By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Drive through Morganza during winter’s last gasp and one is likely to be tantalized by the savory aroma of Italian cookies in the oven, icing waiting to crown the delicacy. Those aromas might be especially strong if passing the houses of Doretha Debetaz or even Rosie Laurent.

Of course, drive anywhere near Shirley Sorpano’s house and one is sure to detect the winsome fragrance of Italian bread, minutes away from being baked to perfection.

The ladies, along with up to 100 other volunteers, spend late February and early March making the final preparations for the St. Joseph’s Altar at St. Ann Church in Morganza, continuing a tradition that dates back close to 50 years, although the exact date is one of those whimsical mysteries that offer intrigue and coziness to any small town.

What is known is the altar started out on a much smaller scale in the church more than 50 years ago. But it was then moved to the parish hall, where it has continued to grow.

“It has gotten bigger but I don’t remember when we came to the hall,” said 93-year-old Adele Robillard, who helped establish the first altar in the hall. “And the number of helpers has certainly grown.”

Parishioner Bonnie Francois, whose mother, Laurent, bakes up to 1,300 cookies from her comfy kitchen in her comfortable home situated along Louisiana Highway 10, said initially parishioners were given bags with cookies that came off of the altar at the church. But the bags now contain not only cookies but bread and other goodies, including a fava bean, which is considered a symbol of good luck in the Italian tradition.

Today, the San Guiseppe (the Italian name of St. Joseph) Ladies from St. Ann Church in Morganza bake cookies that will be used on the parish’s St. Joseph’s Day Altar on March 17 following the 10 a.m. Mass. Nearly 100 volunteers help make the altar a success. Photo by Father Brent Maher | St. Ann Church, Morganza

SEEN ALONG THE WAY — Father Chris Decker, pastor at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Maringouin, Father Paul Counce, pastor at St. Joseph Church in Grosse Tete, and Father Brent Maher, pastor of St. Ann Church in Morganza, help prepare the St. Joseph’s Altar at St. Ann Church in Morganza.

Remember you are dust — Churches around the Diocese of Baton Rouge were packed to overflowing from morning to evening with people receiving ashes on their forehead to mark the beginning of Lent on Ash Wednesday, March 6. At St. Joseph Cathedral Bishop Michael G. Duca and Father Paul Counce, pastor of the cathedral, concelebrated a noon Mass during which ashes were distributed. Photo by Debbie Shelley | The Catholic Commentator

Solo in his thoughts, aching muscles voicing their displeasure, a world apart from Maringouin, Father Chris Decker was startled by the voice of God.

Walking in an area far removed from cell phones, electricity and wifi, God simply asked Father Decker, “Ok, now it’s just you and me. Can we talk?”

“Essentially, I’m thinking this is strange,” Father Decker said. “I didn’t know that the Lord would come to me and say, ‘Well, now, let’s talk.’”

“Essentially, I’m thinking this is strange,” Father Decker, pastor at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Maringouin, St. Francis Xavier Cabrini Church in Livonia and St. Joseph Church in Grosse Tete, said, explaining that he talks to the Lord every day.

“And it was at this point that he kind of placed upon my heart all of the blessings of my past ministry and the diocese, and then all of the difficulties as well. And he says, ‘would you let me heal you of (your) baggage?’”

Father Decker’s encounter with God came while walking the El Camino De Santiago, a route that traverses the footsteps of St. James, beginning in France and ending in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. The classic route is 500 miles, originating in St.-Jean-Pied-du-Port, France, but many pilgrims begin the walk at various jumping off points, depending on a number of factors.

“(The conversation with God) was one of the most beautiful parts of the Camino,” Father Decker said. “The Camino (experience) was incredibly healing. And interestingly enough, it’s almost as if the Lord provided a little oasis that I needed.”
Food for thought

If you are from the ages of 18 to 59, listen up: this fast is for you. During Lent, according to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are obligatory days of fasting and abstinence for Catholics. And, if possible, the fast on Good Friday is continued until the Easter Vigil (on Holy Saturday night), according to the USCCB.

But, what is fasting? The Bible is littered with fasting. According to the definition in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, fasting is “refraining from food and drink as an expression of interior penance, in imitation of the fast of Jesus for 40 days in the desert.”

That passage can be found in Luke where the devil tempts Jesus during those desert days, even calling on Jesus to turn a stone into bread. “He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry” (Lk 4:2).

But the USCCB also sets guidelines for fasting that do not call for such stringent measures, allowing for one full, meatless meal. “Some food can be taken at the other regular meal times if necessary, but combined they should be less than a full meal,” according to the USCCB. Also, liquids are allowed at any time. And, of course, those who are physically or mentally ill, pregnant or nursing are excused from fast and abstinence.

So, what is the purpose of fasting? Certainly not losing weight. According to Father Daniel Merz of the USCCB, “Hunger is that state in which we realize our dependence on something else — when we face the ultimate question: ‘on what does my life depend?’”

Father Merz states that Satan tempted both Adam and Jesus, “the new Adam,” with food. Adam ate the apple but Jesus refused when the devil taunted him, saying, “One does not live by bread alone” (Mt 4:4; Lk 4:4).

Father Merz writes that true fasting does lead to temptation, including weakness and irritation. “In other words, it will be a real fight between good and evil … but the very discovery of the Christian life as ‘fight’ and ‘effort’ is an essential aspect of fasting,” he states.

And that is definitely food for thought.

Harden not your hearts

By Dina Dow

The early weeks of Lent are upon us. Prayer, fasting and almsgiving provide a sturdy foundation for the path upon which we trod. We celebrate the Second and Third Sundays of this holy season with an overall focus on repentance. The Sunday Mass readings illuminate the fruitfulness of faith, the glory of God’s presence, a thirsting for something more and the promise of hope.

Stargazing With God

The relationship between God and Abraham is fascinating. Scripture says, “Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so,” he added, “shall your descendants be.” Abram put his faith in the LORD, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness (Gn 15:5-6). If we went stargazing with God who desires to show us the impact of our faith handed on to generations to come how many stars would we see? One? A cluster? The Milky Way, or something only the Hubble telescope could detect? Does our faith fill the world as the stars fill the sky? Such a comparison means this kind of faith in God reaches beyond what the eye can see. If the “Lord is my light and my salvation” (Ps 27:4) how am I shining the glory of his light and message of salvation with generations to come?

Transfigured by glory

St. Paul challenges the Philippians with a true model of faith. He warns them not to follow the example of those who are “occupied with earthly things” (Phil 3:19). Rather, imitate Paul who imitates Jesus. Since we are united to the glory of God in baptism, we are citizens of heaven, the destination of this earthly journey. God calls us forth from the “shining cloud” which reveals his glory.

The transfiguration of Jesus is this reality. The mystery of God is revealed for a brief moment and for a particular reason. It only took a moment for Peter, James and John to realize the cloud which descended upon them with a voice that was not a strange fog bank rolling in. God partially lifted the veil to fully reveal his glory. Scholars write the purpose was to prepare the three apostles for Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection, as they needed this to strengthen and build hope in the days to come. It was also a moment to prepare Jesus for what he would endure. It must have been a powerful encounter for them, a true mountaintop experience. When have I experienced the transfigured Lord?

Moses was part of the transfiguration on that mountain. He also personally witnessed God’s presence in the form of a burning bush, which was on fire but not destroyed. This was a moment when God revealed himself to a most faithful servant and called him to task. Moses went from tending his sheep to standing on holy ground. In an instant his life was transfigured from shepherd to a liberator, prophet and lawgiver. Where is God calling us in all of this?

Thirsting hope

As thirst is quenched by water, hope is filled by faith. The living waters, as we hear in St. Luke’s account of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, flows from God. The dialogue is worthy of meditation. Jesus asks her to give. She asks how. Jesus states, if only you knew. She asks where do I get this and who are you? Jesus said I give it. She said she will receive it. Jesus said go and believe. This summary threads the seams of a moment of repentance and a lifetime of hope.

We come to the well thirsting, parched from the sins of life. Here we encounter Jesus who asks us to quench his thirst. But why is Jesus thirsty? He does not need water. He is God. Jesus is not asking for water. Rather, he thirsts for souls. He asks us to give ourselves to him. He is right in front of us thirsting for our love, our heart, our life. If we only knew what he could provide for us we would repent immediately. If we only trusted. All it takes is a bit of softening of the heart, repentance with humility, a heap of trust and hope in the promises of Jesus. Am I ready this Lent to be filled with the living waters of Jesus? Am I ready to repent of what keeps me so thirsty? Can I give Jesus the living waters of Jesus? Am I ready to repent of what am I waiting for? He is waiting for me.

Dow is the director of Evangelization and Catechesis for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.
Loss of respect for human life drives spiritual decline

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

When disregarding signs and warnings that they are going down a wrong road, people make many twists and turns before they stop and ask in dazed confusion, “Where are we?” and “How did we get here?”

The same is true concerning the challenges our nation faces today, according to Father Jeff Bayhi, pastor of St. John the Baptist Church in Zachary and founder of Metanoia Manor, Inc., which provides refuge for victims of human trafficking.

At a meeting of Women in Spirit Feb. 28 at St. Joseph Cathedral in Baton Rouge, Father Bayhi spoke about how the challenges we face today, according to Father Jeff Bayhi, said the Sisters of the Hospitalier are the “heroes,” serving as mothers to the girls as they struggle to better their lives.

Father Bayhi said, “Ultimately, Metanoia Manor is a mission, a response to the call of God.”

For more information about Metanoia, visit metanoia-inc.org or call 225-615-7085.

It’s not always strangers who sell the children. According to Father Bayhi, statistics show that 40 percent of children sold into the sex trafficking industry are sold by a parent or primary caregiver.

“We’ve got a lot of changing to do,” Father Bayhi said.

Speaking of the work in Metanoia Manor, Father Bayhi said that the spiritual problems that leave people asking in exasperation, “What’s happening?”

Beginning with the introduction of birth control, when Margaret Sanger there has been a breakdown of the family, Father Bayhi said. He noted Sanger advocated eugenics, which would “purify” the gene pool by breeding out undesirable traits or by disposing of undesirable human beings, individuals, ethnic groups or whole races.

Father Bayhi said when he was a student at St. Aloysius School at Baton Rouge during the 1960s there was only one child he knew of whose parents were divorced.

“Marriage and family life up to that point was certainly a lot more stable than it is today ... it’s changed a great deal,” he said.

Along with the decline in family life came the increase in violence, according to Father Bayhi.

“When I was a kid we got into fistfights. I might get my nose broken. There was teenage testosterone,” he said. “But there wasn’t the violence there is today. Then Roe V. Wade comes along and we start to see a lot of things happening. Kids are getting killed for their sneakers. They get a pair of Michael Jordans, sneakers that their parents bought for them and somebody wants them and they get killed for sneakers or athletic jackets.”

He then referred to the chilling rise in school shootings.

“What is going on?” thundered Father Bayhi. “Where have we lost it?”

He continued, “Then one of the most outrageous offenses against the dignity of the human person is this recent legislation (allowing) a child to be born, and keeping it comfortable with the help of ‘compassionate people.’ And meanwhile his mother and doctor decide if that child is going to live or die.”

Society has “slouched” against the violence against a human person.

“We now see human life as a matter of profit, pleasure or possession,” he said.

“Unfortunately, it goes on past that,” said Father Bayhi, noting that pornography is a million-dollar business.

Father Bayhi said pornography has become “a huge problem. You have grandpas – everybody – married men ...”

“One thing I tell people. ‘Do you have children? Grandchildren? I want you to put their pictures on the screensaver of your computer and the next time you go there to look at (porn) I want you to think about what you would do if your child was the star of that show you’re getting ready to watch.’”

He spoke of a girl from Baton Rouge who was abducted and sold into the sex trafficking and porn industry through Snapchat. When she was rescued the girl remembered doing an average of 30 sexual favors a day.
Bishop Talley to lead the Diocese of Memphis

WASHINGTON (CNS) – Just over four months after Pope Francis forced Bishop Martin D. Holley to step down as bishop of Memphis, Tennessee, he appointed Bishop David P. Talley of Alexandria to lead the diocese.

Bishop Talley’s appointment was announced March 5 in Washington by Archbishop Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States.

The archbishop also announced Pope Francis’ decisions to accept the resignation of 75-year-old Bishop Armando X. Ochoa of Fresno, California, and appoint Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop Joseph V. Brennan to succeed him. In addition, Pope Francis appointed Philippines-born Msgr. Alejandro D. Aclan to be an auxiliary bishop in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

Bishop Talley, 68, a former auxiliary bishop of Atlanta, was named coadjutor of the Diocese of Alexandria in 2016 and succeeded Bishop Ronald P. Herzog when he retired in 2017. Bishop Talley will be installed as the sixth bishop of Memphis April 2.

“It is with deep joy that I join the faithful of the Diocese of Memphis in welcoming Bishop Talley,” said Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, who is apostolic administrator of the diocese.

Bishop Talley brings the heart of a pastor and shepherd, “most importantly, he brings ‘a wealth of experience’ as pastor and bishop, and ‘most importantly, he brings the heart of a pastor and a sterling reputation as a good shepherd,’” the archbishop said in a statement.

He is “devoted to Jesus Christ and his church, deeply concerned for those he serves, humble and wise,” Archbishop Kurtz added.

Number of priests decline; percentage of Catholics remains steady

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – The percentage of Catholics in the world has remained steady, while the number of priests has decreased for the first time in almost a decade, according to Vatican statistics.

Meanwhile, the numbers of bishops, permanent deacons, lay missionaries and catechists have all increased, it said.

At the end of 2017, the worldwide Catholic population exceeded 1.3 billion, which continued to be about 17.7 percent of the world’s population, said a statement published March 6 by the Vatican press office.

The statement reported a handful of the statistics in the Statistical Yearbook of the Church, which reported worldwide church figures as of Dec. 31, 2017.

According to the statistical yearbook, the number of Catholics increased in every continent. But while that growth in Africa and the Americas kept pace with their respective region’s population growth, Asia showed a 1.5 percent increase in the number of Catholics while the region’s population grew less than 1 percent.

At the end of 2017, most of the world’s Catholics (48.5 percent) were living in the Americas, followed by Europe with 21.8 percent.

The yearbook showed the number of bishops in the world rose from 5,133 in 2012 to 5,389 in 2017.

For the first time since 2010, the Vatican statement said, the total number of priests – diocesan and religious order – around the world decreased, going from 414,969 in 2016 to 414,582 in 2017.

Ordinations of diocesan priests continued to decline slowly from 6,577 in 2012 to 5,815 in 2017.

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Come Lord Jesus! celebrates anniversary

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

When the fire of the Holy Spirit was breathed into the apostles at Pentecost, they were emboldened to preach the word as Jesus taught them and “go out to the ends of the earth.” Many were even persecuted for it, so it could be passed down to people of today. Following the pattern set by the apostles into modern day life, participants in the Come Lord Jesus! program say they focus on a community centered around prayer, Scripture, Eucharist and Christian community.

Originating in the Diocese of Lafayette, the program will celebrate it’s 36th anniversary with a conference Saturday, March 30, 8:30 a.m. – 12 p.m., at St. Pius X Church, 201 E Bayou Pkwy, Lafayette.

Come Lord Jesus! is modeled after Jesus’ formation of the disciples as recorded in Acts 2:42: “They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.”

The program, developed by Father Conley Bertrand, was introduced to the Diocese of Baton Rouge in late 1982, when Lisette Borné’s sister, Sister Camille Anne Campbell O’Carm, handed her a manual called “Come, Lord Jesus!” and said she might be interested in introducing it to St. Aloysius School in Baton Rouge. Sister Camille Anne said it was an active program at Vermillion Catholic High School in Abbeville where she was teaching.

Borné said she had been asked God to show her what he wanted her to do in the coming year and God “answered her prayer in two big ways” in the spring of 1983.

First, Borné and the other members of a mom’s prayer group decided Come, Lord Jesus! would be a good thing for the upcoming eighth-grade class at St. Aloysius. Borné approached principal Alan Powers, who gave quick, enthusiastic approval because he was familiar with the program.

Secondly, Borné discovered she was expecting her and her husband’s, Deacon Dan Borné’s, fourth child, the first in nearly seven years. And 1983 saw the birth of Come, Lord Jesus! in Baton Rouge and David Borné.

Borné coordinated the school program and formation of adult groups for 20 years. She then handed the reigns over to other coordinators who have faithfully guided the program.

“With enthusiastic support from the pastors, school administrators and parents, we have successfully engaged both children and adults in the program. Come, Lord Jesus! is important when you’re making such big decisions in your life.”

For more information about Come Lord Jesus! and its anniversary celebration, visit cometlordjesus.com or email cindy.ristroph@outlook.com or mary_carlin_1@hotmail.com.

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Annulment necessary?/ ‘Amen’ is right

Q I was married by a minister/at- torney 40 years ago. My husband was Jewish, and the marriage ended in a divorce after nine months. I now want to marry a man who is a widower. We are both active Catholics, and we want to be married in the church. Will I need to apply for an annulment? If so, how long will it take? (Santa Barbara, California)

A This is an easy one – both for me to answer and for you to carry out. I am assuming here that 40 years ago you never received the Catholic Church’s permission to marry in an other-than-Catholic ceremony. If that is true, you do not need now a full-scale annulment process (which normally can take upward of a year).

Instead, you simply need an administrative proceeding called, technically, a “declaration of nullity for absence of canonical form.” This would involve your meeting with a priest and filling out some short paperwork regarding your earlier wedding – where it took place, who officiated, etc.

The priest would then submit this petition to your diocese requesting a formal declaration that the earlier ceremony did not constitute a valid Catholic wedding which would then leave you free now to marry in a Catholic ceremony. This would almost surely be a relatively quick process.

One California diocese, for example, says on its website that “a typical administrative declaration of nullity in the Diocese of Oakland would take about three weeks to obtain, once the necessary papers have been sent to the tribunal office.”

Q I know that there is some leeway as to whether to receive the Eucharist in the mouth or in the hand and also as to whether to receive kneeling or standing. But what about the “Amen” response just before taking Communion?

When the priest says, “body of Christ,” it is ever appropriate to say something different, such as “yes,” “I believe” or even “thank you?” Or what if the recipient simply says nothing at all? With any of these or other possible responses, could the priest refuse to serve Communion? (southern Indiana)

A The response to “the body of Christ” is “amen.” In the liturgical guidelines, there is no suggestion of or permission for an alternative response. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, the official “rulebook” of the church on liturgy, says: “The priest raises the host slightly and shows it to each, saying, the body of Christ. The communicant replies, amen, and receives the sacrament” (No. 161).

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, document “Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion” explains that “the act of Communion, therefore, is also an act of faith. For when the minister says, ‘the body of Christ’ or ‘the blood of Christ,’ the communicant’s ‘amen’ is a profession in the presence of the saving Christ, body and blood, soul and divinity, who now gives life to the believer” (No. 14).

I’m sure that part of the reason for this universal conformity is to assure the dignity and respect that should surround the Eucharist. What if the church allowed for creative variations, simply permitted recipients to say whatever they wanted?

Your own examples “yes,” “I believe” and “thank you” are tame; but suppose someone chose to say, “I am very grateful” or even, “This makes my day.” Might it then be difficult for those nearby to give their full attention to the sacred sacrament?

Now to your final question: whether the priest should refuse to give Communion to someone who uses a different response. I don’t think so; that doesn’t mean the person doesn’t believe in the Eucharist or is unworthy to receive.

If the recipient, however, made no response at all, the priest might wonder whether the person had ever received before; I can imagine a priest, in that situation, quietly asking if the person were a Catholic – although my own tendency would be simply to give the benefit of the doubt.

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.
Through suffering comes redemption

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

Cries of physical agony as the cold metal of nails are hammered into his warm flesh. Looks of anguish on his face from the piercing of his heart from the sword of betrayal, beginning with a kiss from Judas, the mockery of the crowds and the abandonment of those who were closest to him. And the most difficult thing to bear – our sins as the reason he is there and will surrender everything saying, “It is finished.”

To understand the redemptive power of the long, hard journey of sacrifice and suffering during Lent, one must unite themselves with Jesus, who experienced it, and yet, with love and compassion says, “Father forgive them, they know not what they do,” according to Father Trey Nelson, pastor of St. Jude the Apostle Church in Baton Rouge.

Father Nelson, who is a survivor of esophageal cancer, has experienced suffering in his life.

“Before and after I was sick I always preached that in our suffering we are united with Christ’s and no one suffers apart from Jesus. And I still believe that, still preach that. It’s just that before I was sick and after I was sick I have two takes on it,” said Father Nelson, who has been cancer-free for 15 years.

For 21 days around the time of his surgery, by doctor’s orders he was not allowed to eat anything.

“I’ve experienced that hunger before – it’s lunchtime, I’m hungry. But when you don’t eat for 15–20 days in a row by doctor’s orders, it hurts,” said Father Nelson.

“There’s a physical pain in your stomach.

“It got me to thinking about people around the world who feel that way on a regular basis. So suffering can not only unite you more closely to Christ, but to the suffering of others.”

After enduring grueling chemotherapy and radiation therapies, Father Nelson underwent a surgery that lasted 11–12 hours and had many complications. His brother was advised to take his mother home and prepare her because, “Your brother is not coming home.”

With a survival rate of only 15 percent at that time, Father Nelson’s recovery was also painful, but there were redemptive moments in that as well. When he was in the hospital, there was a crucifix on the wall, and every morning that was the first thing he saw.

“I think there is a difference between Christ as the companion in your suffering and Christ as the cause of your suffering,” said Father Nelson.

And he has been inspired by people who have embraced their cross in their sufferings.

He referred to a Nigerian couple, Dr. Oscar Udoh and Bridget Udoh, who were involved at St. Jude. Bridget died after a long battle with cancer and was buried on March 9.

“They approached everything with a joyful spirit. The family is simply amazing in the way they embraced their faith. I would often look to Bridget when they were sitting at Mass and could tell she was suffering.”

He said Oscar, a coordinator of planning and evaluation at Southern University, would often help set up for Mass while taking care of Bridget. He said Oscar cries sometimes but still holds on to his faith.

Anticipating the funeral Mass at the time of the interview, Father Nelson said, “When we lay her to rest it’s going to be a beautiful celebration with a lot ofemotion. The church will be packed, because here’s a family who’s done a lot for the church with a very joyful spirit.”

Another person who has inspired him was his good friend and mentor Father Mike Collins, who died on March 8, 2017.

“Most of us know that Mike had an expression that he was fond of using: ‘Behind every Good Friday there’s always Easter Sunday,’” said Father Nelson.

Getting through those Good Fridays involves offering up sacrifices to Christ, said Father Nelson.

Speaking of the Lenten season, many people will be making sacrifices, whether it’s one’s choosing – “I will do this for Lent” – or it’s given to them through unexpected loss.

“Either way, there is a choice regarding the orientation of the sacrifice – and it must be toward Christ and the heart of Christ,” said Father Nelson.

A temptation people face when suffering from a trial or a loss is to “get busy” as a way to distract themselves from the pain, according to Father Nelson. But the value of suffering and sacrifice is that one learns more about God and “what matters least.”

In thinking about the sacrifices, Father Nelson recalled a backpacking trip he and his friend took in the Colorado mountains. They made camp at 10,000 feet.

“One of the things you realize when you’re doing that kind of trip is how much do you really need?” said Father Nelson.

“I think all of us, myself included, are incredibly spoiled. I think, ‘How many pairs of shoes do you need or how many shirts hanging in the closet?’ I don’t think the U.S., as a majority, has an understanding of sacrifices as places where poverty exists more widely do.”

Father Nelson said releasing one’s attachment to things leads to less worry and freedom.

“Even when I was at St. Jude, I was suffering.”

Father Nelson said releasing one’s attachment to things leads to less worry and freedom.

Do not look forward in fear to the changes in life; rather, look to them with full hope that as they arise, God, whose very own you are, will lead you safely through all things; and when you cannot stand it, God will carry you in His arms.

Do not fear what may happen tomorrow; the same understanding Father who cares for you today will take care of you then and every day.

He will either shield you from suffering or will give you unfailing strength to bear it.

Be at peace and put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations.
Faith at the heart of civil rights movement

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Faith continues to be at the core of achieving equality for people of all color and it was only through faith that the civil rights movement has been so successful in advancing equality for minorities.

That was the message Southern University chancellor John Pierre delivered during talks entitled “Faith, Social Action and Louisiana Civil Rights” at St. Paul the Apostle Church and St. Aloysius Church, both in Baton Rouge, on Feb. 12 and Feb. 26, respectively.

The talks were presented by the Diocesan Racial Harmony Commission.

“Faith has worked through our ancestors and others as they engaged in life threatening and often life-ending struggles to ensure that people of African descent would be treated equally in the United States and would be beneficiaries of the constitutional protections afforded in this country,” said Pierre, who was appointed chancellor of the law center in 2016 but who previously served as vice chancellor and has been on the faculty since 1990.

“Protections that would allow them to pursue life, liberty, equality and justice without being deterred and usurped by the institution of racism,” he added. “Racism has altering realities. If you don’t believe me all you have to do is look at the current situation this country is in.”

He said people are advancing alternative facts and alternative realities, all sparked by racism.

“So we must never forget the cancer that racism is and how it can kill dreams if we allow it to prevail,” he added.

Pierre, a member of the Louisiana State Bar Association and the Texas Bar Association as well as the author of numerous articles on tax law, sales contracts, real estate and educational law, offered hope through faith. Calling faith “the precedent for social action,” he said it brings to fruition things that might otherwise seem impossible, such as the election and re-election of Barack Obama as the country’s first African-American president.

He said the election of Obama was only made possible through faith, noting “there was nothing about the practical realities that would have said a young African-American named Barak, with the last name of Obama, would have been elected as president of the United States of America.”

“So we know that faith is very important because it was important to all of our ancestors,” he added. “Since the beginning of recorded history, faith has motivated human beings to look past their limitations and their immediate condition and believe and know that better conditions are possible.

“In short faith motivated people to get things done that are not normally done.”

Pierre offered several examples of how faith has “moved mountains,” beginning with President Abraham Lincoln. He said it was Lincoln’s faith that allowed him to focus on a domestic agenda to transform America after the Civil War had ended.

But what was interesting, Pierre said, is that Lincoln began to focus on the agenda even as the North suffered decisive setbacks early in the war.

“Lincoln had the faith to know that the North was going to win because truth was going to prevail,” Pierre said, adding that the president and Sen. Justin Morale from Vermont created the Moral Act of 1862, creating land grant colleges.

That particular act, Pierre said, allowed accessibility for everyone to receive a college education, which was previously reserved for the rich and powerful.

“In fact, if you were a slave you were forbidden to even learn how to read,” Pierre said. “The laws were stringent and it was a crime to teach a slave how to read. And so what (Lincoln and Morale) were doing was trying to make sure education was accessible to everybody, even if they were poor.”

He said that act also allowed the development of historically black colleges and universities, which was critical because those who were enslaved needed to plan their own futures after the war ended.

Pierre added that at the time many predicted the

SEE CHANCELLOR PAGE 10

The 7 Stupid Mistakes Husbands Make Leaving Their Wives Hanging at the Courthouse, IRS, and Nursing Home

Yesterday, I met with a nice couple about their estate plan because the wife attended one of my seminars and thought they needed a plan. It was immediately apparent that the husband took care of all of the finances and the wife never engaged in the process.

The husband did all the talking for the two of them and thought that by simply having a hand-written Will, everything was covered. WRONG! Once the husband realized that he was unintentionally exposing his wife to significant court costs, unnecessary delays, protracted litigation, nursing home poverty and that would all deterred and limited the protections afford in this country.

He said people are advancing alternative facts and alternative realities, all sparked by racism.

“So we must never forget the cancer that racism is and how it can kill dreams if we allow it to prevail,” he added.

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Rice Bowl ‘opens minds’ of St. Michael students

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

Wearing a grin and a bucket of water on her head, Emily Froeba, director of campus ministry at St. Michael the Archangel High School in Baton Rouge, walked into the crowded cafeteria, demonstrating a keen sense of balance and strength — until she slowly turned. Quickly she caught the bucket before it crashed to the floor but not before most of the water sloshed out, to the delight of students and faculty nearby.

Just minutes earlier, Daniel Mumuni, of Sierra Leone, spoke to SMHS students about the day-to-day challenges facing children in his country.

“Sierra Leone is a beautiful country with white-sand beaches but underneath the beauty there is struggle and deprivation,” said Mumuni, who is on a tour of Catholic schools to promote the Catholic Relief Services’ Lenten program, Rice Bowl.

Mumuni had students close their eyes to imagine what it would be like not to have food during their school day, no access to water and no good roads to get necessities. When asked how this would make them feel, students responded with “difficult,” “sad,” “tiring” and “depressing.”

“Meet Kumba,” said Mumuni as he pointed to the screens set up in the gym. “This young girl aspires to be a nurse but she must help provide water for her family by walking a half-a-mile to a mile to access clean water and then carry it home.”

Mumuni explained how money raised through the Rice Bowl program has helped many people who have been suffering by providing food, constructing schools and training teachers.

“As you prepare for Lent, I want you to remember the story of Kumba and those most vulnerable,” said Mumuni. “Lent is about prayer, fasting and almsgiving.”

“Our purpose is to really raise awareness about the great work of CRS and in particular, how such a small offering like the Rice Bowl makes a huge difference in the lives of people overseas, but it also makes a huge difference in the lives of people right here in Baton Rouge because 25 percent of everything we collect from the Rice Bowl stays locally to help families in crisis,” said Jean Dressley, refugee resettlement director for Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Mumuni wrapped up his presentation by having four students carry buckets of water on their heads across the gym and back.

“We do the Rice Bowl every year and last year we raised $6,000,” said Froeba. “I think the kids are really engaged with it, but I think for them to know where their money goes and to put a face to where their money goes, like with Kumba, the little girl, is really important.”

“It helped me understand the causes of the world because I would’ve never understood that if he hadn’t enlightened me on the details,” said sophomore Jonathan Moya.

“I feel like it opened my mind to the struggles that they have to deal with and the adversity they face,” said fellow sophomore Lance Williams.
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
O – Morally offensive

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

CHANCELLOR ▼
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slaves would die because they would not be able to function in America with their freedom.

“Imagine that,” he said. “(African-Americans) didn’t have political power, they didn’t have a large amount of economic power, but they had faith. And so their faith led them to take action when they needed to.”

Perhaps what was not widely known at the time was slaves were craving education, to the point where 20,000 teachers had to be brought in from other parts of the country to train teachers. From 1865-1925, the South was seeing a proliferation of black colleges opening.

Louisiana Lt. Governor Oscar Dunn, a Republican and the first elected African-American elected lieutenant governor in the United States, created Straight University in New Orleans in 1869. Straight University eventually became Dillard University, still a prestigious black university.

Pierre said Dunn is the architect of what is now known as public schools in Louisiana.

“Can you believe that?” he asked. “Let me tell you why you ought to believe it. Because it was black people who were formerly enslaved that created such a drive for education.”

“(Dunn) was concerned about the education of children of African descent but he was really concerned about the education of children of African descent but he was really concerned about the education of children of African descent but he was really concerned about the education of children of African descent.”

What Men Want
Parasite
Workplace comedy based on 2000’s “What Women Want” examines female empowerment and the constant mutual misunderstandings that beset the sexes.

Taraji P. Henson plays a high-powered, foul-mouthed sports agent whose career stalls because she fails to connect well with men. A magic potion gives her the ability to read male minds and puts her in touch with her inner strength.

Director Adam Shankman and screenwriters Tina Gordon, Peter Huyck and Alex Gregory have baked in a surprising number of thematic layers, but a somewhat high raunch factor and a gay subplot narrow the appropriate audience for their film. Three nonmarital sexual encounters, references to homosexuality, some vulgar banter, at least one profanity, pervasive rough and crude language.

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The Catholic Commentator ENTERTAINMENT March 15, 2019

Fighting With My Family
MGM

The fact-based story of a tight-knit British family obsessed with the sport of wrestling makes for an entertaining comedy-drama, written and directed by Stephen Merchant. Saraya-Jade Bevis (Florence Pugh) is inspired by her parents (Lena Headey and Nick Frost), both former wrestlers, and her brother and erstwhile sparring partner (Jack Lowden), to pursue her talent in the ring. Facing seemingly insurmountable challenges, she is invited by the World Wrestling Entertainment empire to compete under the name “Paige.” Although the film’s rough edges, including streetwise cursing and sexual banter,place it out of bounds for younger viewers, an exception might be made for mature adolescents who would benefit from this uplifting picture’s positive messages about perseverance, forgiveness and the bonds of friendship and family. Occasionally violent wrestling action, an out-of-wedlock pregnancy, drug references, sexual innuendo, some profane and crude language.

How to Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World
Universal

Visuals are sumptuous but the story scant as writer-director Dean DeBlois wraps up a trilogy of animated adventures in all three of which, based on books by Cressida Cowell, he has had a hand. Now the ruler of the community of Vikings whose aversion to dragons he cured, the lad (voice of Jay Baruchel) at the center of the franchise continues his romance with his true love (voice of America Ferrera) even as he battles a villain (voice of F. Murray Abraham) intent on ensnaring his beloved pet fire-breather. There’s a melancholy feel to the script’s ultimate lesson in altruism, though, like the values throughout, it’s a message in keeping with a Christian perspective.

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Father Chris Decker spent more than 30 days walking the El Camino De Santiago. Father Decker called the experience “incredibly healing.” Photos provided by Father Decker

WALKING ▼
From page 1

The fact that he was on the trip itself and alone at the time when God came to him speaks to what many believe is divine intervention that is often experienced on any pilgrimage.

Father Decker said he was aware of the Camino because of previous conversations with Father Vincent Dufresne, pastor at Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Gramercy, St. Joseph Church in Paulina and St. Michael the Archangel Church in Convent, but the idea was tucked away somewhere in the back of his mind.

But shortly after returning from a pilgrimage to Fatima and Lourdes, his awareness of the Camino was heightened. He added that his current assignment is the second with a cluster setup, which, admittedly, can be a bit difficult because of ministering to three parishes.

During this time, he also spoke with Father Cary Bani, pastor at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in St. Francisville, about a sabatical, and came away impacted by Father Bani's spiritual renewal and rejuvenation.

“I was feeling very much spiritually rundown and couldn't quite figure out why because I was doing all of the things that priests are supposed to do,” Father Decker said. “I mean there's never a day from here through eternity that I won't be a priest, but felt myself rundown. I was just tired.”

It so happened at the same time his classmate from seminary, Father Ryan Humphries of Alexandria, was experiencing similar feelings, so through several conversations they settled on walking the Camino, jumping off at Pamplona, approximately 430 miles in distance.

But when a blister sidelined Father Humphries a week into the walk, Father Decker found himself alone.

“And that's where it becomes the work of the Lord,” said Father Decker, who admitted he originally packed too much and had to shed some clothing and even box up some items to be shipped to the end of the route to lighten his load.

After the departure of Father Humphries, Father Decker, who admitted to being exhausted after that first week, said he considered stopping as well but “in prayer the Holy Spirit said, ‘Nope, not for you. You don’t get to stop walking. You are supposed to keep walking.’ And I said, ‘Ok, well, I guess so.’”

“It was about allowing the Lord to work, and there really was a very real prayer.”

Through that prayer, through enduring his own set of blisters that finally healed only recently, Father Decker said he returned as a better priest and even a better person. He said he was walking the Camino at the same time the latest round of clergy sexual abuse stories were breaking in the United States.

Father Decker admitted that as a priest he became a lightning rod for other pilgrims, especially those from Europe, once they found out he was a member of the clergy. He said the Lord explained that it was his way of showing Father Decker how he has been a lightning rod for other people in his ministry and diocesan life.

“He allowed me to hear the frustrations of the people in the church in Europe and South America,” he said. “It was strange but the difference is the renewal that took place in my priesthood.

“I was able to hear them because in diocesan ministry, at least with clustered ministries, at some point when the complaints come it becomes a temptation to just not hear them or listen to them.

“And so I think part of it is the Lord saying he can heal me from some of the spiritual wounds that have come from circumstances that happen amidst the difficulties of ministry.

“But that doesn't mean you don’t get to carry the cross as a priest,” he quickly added. “The difference was that I was able to hear probably for the first time in a long time where the frustration was coming from.”

He said that when a priest really stops listening to what’s going on, it becomes “simply damage control.”

“So one of the ways a priest can do that is before somebody comes to us, we can say stop,” Father Decker said. “And I wouldn’t say I did that all the time but it had become more often than not. Well the cumulative damage is that you push people away and that’s what I realized that perhaps I was doing.”

But the Camino “was a real fascinating way in which the Lord provides healing but also teaches you how to take up the yoke of the cross.”

“And so to be able to say ‘Lord I’m sorry for the way that I misrepresented you to my parishioners,’ which is never the priest’s intent. It’s to be able say ‘Lord how can I represent you better?’”

Father Decker said the Camino also allowed him to let the Lord refashion his priesthood, adding that he is much more renewed and very much at peace.

From a personal side, Father Decker admitted laughter is more abundant in his life, but he has also come to understand that joy comes from within. He said inner joy is “a gift, a fruit of the Spirit. But whenever you’re weighed down by your own stuff, joy is hard to come by.”

Father Decker said the joy he feels now is similar to that of when he was first ordained, a joy he thought he would never experience again.

“I think the Lord simply renewed what was already there,” he said, adding that the pain of his blisters opened the way to the healing of his heart.
Area Catholic school students showcase achievements and participation in a number of activities.

Patriotic essay winners

“The first place winner of the Patriotic Essay for the diocese (of Baton Rouge) this year was Landry Mayeaux!” announced David Goldsmith, of the Bishop Stanley J. Ott Assembly of the Knights of Columbus, following the school Mass at St. Jude the Apostle in Baton Rouge on Feb. 20. At the sound of her name, Mayeaux leapt up from her seat on the gym floor and bounded onto the stage to accept her plaque. Her energy, excitement and surprise were apparent as she posed for photos.

“I didn’t expect it at all,” grinned a breathless Mayeaux, as she stood next to her twin sister, Margaret Mayeaux, who won second place and received $30 in prize money.

Three St. Jude students placed in the top 10, including third place co-winner Maria Hargrave, who won $30; Cam Stanford and Susanna Shields won honorable mention, bringing the number of winners from St. Jude School to a total of five.

Indulde Grenier, an eighth-grader at St. Aloysius School in Baton Rouge, also won third place and $30.

According to Frank Zaeringer, chair of the Patriotic Essay program for the Bishop Ott Assembly, no school has ever placed in the top three categories or had so many winners from their school.

“I’ve never had first, second and third place winners (among my students), so that was awesome,” smiled Mestayer. “The winners say it took about two hours to compose their award-winning essays, each taking turns on the computer. “I wrote about how one day I want to work in politics, maybe be president,” said Henry Breeden, St. Aloysius School; Nicholas Jacobs, Sacred Heart of Jesus School in Baton Rouge; and, Henry Breeden, St. Aloysius School in Baton Rouge had two winners in the top 10 of the essay contest. Pictured, from left, are Luis Mestayer, social studies teacher at St. Aloysius; Louis Phillips, honorable mention; Isabelle Gruner, third place co-winner; and, Michelle Dozier, social studies teacher at St. Aloysius. Photo provided by Luis Mestayer and St. Aloysius.
La Eucaristía al Estilo Latino

Padre Donnell Kirchner, CSSR
Parroquia de San Geraldo

La Iglesia Católica en el mundo entero, crece y se alimenta alrededor de la Eucaristía. La Eucaristía es el evento primordial y fundamental a través del cual se congregan las personas de más de 200 diferentes países y de diversas culturas. Aunque la celebración de la Eucaristía es un evento clave y único en su esencia, no deja de recibir la influencia personal de todos aquellos pueblos que la celebran.

Yo crecí en un contexto alemán-irlandés; para esta cultura, la iglesia era un espacio totalmente sagrado, que debía ser respetado y en el cual uno entraba guardando un silencio profundo frente a la Grandezza de la presencia del Señor. La celebración de la Eucaristía era considerada un momento solemne y grave.

En la comunaidad latina he podido mirar que el llegar a la iglesia es entrar en un espacio para reunirse con amigos, y ser un lugar donde las personas se sienten libres para expresarse, motivadas por esa alegría que procede de la fe y del encuentro con otras personas que también van a participar en la misa; se saludan felices unos a otros y a menudo en voz alta y se dirige decir que al entrar a una misa en español se ven muy pocas caras tristes.

En una parroquia anglosajona, la mayoría de los participantes a la Eucaristía están presentes y listos antes de comenzar la misa. En una comunidad latina al comenzar la misa solo la mitad o algo más de la iglesia está ocupada, sin embargo los puestos continúan abriéndose y la iglesia va llenándose de muchachas que siguen entrando aunque estén tarde, tal vez el atraso será porque viven a unos 30 minutos de distancia y además el atraso será porque viven a unos minutos de distancia y además el tener que recibir a muchos niños pequeños, seguro la tarea no resulta algo fácil. Pero para el momento del Evangelio, la congregación ya está lista y completa.

Ser miembro del coro de la iglesia siempre ha sido algo especial y en la comunidad latina durante el canto del Gloria se puede sentir una vibración y un entusiasmo que es algo realmente notable. Uno debe prepararse para escuchar trompetas y guitarras con tonos que animan a la alabanza al Señor.

En las iglesias de las parroquias anglosajonas parecería que la mayoría de los miembros son personas de edad avanzada y abuelos, por lo general no se ve mucho gente jóvenes. En una misa latina, al contrario, hay tantos niños que usted podría pensar que está dentro de una guardería infantil. A ellos también se los puede ver ayudando a recoger la colcha, llevando las ofrendas al altar y son parte del coro.

Parecería que la comunidad anglosajona, de acuerdo a cada región, tiene un solo tipo de acento al hablar en Inglés. En una Eucaristía de la comunidad latina encontraremos personas de diferentes países, por lo que también su hablar es diferente. Para tratar es explicito lo que se pueden escuchar imagínez que dentro de una comunidad que solo reza en Inglés se encontrarían personas de Inglaterra, Australia, Italia, Nigeria, Sudáfrica, Boston, Alabama y España.

Las personas de la comunidad anglosajona depositan en la cesta de la colecta, los sobres que han recibido a su nombre al registrarse formalmente en la oficina parroquial. En una misa de la comunidad latina, las personas buscan en sus bolsillos el dinero con el que van a contribuir y compartir de lo que han ganado duramente, saben que la Iglesia no es apoyada por el gobierno de los Estados Unidos y que deben dar lo que les sea posible para mantenerla en marcha.

En el momento del salida de la paz, los anglosajones estrecharán la mano de las personas que se encuentran cerca. En una misa latina, las personas se abrazan y se saludan fuertemente saliendo inclusive de sus bancas y desean expresiones de placer cuando se encuentran junto a alguien que no conocen.

En una comunidad anglosajona, el 98% de los asistentes se acercan a recibir la Santa Comunión. En una misa en Español, muchos se acercan con sus brazos cruzados sobre el pecho únicamente para recibir una bendición, ellos acuden sin antes de recibir el Cuerpo y la Sangre de Cristo deben ir a confesarse aun cuando la doctrina de la Iglesia indique que la Santa Comunión quita los pecados más pequeños, es decir los venales, como pueden ser: mentiras pequeñas, insultos, malos pensamientos, disgustos con los miembros de la familia, haber bido, etc.

Muchísimos anglosajones se presentando en la iglesia simplemente con la ropa que usan para trabajar en sus jardines o con la que usan para practicar alguna actividad deportiva. Los latinos, generalmente más pobres económicamente, se visten con sus mejores ropas, botas de vaquero y sombreros, hebillas grandes en sus pantalones, vestidos largos que fluyen con hermosos chales. Las niñas elegantemente vestidas parece que fueran a una fiesta.

Sí, así es, la Eucaristía es el único Santo Sacrificio de Jesucristo muriendo una vez más para salvarnos de nuestros pecados y darnos vida eterna. Es lo que nos une a todos como UN solo Pueblo de Dios independentemente de cual pueda ser su origen étnico. Pero en una Comunidad Latina, usted se vera a si mismo moviendo los dedos de sus pies y balanceándose a su ritmo.

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**SERVICIOS DE CUARESMA**

- **St. Pius 7-8 p.m.**
  - 8 de Marzo: Ministerio Divina Misericordia
  - 15 de Marzo: Ministerio Fe y Esperanza
  - 22 de Marzo: Ministerio Conquistando Las Naciones para Cristo
  - 29 de Marzo: Ministerio Damos el Altar

- **05 de Abril: Pastoral Jóvenes**
- **12 de Abril: Jóvenes Adultos**

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**St. George Church**

- 7:30-8:30 p.m.
- 8 de Marzo: Toda la comunidad
- 15 de Marzo: Toda la Comunidad
- 22 de Marzo: Toda la Comunidad
- 29 de Marzo:

- **05 de Abril: Pastoral Jóvenes**
- **12 de Abril: Pastoral Jóvenes**
Retreat centers located in the Diocese of Baton Rouge

BISHOP ROBERT E. TRACY CENTER

BATON ROUGE

The Bishop Robert E. Tracy Center is available for spiritual renewal, professional training and adult or youth formation. As part of the Catholic Life Center, the Tracy Center can provide space for day and overnight retreats, and conferences.

The three-story overnight facility has a total of thirty sleeping rooms which can accommodate up to 120 people. Twenty-four of the rooms can accommodate four persons. Five of our suites provide a bedroom with two single beds and a sitting room with two sofa sleepers. One smaller suite has one bedroom with two single beds and a love seat and chair in the sitting area. All rooms have a private bath.

The Westerfield Conference Center, adjacent to the overnight facility, is a state-of-the-art meeting facility with audio/visual technology. The conference center provides space for 120 people or can be divided into three separate meeting areas for smaller groups.

The Tracy Center Education Building has eight rooms available for day retreats, workshops or breakout sessions. Also available are two chapels, a theatre with fixed-style seating for 196, a ballroom that can seat up to 500 people, and three dining rooms. A full-time kitchen staff provides all meals and snacks; outside catering is not allowed.

The Tracy Center welcomes private groups, prayer groups, small Christian communities and Bible-study groups. We do not have a retreat director on staff; retreats provide their own director.

Our office hours are 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and tours of the facilities are available by appointment. Please visit us at www.tracycenter.org or on Facebook under The Tracy Center.

Phone 225-242-0222; website: tracycenter.org; email tracycenter@diobr.org; mailing address P. O. Box 2028, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-2028.

Directions: I-10 to Acadian Thruway exit; go north 3/4 of a mile. The Catholic Life Center and Bishop Robert E. Tracy Center are on the left.

CYPRESS SPRINGS MERCEARIAN PRAYER CENTER

BATON ROUGE

Cypress Springs Mercedarian Prayer Center is a Catholic retreat center located in Baton Rouge.

The retreat center, which has a chapel that seats 300 and a meeting room that seats more than 300 people, opened in 2010 and is situated on 56 acres that includes woodlands, lakes, ponds, outdoor seating and meditation trails.

It is open to Catholic speakers or for meetings.

Sister Dulcie Maria HMSS also conducts men’s Bible study and women’s spirituality classes. The center opened in 2010.

Phone: 225-752-8480; location: 17560 George O’Neal Road, Baton Rouge, LA 70810; open Monday-Thursday 9 a.m.-3 p.m.
 Retreat centers located outside the diocese

ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW ORLEANS
RECESS CENTER
METAIRIE

The Archdiocese of New Orleans Retreat Center, dedicated to Our Lady of the Crescent, continues the tradition of the Crescent Sisters began in 1958 of providing a place to nurture the soul. Our location on the south shore of Lake Pontchartrain in Metairie offers a serene environment for spiritual contemplation.

Our vision as expressed by our Advisory Board is that we invite you to “Come to the Quiet, Encounter the Sacred.” We offer a full schedule of weekend retreats and weekday Days of Prayer. You may view the details of our offerings at retreats.arch-no.org. Please consider attending a retreat or Day of Prayer that most closely fits your spiritual need.

The retreat center is also available as a venue for faith-based groups to host events including overnight retreats, days of prayer or staff reflection days.

Located about an hour east of Baton Rouge or 15 minutes west of New Orleans, the retreat center has a chapel, dining room offering buffet-style meals, a meeting hall, a library, a large parlor and several breakout rooms. The 11 landscaped acres offer grounds conducive to prayer and reflection that nurture our souls.

We welcome you to come hear the whisper of God and experience nurturing, healing and transformation through the joy of the Good News.

For more information, call us at (504) 887-1420 from 8:30am to 4:30pm, Monday through Friday.

You may reach us through email at retreats@arch-no.org or visit our website retreats.arch-no.org. Our address is 5500 St. Mary Street, Metairie, LA 70006.

Directions: From Baton Rouge, take I-10 east to Williams Blvd. exit; go north to West Esplanade Avenue, turn right; travel on West Esplanade Avenue to the U-turn before Transcontinental Blvd.; make the U-turn; travel four blocks to St. Mary St.; turn right. The center’s driveway is at the end of St. Mary Street.

CARMELITE SPIRITUALITY CENTER
LACOMBE

Cradled among 72 acres of towering pine trees, a picturesque lake and trails slicing through the property, the Carmelite Spirituality Center in Lacombe offers retreats to people of all faiths.

The center, which opened in 2005, is operated by the Sisters of Mount Carmel. The center offers monthly mornings of prayer, directed and guided retreats, private retreats, group gatherings, parish retreats, spirituality workshops and even the ability to design your own program.

Overnight facilities accommodating up to 50 people in semi-private and private rooms are available as well as two cottages. Along with the piney woods, the grounds include a swimming pool, labyrinth and provides an idyllic venue for reflection and prayer.

While enjoying a meal from the full-service kitchen, diners can bask in a beautiful view of the azalea-lined patio, which faces up against the dining room.

The library contains numerous resources and can also serve as a meeting room. The chapel can seat up to 50 people comfortably.

Phone 985-882-7579 or 985-264-0341; website carmelite-spirituality.org; email carmelitecenter@bellsouth.net; location 62992 Fish Hatchery Road, Lacombe, LA; mailing address P.O. Box 130, Lacombe, LA 70445-0130.

Directions: From I-12 east take Exit 74 (LA Hwy. 434), turn toward Lacombe. Follow on LA Hwy. 434 to U.S. Hwy 190. At round-about, take first right and cross bridge over Bayou Lacombe. Take first right at Davis Avenue which becomes Fish Hatchery Road (Capital One Bank is the landmark). Proceed 1.9 miles and the center is on the right.

JESUIT SPIRITUALITY CENTER
GRAND COTEAU

The Jesuit Spirituality Center located in the heart of Acadiana, 11 miles north of Lafayette on I-49, is open to men and women of all faiths.

The former St. Charles College became the Jesuit Novitiate in 1922 and a retreat center in 1972, providing a quiet and restful environment for those seeking to listen and respond to God with generosity and openness through the experience of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

The century-old building, located on 900 acres of farmland, has undergone a complete interior and exterior renovation. It now provides 33 rooms with private baths and individual air control, as well as new furnishings.

Year-round offerings of three-, five-, eight- and 30-day individually directed retreats,
and a variety of weekend programs and retreats, are scheduled throughout the center.

An individually directed retreat differs from the more common group or preached retreat in that the retreatant meets privately each day with a spiritual director. In these sessions, the director listens to the retreatant’s description of what has happened in prayer since the day before and then selects additional exercises and Scripture passages to assist the retreatant in the journey of faith as a companion of Jesus.

The center has bicycle and walking paths and roads, several chapels, a bookstore and a large meeting room that can accommodate up to 50 people.

Phone 337-662-5251 Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. for more information or to request a brochure detailing upcoming events; website jesuitspiritualitycenter.org; email office@jesuitspiritualitycenter.org; mailing address St. Charles College, P.O. Box C, Grand Coteau, LA 70541-1003.

Directions: I-10 west to I-49; turn north at Lafayette; about 10 miles to the Sunset/Grand Coteau Exit 11 (LA Hwy. 93); turn right and follow Martin Luther King Drive (LA Hwy. 93). The center is on the left, at 313 M. L. K. Dr.

**Prairie Ronde Cursillo Center OPELOUSAS**

Prairie Ronde Cursillo Center is open on weekends for Catholic men and women only. Cursillo means a short course in Christianity. The Cursillos are scheduled for men and for women on separate weekends throughout the year.

Overnight facilities are available for up to 60 people in a dormitory-type setting, with shared bathrooms and showers. Separate housing is available for priests or deacons leading retreats. There is a chapel and a bookstore with an area for reading. Handicapped facilities are available.

Each person will need a sponsor for the weekend. The center can help with a sponsor. The local contacts to assist with that are Carla James 225-229-5519, or Tina Guillory 225-235-6470.

Phone 337-543-7425; website prairie rnde.org; mailing address 510 N. Second Street, Bay St. Louis, MS 39520.

Directions: I-12 east to Slidell; I-10 east to Bay St. Louis; take Exit 13, Hwy. 603 south to Hwy. 90 east (approximately six miles; pass seven red lights, after the seventh red light turn right on 2nd Street (a large Sacred Heart shrine is on the right shortly before reaching 2nd Street); go approximately one-half of a mile, entrance to the retreat center is on the right.

The Rev. William Kelley Retreat Center

**BAY ST. LOUIS, MISSISSIPPI**

The Rev. William Kelley Retreat Center in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi features 55 acres for peaceful reflection, located a block off the Bay of St. Louis.

The center, which is operated by the Divine Word Missionaries, is available for lay people, clergy, religious, singles and married persons.

The center offers 30 rooms with two beds in each room with private bathrooms. Some additional housing is available if needed.

The center has a conference center, smaller rooms for break-out sessions, library, chapel, hanging swings and a path through the woods. Specific retreats, such as Retreatville, can be requested although the majority of groups bring their own leadership. Also, private or directed retreats are available.

A kitchen and retreat staff is available. Divine Word Missionaries can be available for Mass and/or confessions upon request.

The center opened in 2002. Available services include cooking, cleaning and a coordinator.

Phone: 228-467-2032; email svdretreatcenter@bellsouth.net; website svdretreatcenter.com; mailing address 510 N. Second Street, Bay St. Louis, MS 39520.

The Rev. William Kelley Retreat Center

Opening in 2006 and operated by the Diocese of Lake Charles, the St. Charles Center offers preached and directed retreats in addition to a variety of other programs. Located near the Calcasieu River, the center provides a deep woods setting with walks along the swamp leading to the river.

Accommodations include separate facilities for 72 adults and 78 youth in double-occupancy rooms. Bath facilities are private on the adult side and shared on the youth side. Other amenities include three libraries, the Chapel of the Assumption, two small conference rooms for 50 people, two large conference rooms for more than 100 people and a dining room.

The center is staffed by spirit. See OUTSIDE PAGE 18.
The Catholic Commentator

SPiritual Retreats

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Our Lady of the Oaks Retreat House

Jesuit Fathers and Lay Associates

Weekend and Mid-Week Retreats

For Men, Women and Married Couples

For more information, visit our website or contact
Phone: 337-662-5410 • Fax 337-662-5331
www.ourladyoftheoaks.com
Email: oloaks@centurytel.net
P. O. Drawer D, Grand Coteau, LA 70541

Directions: From Interstate 12, exit O’Neal Blvd, and go south 8.9 miles. Turn east on George O’Neal Road and travel 1.4 miles to retreat center.

William J. Kelley Retreat Center

Providing spirituality and ecumenical meeting space on the Mississippi Gulf Coast

510 North Second Street
Bay Saint Louis, MS 39520-4826

Phone: 228-467-2032
Fax: 228-467-2031
e-mail to: svdretreatcenter@sbdsouth.net
web site www.sbdsouth.com

The retreat center welcomes all people who wish to use our facilities as a restful, peace place for their meetings.

OUTSIDE ▼

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tual directors and retreat directors and is open to people of all denominations. For more information, call 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (closed between noon and 1 p.m.), Monday through Friday.

Phone 337-855-1232; website live. ldcioecese.org/retreats; mailing address 2151 Sam Houston Jones Pkwy., Lake Charles, LA 70611.

St. Joseph Abbey Retreat Center

ST. BENEDICT

Located four miles north of Covington, the St. Joseph Abbey Retreat Center is open to individuals and groups seeking peace and recollection in a monastic setting suitable to their spirituality.

St. Joseph Abbey is home to the Benedictine monks, who conduct Abbey Sponsored Retreat weekends approximately 18 times per year for men, women and married couples. On the remaining weekends and during the week, the retreat center is available to groups for religious, educational and charitable purposes.

The retreat center, which opened in early 2018 following a complete renovation, now has 30 bedrooms with queen-size beds, pull out love seats and private bathrooms. The center includes a chapel, two meeting spaces and a dining room. The larger St. Joseph Abbey Church is located on the grounds.

The 1,200 acres of piney woods and tranquil ponds offer retreatants the opportunity for quiet and reflective leisure. The center strives to continue the tradition set down more than 14 centuries ago by St. Benedict, who believed that the stranger or guest who comes to the monastery gate is to be received as Christ, but, it reserves the right to decide which programs meet the stated goals of the facility.

Phone: 985-892-3473; website: saintjosephabbey.com/christian-life-center; email: clc@sjasc.edu; location: Retreat Center, St. Joseph Abbey, 75376 River Road, St. Benedict, LA 70457.

Directions: Take I-12 to exit 63-B Covington (U.S. Hwy. 190) north; continue past Hwy. 437 to Hwy. 25 (traffic light); continue north on Hwy. 25 to Ramsay; travel to the sign for St. Joseph Abbey and turn right onto the bridge.

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Directions: From Sorrento/Donaldsonville exit 182; south on Hwy. 22; left onto Hwy. 70 and left onto Hwy. 3125; right onto Hwy. 4214; and left at Hwy. 44 (River Road); continue five miles. Manresa is on the left.

Our Lady of the Way Spiritual Life Center

TICKFAW

Our Lady of the Way Spiritual Life Center in Tickfaw, which opened Aug. 15, 2015, offers overnight facilities.

The facility is able to accommodate 40 people in semi-private rooms, as well as two private apartments that can sleep from six to eight people.

The center also offers a chapel, library, conference room that accommodates 50-70 people, a dining area with catering and two outdoor patios.

Our Lady of the Way is situated on 10 acres that offer a pleasant retreat facility located in a tranquil setting of pine trees and manicured grounds. It offers an escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

Phone: 985-402-3095; website ourladyoftheway.org; mailing address 50352 SEEDIOCESE PAGE 19

Manresa House of Retreats

CONVENT

Manresa House of Retreats opened in 1929 as a retreat center for men. Since then, the Jesuit-run center has become a favorite retreat facility for men in the south. Manresa sits on 130 wooded acres along the Mississippi River.

Manresa offers sleeping accommodations for 111, all having private bath facilities, a main chapel and four reflection chapels, a library, gardens and shrines.

All retreats are in the manner of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

While most of the retreats are preached retreats for men, some spaces are available for individually directed retreats for men and women.

For more information, call between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Phone 800-782-9431; website manresala.org; location 5858 LA Hwy. 44, Convent; mailing address P.O. Box 89, Convent, LA 70723-0089.

Directions: 1-10 to Sorrento/Donaldsonville exit 182; south on Hwy. 22; left onto Hwy. 70 and left onto Hwy. 3125; right onto Hwy. 4214; and left at Hwy. 44 (River Road); continue five miles. Manresa is on the left.
Antioch Road, Tickfaw, LA 70466.

Directions: I-12 east to Hammond; take Exit 38B to I-55 north; take Exit 36 Tickfaw/LA 442; turn left on Hwy 442 west; proceed 0.8 miles to Antioch Road; take right and go 0.7 miles; the center is on the right.

ROSARYVILLE SPIRIT LIFE CENTER
PONCHATOULA

Rosaryville Spirit Life Center is located approximately 45 miles east of Baton Rouge off of LA Hwy. 22 in Ponchatoula. Situated on 500-manicured acres of a 1,700-acre tract, it is a place for renewal of spirit, mind and body. Visitors can stroll the beautiful grounds, tour the facilities and see the picnic area complete with tables, pool and bathhouse. Beneath a canopy of trees along the meditation path stand outdoor shrines, grottos and stations of the cross. There is also a covered deck on the two-acre pond, a perfect place for reflection.

Rosaryville is staffed by the Dominican Sisters of Peace, formerly the Congregation of St. Mary, and their lay colleagues. Rosaryville Spirit Life Center opened in 1981, when the community of professed sisters in residence returned to a newly renovated motherhouse in New Orleans. It was at this time the congregation began its ministry of hosting and/or sponsoring retreats, days of prayer, workshops and other activities for religious, clergy and laity.

Rosary Hall, erected in 1955, is a three-story building. On the first floor are offices, an informal gathering area, three dinning rooms and two kitchens. On the second floor a library, an audio-visual center, a small conference room, a suite for visiting retreat directors, the Holy Rosary Chapel and a smaller area, the Upper Room that may be used for workshops and/or conferences for groups from 35 to 50 people. On the third floor are eight semi-private rooms and semi-private baths.

St. John Hall, erected in 1966, is adjacent to Rosary Hall and houses a large conference room, a small parlor, the gift shop, the massage therapy room and 34 private and semi-private bedrooms.

Kateri Hall has eight dormitory rooms with bunk beds. Five rooms can sleep eight each, two rooms can sleep 10 each, and the one remaining room can sleep four. The hall has a spacious recreation/conference room and separate renovated bathrooms with showers for boys and girls. It is ideal for youth groups and Rosaryville’s Camp Kateri for boys and girls each summer. There is also a chapel named Queen of the Most Holy Rosary that can hold about 80 retreatants.

Shalom House is a one-story, self-contained hermitage. It has sleeping capacity for six or more, a fully equipped kitchen, two bathrooms, washer/dryer and large worktable. It is ideal for those seeking an extended private retreat or for small groups needing a meeting facility.

Rosaryville hosts retreats, conferences and events planned by church and civic organizations. It also sponsors retreats, workshops, prayer days as well as directed and/or individual retreats.

Rosaryville Retreat Center offers a new Memorial Cemetery to serve all families with both mausoleum and in ground availability.

Rosaryville has directed and/or individual spiritual direction are two directors. Noël OP, who is a nationally certified massage therapist and a spiritual director.

Phone 225-294-5039; email scallais@oppeace.org; website rosaryvillela.com; mailing address 39003 Rosaryville Road, Ponchatoula, LA 70454.

Directions: I-12 to Pumpkin St. exit 35; turn south; at Ponchatoula, LA 70454.

Rosaryville Road; turn right, go one block to Kleinert Ave.; go one mile to the Rosaryville gate. south Acadian Thruway; go north to Broussard St., turn left; go one block to Parker St., turn right; go one block to Kleinert Ave., turn left.

ST. JOSEPH SPIRITUALITY CENTER
BATON ROUGE

To awaken and deepen spirituality to impact our world is the mission of the St. Joseph Spirituality Center, a sponsored ministry of the Congregation of St. Joseph.

Through spiritual direction, programs and retreats, the Spirituality Center promotes spiritual awakening, growth and development.

After significant prayer and careful discernment, the trustees of the St. Joseph Spirituality Center and the Sisters of St. Joseph who sponsor the Center have decided to conclude its operations on June 30.

The center will continue to offer spiritual direction to new and existing directees until its conclusion. The spiritual directors may continue serving directees after June 30 on a private practice basis.

The center will offer its last silent retreat for Lent on March 29-30 at Our Lady of the Pines Retreat Center in Chatawa, Mississippi and the “Spiritual Graces of Aging for Caregivers” retreat on April 6 from 9 a.m. till noon at St. Joseph’s Academy Mother Alice Hall.

Faithful who feel growth in their spiritual life through the integration of spirituality with social responsibility are welcome to join in conversations, companionship and activities in our Word and Deed program which promotes spiritual growth in people committed to consistent prayer and working on systemic change.

To register for spiritual direction or our programs, contact the center at our website at stjc.org; by email at stjo@stjocenter.org; or by phone at 225-383-3349; mailing address 2680 Kleinert Ave., Baton Rouge, LA 70806.

Directions: I-10 to exit 157B

TO SUBSCRIBE, CALL 225-387-0983.

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SPiritual Retreats

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Lent, a good time to acquire the discipline of prayer

"G"race" is a word that we Catholics, other Christians and even the irreligious use freely. We offer kind wishes to our friends saying, "Grace and peace be with you" or "May God’s grace shine upon you." We name our little girls "Grace" and use the word in the title of our churches, such as "Grace Cathedral" or "Our Lady of Grace." We salute the Blessed Virgin in our prayer as "full of grace." Our behavior is "gracious," "gracious" or "lacking in grace." Sometimes we can "fall from grace" completely.

Yet, we have a hard time defining what grace really is. It is something good, which even the irreligious in our society recognize by their use of the term, but it is hard to get a handle on grace. For us Catholics, however, grace has a particular meaning, taught to us in our catechisms, which is at the heart of all human desires. It is what everyone ultimately longs for, knowingly or unknowingly. Grace is what we pray for.

We recognize that our lives have been "graced" in special ways. Loving parents, a good education, a spouse who has been the happiness of our life, children who are our joy, close friends, moments of beauty and deliverance from storms and accidents, peace in the world, a lessening of crime and violence in our community...all of these we count as graces. In our catechisms we were taught that these are "actual graces," good things or blessings that God has given us. We pray for them constantly in our private prayers and publicly during the Prayers of the Faithful at Mass.

It is good and necessary to pray for blessings or actual graces. God wants our happiness, and he also wants us to accept that happiness from him as a sign of his love. Jesus encouraged his disciples to ask and they would receive, to be persistent and knock and the way would be opened for them. When we ask God for the things we need to make us truly happy and recognize our dependence upon him for them, we begin to live in a relationship with God which is the purpose of our creation. I remember the evening news showing footage of John Glenn in space recounting how he was constantly moved to prayer by the beautiful image he had of the earth God created for us.

Prayer moves us from graces, which are gifts from God, to a relationship with God himself. We pray spontaneously for the things we need. As the saying goes, "There are no atheists in foxholes." There are not too many in hurricanes, plagues, droughts, floods, financial crises and emergency rooms either. But the relationship with God that graces received are intended to create requires prayer that is disciplined, frequent and habitual. That relationship, which the catechism calls "sanctifying grace," requires more than a response to our needs of the moment if it is to grow.

For us Catholics, however, grace has a particular meaning, taught to us in our catechisms, which is at the heart of all human desires. It is what everyone ultimately longs for, knowingly or unknowingly. Grace is what we pray for.

So many of our blessings or graces become distractions rather than invitations to a closer relationship with God. We forget to put that relationship first through prayer as we are overwhelmed by our attempts to preserve and manage our lives all by ourselves, except for an occasional "God help me!" God is always there, and our relationship with him through prayer could be the source of strength which gives us the balance we need.

Our relationship with God, the grace which truly sanctifies our life, takes disciplined prayer, daily prayer. Such prayer begins with a commitment to Mass, reconciliation, Scripture reading and time alone with the Lord. Giving up personal pleasures in Lent is good, if such penances remind us to work on our prayer life, our communion with God. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament provides a good setting for the solitary prayer that can nourish our relationship with God. We can pray daily anywhere, but prayer before the sacramental presence of Christ helps greatly to nourish our relationship with his father and our father.

Lent is a time for walking more closely with Jesus who prayed at the Last Supper that we, his disciples "...may all be one, as you father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me."

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

A colleague of mine, a clinical therapist, shares this story: A woman came to him in considerable distress. Her husband had recently died of a heart attack. His death had been sudden and at a most inopportune time. They’d been happily married for 30 years and, during all those years, had never had a major crisis in their relationship. On the day her husband died, they had gotten into an argument about something very insignificant and it had escalated to the point where they began to hurl some mean and cutting words at each other. At a point, agitated and angry, her husband stomped out of the room, told her he was going shopping, then died of a heart attack before he got to the car. Understandably, the woman was devastated, by the sudden death of her spouse but also by that last exchange. “All these years,” she lamented, “we had this loving relationship and then we have this useless argument over nothing and it ends up being our last conversation!”

The therapist led off with something meant partially in humor. He said: “How horrible of him to do that to you! To die just then!” Obviously the man hadn’t intended his death, but its timing was in fact awfully unfair to his wife, as it left her holding a guilt that he might have been able to ease. The woman had clearly had no intention of doing anything harmful to her husband, but his timing was also very bad. Good Friday was bad long before it was good. But, and this is the point, as Christians, we don’t believe there will always be happy endings in this life, nor that we will always be adequate in life. Rather we believe that the fullness of life and happiness will come to us through the redemption of what has gone wrong, not least what with what has gone wrong because of our own inadequacies and weaknesses.

G.K. Chesterton said that Christianity is special because in its belief in the communion of saints, “even the dead get a vote.” They get more than a vote. They still get to hear what we’re saying to them.

So ... if you’ve lost a loved one in a situation where there was still something unresolved, where there was still a tension that needed easing, where you should have been more attentive, or where you feel badly because you never adequately expressed the affirmation and affection that you might have, know it’s not too late. It can all still be done! (Mt 7:9-11).”

Food for the journey

“Bring double the snacks. Leave half the clothes.”

When I was a brand-new mother, preparing to bring our first baby on his first plane ride, a wise friend with older kids shared her advice for packing for family vacations.

“I started down at the tower of onesies I’d folded, next to one scant bag of Cheerios.

“Half the clothes,” she gently prodded, dividing my stack in two and handing half back to me.

“Double the snacks.”

Over the years, I learned she was right.

Clothes can get cleaned, but hungry kids grow cranky fast. We need less luggage but more sustenance.

Now each time I pull out the suitcases, her words echo in my head. I remember to step back and take clothes out of our bags, opting for a simpler, lighter approach to vacations. But I always throw extra snacks into the kids’ backpacks.

Smarter packing equals happier travelers.

What parent wouldn’t plan for a trip as best they can? When turbulence jolts or car sickness hits, whether stuck on the runway or stuck in traffic, no one wants to be unprepared. Especially when travel will be long, we want to care for each child along the way.

The journey of Lent is just the same.

Except this time, God is the wise parent who has already brought exactly what we need.

We often face Lent like it’s another family vacation: our work to plan, our job to steer and our outcome to control. But this season invites exactly the opposite.

In these holy days, can we trust that God will provide? Can we remember as we pray, fast and give alms that Lent is God’s gift to offer, not ours to control?

Scripture reminds us that God’s nature is generous, merciful, caring and compassionate: “Which one of you would hand his son a stone when he asks for a fish? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him” (Mt 7:9-11).”

If we wonder how God longs to guide us through this sacred season, we need only look to the ways we care for children at our best, still only a sliver or shadow of the love God pours out on us.

Lent calls us to trust that God will care for us like a loving parent. Offering food and water for the journey. Caring for us, body and soul. Traveling with us through 40 days of penance and preparation.

We know that Lent is going to be hard. We know we’ll want to give up and give in to temptation. We know that half of our good intentions will be swallowed up by our hardest habits. Each Lent teaches this humbling truth over and over.

Yet this is precisely the point. Lent is meant to remind us that God provides. We don’t need to drag along extra luggage, fear, anxiety or shame. Whenever we hunger or thirst, God will sustain us in surprising ways.

Like a loving mother or father planning for a long trip, God has already prepared what we need for the sacred mysteries that lie ahead.

Now when I prepare for Lent, I imagine God echoing my friend’s wise words. “Leave half of your plans behind. Bring twice the trust that I will feed you.”

As I pack for this year’s journey, what can I leave behind? How can I open my hands to receive?

Laura Fanucci is the author of several books, including “Everyday Sacrament: The Messy Grace of Parenting,” and blogs at motheringspirit.com.
St. Francis Xavier Fish Fry – St. Francis Xavier Church, 1120 Myrtle St., Baton Rouge, will hold its Lenten fish fry on Fridays, March 15, 22, 29 and April 5, 12 and 19. Lunches are $9 and include fried fish, sweet peas, potato salad, macaroni and cheese, bread and dessert. Dine in or take out. Call in orders are taken from 7:30 a.m. – 3 p.m. Walk-ins are welcome from 10:30 a.m. – 3 p.m. Delivery is available for 10 or more plates. To order, call Mary Williams at 225-333-1866 or Charles Fair at 225-236-5287.

Lenten Reflections – St. Agnes Church, 749 East Blvd., Baton Rouge, will host a series of Lenten reflections on “The Seven Last Words of Jesus Crucified.” Emily C. Byers, consecrated virgin from the Diocese of Lafayette, will offer reflections on the second word, “This day you will be with me in paradise” (Lk 23:43), Wednesday, March 20, 6:30 p.m. Father Michael Champagne CJC will present “Woman behold your son” (Jn 19:26-27), Wednesday, March 27, 6:30 p.m. Mass at 5:30 p.m. and Divine Mercy Chaplet at 6 p.m., followed by the reflection. For more information, call 225-339-1511.

Public Rosary – To pray for peace, families, poverty, homelessness, violence and other concerns, Saturday, March 23, at noon at St. Gerard Majella Church, 5354 Plank Road, Baton Rouge. For information, contact Valerie Richard 225-938-0532.

Organ Recital – Jacob Bend will present an organ recital, sponsored by St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge and the Baton Chapter of the American Guild of Organists Monday, March 25, 7 p.m., at St. Aloysius, 205 Stuart Ave., Baton Rouge. For more information, call 225-343-6657.

Robbie Giroir Tribute Concert – Christopher Berry, former student of Robbie Giroir, will present a free concert in memory of Giroir, former director of music and organist at St. Joseph Cathedral, Thursday, March 28, 6:30 p.m., at the Cathedral, Fourth and Main streets, Baton Rouge. For more information, call 225-387-5928.

Women in Spirit – Mary T. Heffron de Brueys will present, “Why (Not) Me: Thoughts on Losing a Child,” at the Women in Spirit Meeting Thursday, March 28, noon, at St. Joseph Cathedral, Fourth and Main streets, Baton Rouge. To RSVP, email wis.stj@gmail.com or call 225-387-5928.

RHS Alumni Picnic – Redemptorist High School Alumni and Friend, Inc. is hosting its annual picnic Saturday, March 30, 1 – 4 p.m., the grounds of St. Gerad Majella Church, 5354 Plank Road, Baton Rouge. To learn more, visit facebook.com/rshsalumniand friends and email kellisconerly@gmail.com to RSVP.

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leaders and volunteers will serve up to 300 people.

“Who knew it was going to go this long?” mused Marianna Wells, who was a member of the original group and is married to incoming Morganza mayor Woots Wells.

“When we started they wanted everything white, white, white,” she added. “Italians like color. We started putting color, so when I started with it, I gave it color. We started putting the red under the white lace.”

She added that through the years numerous religious statues and articles brought by parishioners have been added.

“People want to bring them in and I try to work them in,” said Wells, who, along with the other volunteers clearly enjoy working in the altar.

So what goes into the planning and cooking? The good news is the food on the altar remains consistent each year. But much work looms, starting with the cookies, and plenty of them. Debetaz bakes approximately 1,400 cookies during the course of several days, and along with anywhere from 12 to 15 helpers, ices the cookies once they cool.

“We learned that we can make cookies ahead of time and can ice them the next day,” she said. “You have to let the cookies cool and after putting the icing on, we put them over and let them cool again. Whoever can come will help us.”

Laurent, 93, will bake 600 fig cookies and at least 600 Italian almond cookies. On a recent morning, her kitchen was a beehive of bakers, a joyous group that included four generations of her family.

Of course, no St. Joseph’s Altar would be complete without pasta, dripping with Italian gravy. Francois said eight families make gravy from their own recipes, all “very good,” deftly sidestepping the vexing question of whose was the best. The gravies are then put together into a pot with boiled eggs.

Each year, about 48 dozen eggs are used for the altar. On the morning of the altar, volunteers arrive early to begin cooking 44 pounds of pasta and slice 33 loaves of Italian bread to be served with the meals.

“I don’t know how many pounds of Italian cheese,” Francois said.

Added to that are 36 pounds of salad, and for years a parishioner has been grinding up bread crumbs, symbolic of saw dust because St. Joseph was a carpenter by trade.

“You can put that on the pasta,” Francois said.

Once completed, three chairs are set around a table placed at the front of the altar. Three young students, representing the Holy Family, are fed first, and no one else eats until they have completed their meal.

St. Ann pastor Father Brent Maher said the St. Joseph’s Altar is important to the church because the church is alive in each community, each culture.

“And that’s the beauty of it, that traditions like the altar bring us all together,” he said. “People come and have a full belly and a full heart.”

Those coming for meals include residents from a nursing home in New Roads. And once everybody has eaten, the food is distributed to the needy, shut-ins and others in the area.

“The altar, the church, it brings us all together,” Rebetaz said. “It’s the backbone of the community.”

“I continue to look forward to it and hope each year I can still participate,” she added, saying that she also does much of the decorating.
MARCH 15 AND 16
Friends of St. Joseph Immaculate Conception Church 865 Hatchell Lane, Denham Springs. 
March 15 – Blessing of the altar in main hall after 7:00 a.m. Mass. 
March 16 – 11:00 a.m. Feeding of the saints followed by a free meal for all until 3:00 p.m. 

March 16
Our Lady of Pompeii Church 14450 Hwy. 442, Tickfaw 6:00 p.m. Altar will be blessed after Stations of the Cross. Followed by Novena and public viewing until 8:00 p.m. 

MARCH 17
St. John the Evangelist Church Knights of Columbus Home 58715 Price St., Plaquemine 12:00 p.m. 
Saturday March 16 – 4:00 p.m. Mass honoring St. Joseph. Blessing of the St. Joseph Altar immediately following 4:00 p.m. Mass at the Knights of Columbus Home. 

Betty Aucoin 225-687-2111

San Giuseppe Ladies 182 Church St., Morganza 10:00 a.m. Mass 11:00 a.m. – Blessing of the Altar followed by meal. 
Bonnie Francois 225-694-2149

Our Lady of Pompeii Church 14450 Hwy. 442, Tickfaw 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. Everyone invited to partake of the altar. 

Jamie Mabile James Bill Gremillion 12009 Graham Rd., St. Francisville 12:00 p.m. A traditional meal will be served after the blessing by Deacon Zeke. 225-978-3159

Cypress Springs Mercedarian Prayer Center 17560 George O’Neal Rd., Baton Rouge 12:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. Free meal for all and viewing of the altar in the center’s Dolphin Room.

May the Lord bless you and keep you safe. Amen.