“To offer funds and seed capital to create new structures that adjust some of the institutional realities the working poor have to confront and keep them living on the edge rather than providing them a way out, the CCCHD mission aligned with the purpose of this grant,” Aguilard said. “They are particularly excited about this.”

With the assistance of matching funds from the Firemen’s Fund and OLOY, the Faith Fund office opened on Evangeline Street in north Baton Rouge, housed at the site of Families First. Aguilard said that location is ideal because of the demographics of the surrounding area and the fact pay-day loan companies in those neighborhoods far outnumber mainstream financial institutions.

He said similar programs have been implemented in other parts of the country but rely on donations and fundraising to survive. His goal is to establish a sustainable business model that will cover its expenses and have some revenue left over to invest.

“We are reasonably confident that our model will work,” said Aguilard, who called Dale one of the stars of the agency’s recent disaster recovery program. Anyone interested in applying should can visit Louisiana faithfund.org or call CCDBR at 225-336-8700.
Advent: preparing to hope

Father John Carville

I sit here on “Black Friday,” the most commercial day of the year, trying to write about Advent, a time of waiting for the world’s salvation to be born as a shelterless infant in a manger for animals, a sign of his solidarity with the poor. I did a piece about 20 years ago on Advent and waiting in a spirit of poverty. So I pulled it up and realized that the more things change, the more they remain the same. But then, that should not surprise us about a mystery that was planned by God from all eternity.

“There they go again, Santa Claus and candy canes out before we even buy the turkey for Thanksgiving!”

Yes, commercialism does overdo the Christmas season a little more each year. We try to fight it in different ways. Some swear to stay away from the malls. This usually proves impossible (although Amazon is greatly helping to make it more possible today), judging from the crowd I encountered on my visit (about two months ago the mall was almost empty). Others become liturgical purists and refuse to play Christmas carols or put up cribs and trees before the eve of the celebration of the feast itself. The Advent wreath and “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” is all they will allow until the Vigil of Christmas. Commercialism and its excesses we can’t control. Only a recession seems to stem that. And who wishes for a recession, after the “Great Recession” we just got out of? But I do believe that the anticipation of Christmas (after Thanksgiving) in Advent can coincide with traditional carols and decorations, Christmas cards and parties, while fostering the true spirit and meaning of Christmas. Advent hymns compliment the readings for Mass, so they can be sung during the liturgies. But in our homes and schools it is appropriate to anticipate Christmas with angels and carols, shepherds and wise men. For what is Christmas if not the celebration of a long hoped for miracle, a miracle that happened, and is available for us all year long, if we do not cease to hope? Advent is a time to rekindle the embers of our heart that have become cold with the setbacks and hurts of a year of living. St. John begins his Gospel by describing Jesus as the light that has come into the world of darkness and despair, a light of hope so powerful that the dark events of our life should never extinguish it. The difference between saints and us is that they somehow carry the light, peace and joy of the coming of God into our lives with them constantly. We struggle to keep that light flickering amidst the winds and storms of daily existence. Advent is a time to refuel our lamps with the oil of hope.

The star, the evergreen tree, Christmas candles, all began to stem that. And only a faith of the early Christians, realizing that the coming of Christ marked the fulfillment of God’s promise to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15 to conquer sin and renew humankind, would celebrate the birthday of God’s son on the feast of the unconquered sun. They remembered the prophesy of Malachi: “For you who fear my name, the sun of justice shall rise, with its healing rays” (3:20).

Christ is the eternal light who came into our world, “The light (that) shines in darkness and the darkness did not overcome it” (Jn 1:15). This faith of the early Christians is renewed each Christmas in a world that still suffers the darkness of war, famine, human corruption and natural disasters. (After the very wide-spread dark smoke of fires, may Californians this year still hope for golden years ahead.) Our little world can feel fragile indeed. When dark fear grips us, we need the hope that Shakespeare saw in Christmas:

Some say that ever ‘gainst that season comes
Wherein our Savior’s birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long.
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm;
So hallow’d and so gracious is the time (Hamlet).

The meaning of the season for which we prepare is summed up by the Chicago theologian, John Shea: “What is at stake is human hope.” So deck the halls and wait in Advent hope for Christmas, when “the bird of dawning singeth all night long.”

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

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor should be typed and limited to 350 words and should contain the name and address of the writer, though the address will not be printed. We reserve the right to edit all letters. Send to: Letters to the Editor, The Catholic Commentator, P. O. Box 3316, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-3316, or to tcc@diobr.org.

Mission Statement

The mission of The Catholic Commentator is to provide news, information and commentary to the people of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, Catholics and their neighbors alike. In doing so, The Catholic Commentator strives to further the wider mission of the Church: to evangelize, to communicate, to educate and to give the Catholic viewpoint on important issues of the present day.

PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PRAY FOR US

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

Dec. 13  Rev. Reuben Dykes
Br. Dwight Kenney SC
Dec. 14  Rev. Denis O. Ekwugha
Dcn. Larry J. Meloncon
Sr. Vandana Thomas CMC
Dec. 15  Rev. Gilbert A. Enderle CSR
Dcn. Timothy Messenger Sr.
Br. Clifford King SC
Dec. 16  Rev. Carl Evans
Dcn. Francis M. Minor
Sr. Thanh Tam Tran ICM
Dec. 17  Rev. Michael French SJ
Dcn. Gary Mooney
Br. Noel Lemmon SC
Dec. 18  Rev. Michael A. Galea
Dcn. James J. Morrisey
Sr. Margarita Maria Vasques FMOL
Dcn. Jodi A. Moscona
Br. Roger LeMoine SC
Dec. 20  Rev. Matthew J. Graham
Dcn. Leon Roy Murphy Jr.
Sr. Doris Vigneaux CSJ
Dec. 21  Rev. Paul A. Gros
Dcn. Donald Musso
Br. Malcolm Melcher SC
Dec. 22  Rev. Eric V. Gyan
Dcn. Roger A. Navarra
Sr. Adelaiyla Williamson CSJ
Dec. 23  Rev. Ryan Hallford
Dcn. Angelo S. Nola
Br. Paul Montero SC
Dec. 24  Rev. Robert Halter
Dcn. Ricky P. Oubre
Sr. Martha Ann Abshire FMOL
Dec. 25  Rev. Patrick Healy SJ
Dcn. Stephen Paul Osborn
Br. Marcus Turcotte SC
Dec. 26  Rev. Ray Hebert SC
Dcn. Ricky A. Patterson
Sr. M. Alokes MC
A season of mixed emotions

During my formative years, when phones still had chords and folks hung out on porches to talk to their neighbors, one of my favorite times of the year was Advent. My own memory, fading as it is, always associated Advent with a time of joy, a time of anticipation. Naturally, as with any young person, I eagerly anticipated the holiday season, especially those magical Christmas mornings.

But even as a young Catholic, including my days as an altar boy, I understood there was something special about Advent, which was trumpeted by the priests finally ditching their green vestments they had been wearing seemingly forever to purple and a festive rose for the Third Sunday of Advent.

In the classroom, the women religious emphasized the true meaning of Advent, and how the season is one of preparation for the birth of our Lord.

By contrast, Lent was always somber, one of sacrifice and penance, which even as a youngster seemed almost fitting in an odd sort of way after the raucousness of Mardi Gras. Unlike Advent, Lent was dreadful, especially since it involved fasting and giving up meat on Fridays, a troublesome dilemma for someone like myself who has a disdain for eating any meat and giving up meat on Fridays, a troublesome dilemma way after the raucousness of Mardi Gras. Unlike Advent, as a youngster seemed almost fitting in an odd sort of one of sacrifice and penance, which even emphasized the true meaning of Advent, and how the season is one of preparation for the birth of our Lord.

By contrast, Lent was always somber, one of sacrifice and penance, which even as a youngster seemed almost fitting in an odd sort of way after the raucousness of Mardi Gras. Unlike Advent, Lent was dreaded, especially since it involved fasting and giving up meat on Fridays, a troublesome dilemma for someone like myself who has a disdain for eating any sea-faring critter.

Personally, this Advent has more of a Lenten presage.

Yes, spiritual joy is present in anticipation of the Lord’s birth, yet the recent clergy abuse scandals blustering the Catholic Church have seemingly cast a pall over this Advent.

Just as we envelop ourselves in the sacredness and spirituality of the season, seemingly another scandal is reported, and our moods darken, like a rapidly fading late autumn sun.

For myself, the scandal is perhaps a bit more disturbing because of my own positive experiences with priests starting at an early age. Two priests particularly stand out as being role models through my tumultuous teen years and into adulthood.

Because of their influence, and exemplary lives, at one point my thought was drifting to the priesthood. But the lure of a family complete with the white picket fence eventually won out, and, yet, neither dream was realized as God apparently had other plans.

We are indeed fortunate in the Diocese of Baton Rouge because I firmly believe that collectively we have a tremendous group of clergy members.

Their spirituality, concern for others, love of the church and even their enormous sense of humor and love of life is truly inspirational, especially for a Catholic who often struggles with his own faith.

Unfortunately, the majority suffer for the horrific actions of a few, and because of that this Advent feels like one of healing rather than joy. I go into this season a bit tepid, if not downright challenged, in my faith, taking solace in the fact knowing I am not alone.

Similar to so many others, I am left wondering what I can do as a lone voice, or what can we or should be doing collectively.

Of course, prayer is always encouraged. Occasionally, though, even that can become rote. How does one pray when the faith that you live has a target on its back?

And how do we each reconcile the sins of the past, not only the actions of the abusers but also of some of the church’s highest leaders from around the country who moved abusers from one parish to another in their own individual dioceses?

Personally, my focus this Advent will be on the Eucharist, which defines the very existence of the Catholic Church. Receiving the body and blood of Christ is at the heart of what we believe, the DNA of Catholicism.

Struggle as we may, either collectively or individually, receiving Jesus through the Eucharist is our healing, our own spiritual panacea.

Ultimately, the church is our mother, and like every family, we are not without blemishes. But the misguided actions of our own family members should not allowed to break down the entire family.

Healthy families are rooted in love, and it is in love where one finds the necessary healing to endure the most difficult of times. Along with the joy of Advent, let the next few weeks also be a time of healing, especially for those affected by the abuses of the past, forgiveness for heinous acts of the past and for a church that is clearly hurting.

When is our life fulfilled?

When is our life fulfilled? At what point in our lives do we say: “That’s it! That’s the climax!” Nothing I can do from now on will outdo this. I’ve given what I have to give.”

When can we say this? After we’ve reached the peak of our physical health and strength? After giving birth to a child? After successfully raising our children? After we’ve published a best-seller? After we’re famous? After we’ve won a major championship? After we’ve found a soulmate? After we’re at peace after a long struggle with grief? When is it finally done? When has our growth reached its farthest place?

The medieval mystic, St. John of the Cross, says we reach this point in our lives when we have grown to what he calls “our deepest center.” But he doesn’t conceive of this the way we commonly picture it, namely, as the deepest center inside our soul. Rather, for St. John, our deepest center is the optimum point of our human growth, that is, the deepest maturity we can grow to before we begin to die. If this is true, then for a flower, its deepest center, its ultimate point of growth, would be not its bloom but the giving of its seed as it dies. That’s its furthest point of growth, its ultimate accomplishment.

What’s our ultimate point of growth? I suspect that we tend to think of this in terms of some concrete, positive accomplishment, like a successful career or some athletic, intellectual or artistic achievement that’s brought us satisfaction, recognition and popularity. Or, looked at from the point of view of depth of meaning, we might answer the question differently by saying that our ultimate achievement was a life-giving marriage, or being a good parent, or living a life that served others.

When, like a flower, do we give off our seed? Father Nouwen suggests that people will answer this very differently: “For some it is when they are enjoying the full light of popularity; for others, when they have been totally forgotten; for some, when they have reached the peak of their strength; for others, when they feel powerless and weak; for some it is when their creativity is in full bloom for others, when they have lost all confidence in their potential.”

When did Jesus give off his seed, the fullness of his spirit? For Jesus, it wasn’t immediately after his miracles when the crowds stood in awe, and it wasn’t after he had just walked on water, and it wasn’t when his popularity reached the point where his contemporaries wanted to make him king that he felt he had accomplished his purpose in life and that people began to be touched in their souls by his spirit. None of these.

When did Jesus have nothing further to achieve? It’s worth quoting Father Nouwen again, in answering this question:

“It’s fulfilled!” The Greek word here is tetelesti. This was an expression used by artists to signify that a work was completely finished and that nothing more could be added to it. It was also used to express that something was complete.

For example, tetelesti was stamped on a document of charges against a criminal after he had served his full prison sentence; it was used by banks when a debt had been repaid; it was used by a servant to inform his master that a work had been completed; and it was used by athletes when, tired and exhausted, they successfully crossed the finish line in a race. “It is finished!” A flower dies to give off its seed so it’s appropriate that these were Jesus’ last words. On the cross, faithful to the end, to his God, to his word, to the love he preached, and to his own integrity, he stopped living and began dying, and that’s when he gave off his seed and that’s when his spirit began to permeate the world. He had reached his deepest center, his life was fulfilled.

When does our living stop and our dying begin? When do we move from being in bloom to giving off our seed? Superficially, of course, it’s when our health, strength, popularity and attractiveness begin to wane and we start to fade out, into the margins, and eventually into the sunset. But when this is seen in the light of Jesus’ life, we see that in our fading out, like a flower long past its bloom, we begin to give off something of more value than the attractiveness of the bloom. That’s when we can say: “It is fulfilled!”
Holiday Safety Seminar – The Baton Rouge Police Department will host a holiday safety seminar on Saturday, Dec. 8, 9 a.m. – noon, at Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish Hall, 2250 Main St., Baton Rouge.

St. Agnes Masses – St. Agnes Church, 749 East Blvd., Baton Rouge, will celebrate a pro-life Mass on Tuesday, Dec. 11, 5:30 p.m. On Dec. 23, St. Agnes will host a St. Charbel healing Mass at 6 p.m. For more information, call 225-383-4127.

Day of Reflection – On Tuesday, Dec. 11, Lorraine Hess, singer, songwriter and music minister, will present a women’s day of reflection, “Don’t Just Do Something Sit There,” from 6 – 8 p.m. at the Archdiocese of New Orleans Retreat Center, 5500 St. Mary St., Metairie. To register, call 204-267-9604.

Women at the Well – The Well, a ministry providing women an opportunity for faith and fellowship, will host an Advent evening of reflection Tuesday, Dec. 11, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m., at the Our Lady of Mercy Parish Activity Center, 445 Marquette Ave., Baton Rouge. Tammy Vidrine will present a program, “Pull of Grace: Anticipating the Living Water.” Kathleen Lee will offer musical accompaniment for the evening. To register for the event visit womenofthewellbr.com. For more information, email Corey Toups at coreytoups@olomchurch.com or call her at 225-926-1883.

St. Francis Xavier Centennial Mass and Gala – St. Francis Xavier Church, 1120 Myrtle Dr., Baton Rouge, will celebrate its 100th anniversary closing Mass on Sunday, Dec. 30 at 10:30 a.m. Celebrant will be Bishop Michael G. Duca. Festivities will conclude that night with a centennial gala at the Belle of Baton Rouge Hotel Atrium, 102 France St., Baton Rouge. Speaker will be Lt. General Russel L. Honoré. For more information, call 225-383-3479.

Theology of the Body Workshop – Brian Butler, executive director and co-founder of Dumb Ox Ministries, will present a workshop for parents and teachers of youth in grades 6-8, “Theology of the Body for Teens,” Saturday, Jan. 5, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m., at the Catholic Life Center, 1800 S. Acadian Thwy., Baton Rouge. The cost is $45, which includes lunch. To learn more and register visit gool.gl/AnrgbL.

Afternoon of Reflection – Becky Eldredge will present an afternoon of reflection, “The Spirit of Accompaniment,” for wives of deacons of the Diocese of Baton Rouge on Sunday, Jan. 13, at 3 p.m. All wives of deacons, current, retired or deceased are invited to join the gathering. For more information, call 225-978-7046.

Eucharistic Healing Morning – A Eucharistic Morning for Healing and consolation will be held Saturday, Jan. 26, 9 – 10 a.m. at Most Blessed Sacrament Church, 15615 Jefferson Hwy., Baton Rouge. For more information, call 225-752-6230.

Men’s Conference – Tickets are available for the Men of the Immaculata’s men’s conference “A Call to Battle” that will be held on Saturday, March 9. Tickets are $30 for adult and $25 for students. For tickets and more information, visit catholicembr.com.

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LEGAL NOTICES

Anyone with knowledge of the whereabouts of Ray Coleman Jordan, III is asked to contact the Diocesan Tribunal at 225-336-8755.

Sister Mildred dies

Sister Mildred Guillot (formerly Sister Francis of Assisi) CSJ died at Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center on Nov. 22 at age 92.

She was born in Natchez on Oct. 17, 1926 to the late Leo and Norma Hill Guillot. She is survived by her sisters Betsy G. Roark and Mary Lee Guillot; her nephew Frank Roark of Orlando, Florida; and her nieces Rebecca Wall of Daytona, Holly Gordon of Orlando and Erin Rinker of Coco Beach, Florida.

Sister Mildred was predeceased by her parents and her twin brother, Msgr. Leo Guillot.

She entered the Sisters of St. Joseph in New Orleans on Sept. 8, 1943 after graduating from St. Joseph’s Academy in Baton Rouge and at St. Rose in New Orleans.

She attended Hotel Dieu Hospital Nursing School in New Orleans from 1949 to 1952 where she earned an R.N.

The funeral Mass was celebrated Dec. 3 at Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Baton Rouge. Interment was at Roselawn Cemetery.

Memorial contributions in Sister Mildred’s name may be made to the Sisters of St. Joseph, 3154 Hundred Oaks Avenue, Baton Rouge, LA 70808.

Sister Mildred Guillot Sister Mildred Guillot in Baton Rouge and at St. Rose in New Orleans.
CARDS ▼

From page 1

“I got a few parishioners together that were active in the parish and a few friends and I said, ‘Would you mind one Sunday if we took the parish roll and instead of putting labels on all these Christmas cards if we wrote out the envelopes in our own hand? It seems to me if parishioners are getting cards from the parish it needs to be with a personally written envelope and not like some mass production,’ ” said Father Uter. “And they said ‘Sure.’

“We did that for two years and it was fun. We’d do all of that and have supper and they’d go in the mail.”

But Father Uter felt he needed to do more.

“I said, ‘I don’t get to talk to every parishioner all the time. If I wrote a little personal greeting it would be a way of reaching out to everyone in the parish,’” he said.

He continued the tradition when he was assigned to St. Joseph Cathedral in 1984.

In 1997, Father Uter was assigned to the cluster parishes of St. Michael the Archangel in Convent, St. Joseph Church in Paulina and Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Gramercy. It was during the years when the parishes were first clustered.

“It was, ‘You prefer this parish to us,’ or, ‘You like them better than us,’” said Father Uter. “It was human nature and it was understandable. It was almost like a sibling rivalry, but we got over that.”

He said he sent Christmas cards to families in the parishes so that they would know he cared for them.

“It was my way of reaching out to every family in all three parishes equally. And so they knew it was a way of growing together,” said Father Uter.

Then Father Uter came to Immaculate Conception and faced the challenges of making contact with so many families.

“I knew I was not seeing every family on Sunday, much less talking to every family personally. That’s where the spirit of evangelization really kicked in,” he said.

Father Uter has rules regarding his Christmas card project. Beginning in September he does not take a day off and in the evenings and on Sunday afternoons if he doesn’t have meetings he will go to the (rectory) kitchen table and write cards so it doesn’t become like an office project.

“Each year the secretaries give me a book with every family with the names and ages and nicknames, everything that can help me to make the card personal and ages of the children,” said Father Uter.

If he sees a zero by a child’s name he writes a note to the parents that he hopes their first Christmas with their child is especially graced. He also keeps cards in alphabetical order, so that in case someone dies or becomes sick he can rewrite the card to their families.

And there’s also personal thanks for people’s ministry.

“I have one man who likes to cook shrimp boats (dishes), so I tell him in the course of the message, ‘Thanks for the shrimp boat,’” said Father Uter.

The flood of 2016 was a challenging year with so many people displaced. The church had received the cards shortly before the flood and they were destroyed. Father Uter took a picture of them in a wheel barrel as they were being carted away.

Determined to have some sense of normalcy, the cards were soon reprinted and Father Uter kept up the tradition.

“I wrote a whole lot of cards saying, ‘We hope you will soon be home for Christmas.’”

Once Father Uter finishes writing the cards, a couple of people will take a few boxes of cards home and seal the cards, which also contain a copy of the Christmas Mass schedule, and bring them back to the church.

Parishioner Beverly Jackson will get long trays from the post office and she and volunteers separate the cards by zip codes before taking them to the post office.

The original artwork and a framed copy of the Christmas cards adorn the walls of the ICC office. The 2013-2015 Christmas cards served as a gallery of artwork from ICC teens; 2016 incorporated the works of mercy and 2017 featured a stunning gold star of Bethlehem encircled with handprints of autistic children.

This year’s card features a photo of pint-sized angels and shepherds, from Immaculate Conception Early Learning Center’s 2017 Christmas pageant.

Father Uter said the cards are put in the mail on Dec. 17, the final preparation days for the 2017 Christmas pageant.

When it occasionally requires discipline to write the cards, Father Uter said doing so helps him realize how blessed he is.

“To be surrounded by so many good families and just writing for a few hours I feel really good,” said Father Uter.

Mother Mary Immaculate Conception of the Most Holy Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Most Holy Conception of Mary in the Most Holy Conception of Father Frank Uter writes messages in Christmas cards. Photo by Debbie Shelley | The Catholic Commentator Christmas with their child is especially graced. He also keeps cards in alphabetical order, so that in case someone dies or becomes sick he can rewrite the card to their families. And there’s also personal thanks for people’s ministry. “I have one man who likes to cook shrimp boats (dishes), so I tell him in the course of the message, ‘Thanks for the shrimp boat,’” said Father Uter.

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“For me the church has to be present in the world,” Father Alello said. “We encourage people to vote, we encourage them to participate in the life of the community. This was just a fun way to remind people our commitment is not just to the church on the weekends but our commitment is to our faith and to our community.”

Father Alello said the stickers were a fun, quirky way to carry out the church’s mission of the new evangelization. He told his parishioners to wear their stickers with pride, and “when you are asked where you got your sticker from, you can tell them your crazy pastor handed them out since you didn’t get one for voting.”

Husers said he and a friend designed the stickers, which are similar to the “I Voted” stickers but crosses replace the stars and includes the words “I Prayed Today.”

“It was a fun project; our faith should be awesome and fun,” Husers added. “I think we should have fun with our faith and be proud of it. Sometimes the misconception is we are just solemn and not having a lot of fun. But we do have fun.”

Even weeks after the stickers were distributed, Father Alello remains amazed at the project’s popularity. He has also heard from churches in Texas and Michigan asking how they can have similar stickers produced.

He recalled one story where a lady at a nearby outlet mall saw another lady wearing the sticker. When approached, the lady wearing the sticker, who was from Lake Charles, said she had attended Mass at St. Thomas earlier that day, received the sticker and was proud to be wearing it in public.

“It’s been fun, a fun way to engage the community, a fun way to be a proud Catholic in our community,” Father Alello said. “The people loved it and thought it was a great idea. It’s another way for the church to be present today.”

“I think sometimes we take ourselves way too seriously,” he added. “I think it was a great opportunity for us to be church and community together, just to laugh about something that happened in our community, and also have an opportunity to be truly proud of who we are. We want you to be proud of who we are, we want you to share our faith and our story with other people.”

Father Alello encourages Catholics to be engaged inside and outside of the church.

“What better way to have a sticker plastered on you,” he said. “It gives you a chance to tell a crazy story about your crazy pastor and why it’s wonderful to go to church.”

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When we respond to a plea for help with an act of kindness, it is His hand that guides us. This year, we will serve over 270,000 meals; provide over 30,000 guest nights of shelter; and fill prescriptions worth more than a million dollars. Each of these numbers represents a wish fulfilled and a triumph of faith over adversity.

When it comes to wishes, the kids we serve here at St. Vincent de Paul in the weeks leading up to Christmas are pretty typical. Children like Liz, the little girl in the photo, want bikes and dolls and video games; but there are also some things they don’t want. They don’t want to go to bed hungry; they don’t want to live in homes without heat; and they don’t want to worry about adult problems like lay-offs and eviction notices. The adults we serve – people like Liz’s mother – want things like steady jobs and enough income to buy food for themselves and their families, to pay rent and utilities, with a little left over for Christmas gifts. When a homeless mother has nothing to give her child but love and a kiss, they must rely on others for everything else. Liz and her mother represent the thousands who have benefited from the kindness and generosity of our community.

We’ll do our best to make this Christmas Season a good one for as many people as possible. Our dining room will serve thousands of meals. Our shelters will provide warm beds to homeless men, women and children. Our community pharmacy will fill life-sustaining prescriptions. We hope you will add one more person to your Christmas list and ask you to consider making a financial gift at svdpbr.org or by sending a gift by mail. If you can’t afford to give at this time, please pray for the poor and homeless and help us when you can afford to give.

Cut out and send in with your financial gift:

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