For 3 1/2 years, Norman Weiss would hear in his spirit, “Norm, the doors are open, come on in” when he drove by St. Alphonsus Church in Greenwell Springs on his way to work at the Baton Rouge Airport as a supervisor for the Transportation Security Administration or even to the grocery store.

One day Weiss agreed, “All right, God. I’m coming back after work and I’ll go into the church.” When he walked into St. Alphonsus, Olga Johnson, director of religious education, met him. When he told her he wanted to learn more about the Catholic faith, she informed him RCIA classes were starting that Thursday and he said, “I’ll be there.” He and his wife Judy, took the classes together.

Norman is experienced in looking after the safety of people and making sure they get to their destination. He was a “Hollywood Marine” stationed in San Diego, California in the Air Wing as an aviation ordinance chief before becoming a gunnery sergeant. He worked in the transportation business and began his career with TSA in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. But he and Judy talked about how the Holy Spirit is coordinating their journey into the Catholic Church, which will culminate with the couple entering the faith at the Easter Vigil Mass on April 20.

Norm and Judy Weiss, of Greenwell Springs will join many people across the Diocese of Baton Rouge entering the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil Mass on April 20. Photo by Debbie Shelley | The Catholic Commentator

Bishop to pray
Way of the Cross

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Bishop Michael G. Duca is scheduled to pray the Way of the Cross on Friday, April 5 at 7 p.m. at St. Joseph Cathedral in reparation for the sin of sexual abuse within the church and for the graced healing of body, mind and spirit for those betrayed by this great sin.

“We pray this day in reparation for the sin of sexual abuse within the church of the Diocese of Baton Rouge; and for those in our diocese and across world who have suffered in mind, body and spirit the betrayal of trust by this great sin,” Bishop Duca said.

The bishop said all are welcome to join him and become part of the assembly. He is also asking that clergy members and parishioners who are unable to attend “offer this prayer in union” with the bishop’s effort on that day.

The Way of the Cross is a devotion commemorating the Passion and death of Christ, consisting of a series mediations.
Stations of the Cross

“We adore you, oh Christ, and we praise you ... because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.”

Stations of the Cross and Knights of Columbus fish fries are favorite Friday traditions for many Catholics.

The devotion of the Stations of the Cross, also known as the Way of the Cross, Via Crucis and Via Dolorosa, helps the faithful make, in spirit, a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and walk in the footsteps of Christ through his sufferings and death.

The origins of the stations are traced to the Holy Land. The Via Dolorosa at Jerusalem (though not called by that name before the sixteenth century) was marked out from the earliest times and has been the goal of pious pilgrims ever since the days of Constantine.

Early Christians in the Holy Land were devoted to these various stations. Pilgrims coming from the West desired to see these places and know how Christ traveled from the place of his unjust condemnation to his crucifixion.

Pilgrims brought stories about these places and their devotions home with them. In the 400s, St. Petronius erected a series of chapels dedicated to the important shrines of Jerusalem in Bologna, Italy.

With the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin, the first sultan of Egypt and Syria, in 1187, Christians were prevented from going to the Holy Land.

During the Crusades, when pilgrimages and travel to the Holy Land resumed, there was a renewed interest among Europeans in the Via Sacra Jerusalem. The Franciscans, who were granted administrative of the Christian holy places in Jerusalem in 1342, increased its popularity.

In the 1400s, the Stations of the Cross became extremely popular in Europe; however, they were usually a series of outdoor shrines.

In 1686, Pope Innocent XI granted the Franciscans the right to erect Stations of the Cross within their churches. In 1862 that right was extended to bishops throughout the Catholic Church.

The earliest use of the word “stations,” as applied to the accustomed halting-places in the Via Sacra at Jerusalem, was made by English pilgrim William Wey, who visited the Holy Land in the mid-15th century and described pilgrims following the footsteps of Christ to the cross. In 1521, a book called “Geystlich Strass” (German for “spiritual road”) was printed with illustrations of the stations in the Holy Land.

Today, the stations may be conducted with specific intentions in mind. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishop’s website usccb.org contains: Stations of the Cross for vocations, for life, for victims of human trafficking, as well as an audio Station of the Cross, Scriptural Way of the Cross and Scriptural Way of the Cross for Lent (also in Spanish).

To pray the stations through the eye’s of the Blessed Mother, there’s also Mary’s Way of the Cross.

Catholics can receive a plenary indulgence for making the Stations of the Cross according to the requirements listed in The Enchiridi- on indulgences.
Dancing to freedom’s beat

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

With a pep in their step and a wave of a white napkin, residents of Joseph Homes rose from their seats to join the second line that was dancing to a rowdy rendition of “When the Saints Go Marching In” performed by Mary McBride and her band in front of the complex for parolees on Laurel Street on Thursday, March 14.

The impromptu parade of people, which included staffers of Joseph Homes and St. Vincent de Paul, made for an atmosphere of good old-fashioned fun and memories – something that can be in short supply for Joseph Homes’ residents as they try to navigate their way back into day-to-day life in the real world.

“It feels wonderful,” said New Orleans native Oliver Francis, who suffered a stroke in August and was still in rehab on his Oct. 29 release date from the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. He moved into an apartment at Joseph Homes on March 1. “When the Saints Go Marching In” is his favorite song. “It has a certain melody with it and it brings back memories from New Orleans,” he said.

On any other Thursday evening, the men living at Joseph Homes, a residence for recent-ly released incarcerated men, would be attending a weekly support group meeting. But on this night, support and love came from a different source – music. Linda Fjeldsjo, coordinator for Joseph Homes for Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, said she was contacted by Charles deGravelles, a long-time volunteer at Angola and founder of Quest for Peace, about Mary McBride, who happens to be his niece, and her band are traveling on the Home Tour. The group performs for people who are displaced from their regular homes.

“She was looking for small venues to play, and Charles has been to our support groups and knows a lot of the guys because of his volunteer work and he asked if this could be one of the venues,” Fjeldsjo explained. “I thought it would just be wonderful for the guys.”

“Our idea this year is focusing on displaced people,” said de-Gravelles, a musician who joined the band to perform a song he had written. “So, we’ve done consecutive gigs this week – we went down to the Isle de Jean Charles, where the Indians are getting displaced from their island; we did a detox center; ending Sunday with a celebration of newcomers for immigrants and refugees.”

McBride started her mission nine years ago and, through funding by the U.S. State Department, Quest for Peace and private donations, the Home Tour has made stops around the U.S. and 34 countries, playing “for people who live there and playing where they live.”

“We’re very happy to be here at Joseph Homes because we have a real commitment to playing both in prisons and for people after they’ve gotten out of prison,” said McBride, who grew up in Washington, D.C. but spent countless summers visiting grandparents in Louisiana.

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Clergy abuse list updated

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

An individual identified below served in the Diocese of Baton Rouge without any credible allegations having been made against them related to that service, but they have been publicly identified by other dioceses or institutes of consecrated life.

Lockwood, born in 1933, was ordained a deacon for the Archdiocese of New Orleans an individual who has been publicly identified by other dioceses or institutes of consecrated life.

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Deacon James Lockwood of the Archdiocese of New Orleans is the individual who has been publicly identified by other dioceses or institutes of consecrated life.

Lockwood, born in 1933, was ordained a deacon for the archdiocese in 1974. The estimated time of the abuse was in 1978 and he was removed from ministry that same year. His only pastoral assignment was Center of Jesus the Lord in New Orleans. He served as a lay teacher at St. Aloysius School in Baton Rouge for five months.

Report known or suspect-ed child abuse immediately to law enforcement or to the Department of Children and Family Services at 855-452-5437. Any allegation of child or vulnerable adult sexual abuse involving clergy or a representative of the church should then be reported to Amy Cordon, the diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator, at 225-242-0250.
Father Blanchard’s calling came at an early age

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Long before crossing the threshold of high school, or even taking his first steps into a first-grade classroom, Father Donald Blanchard sat in the pew at his home parish of Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Baton Rouge and was awestruck as he watched priests celebrate Mass.

As he would say later, “There was just an attraction of what I saw the priest doing. It just stuck with me.”

His life would never be the same. At an age when many youngsters think of the future as being the upcoming weekend, Father Blanchard’s life compass was already pointed toward the priesthood. By eighth grade he was attending St. Ben’s seminary in St. Benedict, the launching point of what would become a 50-year pilgrimage as a priest.

“I didn’t know any (priests) personally but the parish priests were always very kind and solicitous,” said Father Blanchard, who celebrated his golden jubilee Feb. 24 during a Mass at Most Blessed Virgin with Jesus at the Resurrection Church in Baton Rouge and St. Jean Vianney Church in Baton Rouge.

He readily admits his true calling was, and to this day, is not behind the desk, not scrutinizing financial statements, but ministering to his parishioners, to those who are ill, to those facing death, as well as baptizing.

“Of all the things a priest is called to do I love,” Father Blanchard said. “My greatest joy is helping others discover God’s love and mercy and assist them in any way I can to come to that and let that be their grace.

“I particularly love preaching and I’ve been told I’m good at it.”

“I couldn’t stand administration; I did it because it was part of the package and tried to get the right people to help me with it,” he admitted. “When I retired and walked out of the rectory (at Sacred Heart, which, fittingly, was his last pastoral assignment) I felt this energy released from me, knowing that I did not have that burden anymore.”

Retirement has brought great joy to Father Blanchard, especially being able to return to his role as a priest. But he has also developed an amazing aptitude in writing icons, a demanding and unique skill he said his interest in icons traces back to his youth, perhaps because of the Byzantine art that is so prevalent at Sacred Heart.

He has written more than 100 icons during the past nine years, and word of his stunning work continues to spread throughout the diocese.

“Writing icons has helped my prayer life tremendously,” Father Blanchard said. “I get lost; I become so focused and so disciplined but it’s so energizing.”

“I’ll go hours without eating anything while writing this prayer,” he added, saying that it takes him about 50 hours to complete one icon. But he’ll often work on one for 10 consecutive hours.

Some of his favorites include those of St. Clare, the Baptist of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin after the Resurrection, the Sorrowful Mother, Our Lady of Ten Thousand, the Visitation of Our Lady and Mary, and all of her icons.

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One of Father Donald Blanchard’s favorite icons that he has prayed is that of the Blessed Virgin with Jesus at the Resurrection. Photo provided by Father Gerald Burns.
OLOL channel a hoot for kids

By Benny Van
The Catholic Commentator

Lions and tigers and bears ... in a hospital? Oh my!

But, for Our Lady of the Lake Children’s Hospital in Baton Rouge, that’s exactly what doctors are prescribing for their young patients. The elixir is the San Diego Zoo Kids, a closed-circuit television adventure channel now available in the children’s hospital rooms. It’s something that is helping to create a healing environment, according to Dr. Trey Dunbar, president of OLOL Children’s Hospital.

Dunbar noted some children might not be able to make the distance to the hospital’s playroom to see visiting pets, or the animals might not be allowed in the rooms for sanitary reasons.

“So having a channel where you have this exposure to the animals and the education that goes with the San Diego Zoo Global channel is huge for us, the kids and the families – just to be able to help create that healing environment, and give them exposures that they may not otherwise have,” said Dunbar.

Funded through a donation from philanthropist T. Denny Sanford, San Diego Zoo Kids provides family-friendly, animal-oriented programming that is entertaining and educational. The channel also features animal stories from BREC’s Baton Rouge Zoo, along with more than a dozen accredited zoos and aquariums throughout North America.

Dunbar said the zoo channel fits in “very well with the type of environment that we’re trying to provide.” The new Children’s Hospital has an animal motif and each floor is designated to an animal that’s indigenous to Louisiana, according to Dunbar.

Jennifer Shields, education curator for the Baton Rouge Zoo, is thrilled with the new partnership and brought along some furry friends to be introduced to patients during the announcement of the zoo channel on Feb. 1. The kids got an up-close encounter with Shakespeare, a barred owl; Tawanda, a tenrec; and Xenon, a ferret.

Some segments have already been filmed in the Capital City and have been incorporated into a series of segments, according to Shields.

Shields’ takes the wild ones on the road with the zoo’s mobile program, visiting schools, Alzheimer’s groups, retirement communities and libraries. She is excited to add this new dimension to the zoo’s outreach initiative.

“We’re hoping to possibly continue to work with Children’s Hospital to do some live programs with bringing animals periodically,” she said. “But, we’re still working on the details on that, with hospitals and animals.”

Shields is already familiar with the projects at the San Diego Zoo and even their personnel. She worked there before coming to the Baton Rouge zoo almost 10 years ago. She said the new collaboration has given her quite a few ideas on how the critters can help forge connections in other areas.

But for now, the animals will be linked via satellite to the medical world and hopefully create a different world, one of healing. Dunbar said seeing the kids interact physically with the animals was very moving.

“In that moment, you could see how big of an impact this program can have,” said Dunbar. “And, it was just great to see the smiles on the kids’ faces and see them interacting with the animals and asking questions, and just the curiosity of the kids – even kids that are ill and, in many ways, in a lot of stress. It was wonderful to see that moment of respite.”
In Lent, do Sundays count?/ One world religion?

Q My mother was very religious and she always told us that during Lent, whatever you gave up (ice cream, candy, etc.) you could have on Sundays. Is that true? Do Sundays count as part of Lent? (Green Bay, Wisconsin)

A I’ll answer your second question first, because that’s the easier one: “Do Sundays count as part of Lent?” The clear answer is “Yes.” In the liturgical books of the church, the season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends just before the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on the evening of Holy Thursday. In the Roman Missal, for example, March 10 this year was designated as the “First Sunday of Lent.”

Now, for the more complicated part: If you’re fasting on candy for Lent, may you eat it on Sundays? The answer is: “No.”

Q Now, for the more complicated part: Will there be fasting on candy for Lent, may you eat it on Sundays? The answer is: “No.”

A There’s no law involved or question of sinfulness, you’re just doing something that doesn’t seem like a kind of “little Easter,” and has never required fasting on Sundays

Q But I think it’s probably better to continue the practice throughout the whole Lenten season, Sundays included; if I gave up candy for Lent but ate it on each of the six Sundays, that doesn’t seem like much of a sacrifice.

A That’s true, but it’s your own call. Each of us is required in a general way to do penance, but the particular manner is a personal choice. There’s no law involved or question of sinfulness, you’re just doing something nice for God, in return for the sacrifice Jesus made for us.

Now it’s true that the church has always viewed Sunday as a day of celebration in remembrance of the Resurrection, a kind of “little Easter,” and has never required fasting on Sundays so I suppose there’s some warrant, when you’ve adopted a Lenten penance, for “taking Sundays off.”

Q I have read the document to which you refer and nowhere can I find a call for “one world religion.” Instead, it is a plea for peace and nonviolence, a call to Catholics, Muslims and all believers “to unite and work together” in order to serve “as a guide for future generations to advance a culture of mutual respect in the awareness of the great divine grace that makes all human beings brothers and sisters.” The joint declaration, titled “A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together,” was signed by Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb, a grand imam of Sunni Muslims, during a visit by the pope to the United Arab Emirates in early February.

A It calls on world leaders “to work strenuously to spread the culture of tolerance and of living together in peace; to intervene at the earliest opportunity to stop the shedding of innocent blood and bring an end to wars, conflicts, environmental decay and the moral and cultural decline that the world is presently experiencing.”

The declaration condemns “all those practices that are a threat to life such as genocide, acts of terrorism, forced displacement, human trafficking, abortion and euthanasia” It notes “that among the most important causes of the crises of the modern world are a desensitized human conscience, a distancing from religious values and a prevailing individualism accompanied by materialistic philosophies.”

Far from urging, as your question says, “one world religion,” the document states instead that “the pluralism and the diversity of religions, color, sex, race and language are willed by God in his wisdom,” an observation that has been taken by some Catholic commentators simply to mean that the variety of religions comes under the permissive will of God and indicates the natural desire of humans to know God.

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 to 30 Columbia Circle Dr., Albany, NY 12203.

Come and See Weekend scheduled April 12-14

By Richard Meek

The Catholic Commentator

Young men who might be interested in entering the seminary are invited to an upcoming vocations weekend retreat at St. Joseph Abbey in St. Benedict.

A Come and See weekend is scheduled at the abbey April 12-14 and is open for all young men ages 16 and over.

There is no cost. Meals beds are provided but linens, pillow, towels and personal items must be brought.

Activities traditionally include conferences on seminary life and discernment, as well as Mass, eucharistic adoration and confession. Retreat officials said the weekend is a great opportunity for anyone discerning a potential journey to the priesthood.

Along with the activities listed, those attending will also have the opportunity to meet with priests and current seminarians in ongoing formation. Retreatants will be able to ask questions, discuss concerns and take the time to pray for God’s will.

“The Come and See weekend allows men who are discerning a call to the priesthood or who simply desire to see what seminary life is like to come and spend time at the seminary with men who have answered God’s call,” said Albert Blount, a seminarian for the Diocese of Baton Rouge. “Those who come will be able to spend time with the seminarians in a number of settings, from meals and sports to classes and one-on-one time to ask any questions they may have.

“There are no expectations or pressure placed on the men who show up; it is only a time for them to come and see what this life is really like.” For more information or to register, call Father Andrew Merrick, vocations for the Diocese of Baton Rouge, at 225-336-8778 or email him at amerrick@diobr.org or contact Christie Francis of the Office of Vocations at 225-336-8778 or cf francis@diobr.org.

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- Anthony’s Deli, Baton Rouge
- Alexander’s Highland Market, Baton Rouge
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- Louisiana Vet Home, Jackson
- Mathern’s Supermarkets, Baton Rouge
- Magnuson Hotel, St. Francisville
- North Ridgely Healthcare, Baker
- Oak Point Supermarket, Central
- Oak Wood Nursing Home, Zachary
- Old Jefferson Community Care, Baton Rouge
- Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center, Baton Rouge and Walker
- Our Lady of the Lake Physician Group, offices with locations throughout the Diocese
- Reeves’ Supermarket, Baton Rouge
- Rouses, Baton Rouge, Gonzales, Donaldsville, Hammond, Plaquemine, Prairieville and Zachary
- St. Elizabeth Hospital, Gonzales
- St. Mary’s Books & Gifts, Baton Rouge
- St. Vincent dePaul Stores throughout the diocese
- Schexnayder Supermarket, Vacherie
- Southside Produce, Baton Rouge
- Tony’s Seafood, Baton Rouge
- UPS Store, Coursery Blvd., Baton Rouge
- Whole Foods Market, Baton Rouge
- Winn Dixie in Hammond, New Roads

as well as your local church parish

The Catholic Commentator

March 29, 2019
Corporal works of mercy during Lent

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Today we may think we can’t enjoy an evening of hospitality with Jesus, listening to him laugh or sigh as he told stories, as Mary did, or fuss in the kitchen cooking up a ‘fancy dinner’ like Martha. We may believe we can’t push through the Roman soldiers because all we see is Jesus in pain and wipe his face with compassion as Veronica did. Nor may we see ourselves helping “lift the load” from Jesus’ back as Simon of Cyrene or giving Jesus’ body the dignity of a (temporary) burial like Joseph of Arimathea.

But through exercising the corporal works of mercy during Lent, as Jesus assures in Mt 25:40: ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’

The St. Vincent de Paul Society allows people to pour out their love to Jesus by serving the poor in different capacities, said SVDP executive director Michael Acaldo.

“You can see all the wonderful things — people taking care of each other and the tremendous energy and excitement of serving people. It’s contagious,” said Acaldo.

Among those enthusiastic volunteers are Kay and Chris Gaudet, who volunteered because of their involvement in social justice and a desire to set an example for their children. Both are retired pharmacists (Chris from Elayn Hunt Correctional Center in St. Gabrielle and Kay from the Louisiana Department of Health) who met in pharmacy school and will be married 45 years in May.

After raising two children and retiring from busy careers, the Gaudets looked for an opportunity to “give back” together and explored the volunteer opportunities on the SVDP website.

“We were attracted to the fact that there was a dining room as well as a pharmacy,” said Chris. They both initially served in the dining room, but Chris was later asked to help in the pharmacy. Sometimes he walks over to the dining room, puts on an apron and joins Kay on the serving line.

Their social justice initiatives have rubbed off on their children. Their younger daughter, Katherine, has been a big sister to a youth in Philadelphia for about seven years and their older daughter, Christy, has been on mission trips using her expertise in biomedical engineering to help people in places such as India. And in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Gaudet’s daughters served evacuees in Georgia and Alabama.

The couple said they believe doing the corporal works of mercy is prayer in action.

Chris recalled a homily by Father Pat Mascarella, deceased, in which he talked about not keeping God inside the church.

“He (Father Mascarella) talked about how God wants us to open the doors and go outside the church and do the work that he asked us to do,” Chris said.

This is also the belief of Terry Cormier and Chris Willis, who work alongside the sisters of the Missionaries of Charity at St. Agnes Church in Baton Rouge.

Willis said he started volunteering at St. Agnes by serving meals but the sisters soon “pulled him away” to do other things, such as unloading food shipments, sweeping, mopping, changing light bulbs, taking out the trash and other “handyman” type of work. He receives his “marching orders” once he arrives at St. Agnes.

“Corporal works of mercy can also include serving those who have given their life in service, such as military veterans, according to Clayton Landry.

Landry, who still visits St. John the Baptist Church in Zachary after moving to McComb, Mississippi, said he did not want to give up his ministry at the Louisiana War Veterans Home in Jackson. He makes the long drive every first and third Thursday of the month to be with the veterans.

An Army veteran himself, Landry was a helicopter mechanic instructor.

He and his wife were one of two couples who started volunteering at the nursing home.

When there is a Mass or Communion service, Landry, 74, brings out the veterans in wheelchairs and distributes the Eucharist to those unable to come.

There are younger men, who were injured, as well as older veterans in the home, according to Landry, who said, “I always feel that I’m doing something for God and my country.”

“I look to them as heroes. Sports figures and celebrities get paid big money to be called heroes, but to me these men put their lives on the line and often weren’t appreciated for it,” said Landry.
Reflections of El Camino

By Michael Hilborn
Special to The Catholic Commentator

The Camino de Santiago, known in English as the Way of Saint James, is a network of pilgrimages dating back to the beginning of the 9th century that leads to the shrine of the apostle Saint James the Great in northwestern Spain.

I would like to bring to light something that only those who have made the trek to Santiago de Compestela can come to understand, that which is what pilgrims refer to as the “Spirit of the Camino.”

About half way through my hike I met a French girl named Blandine who had just finished nursing school in her hometown of Lyon, France. The language barrier between us unfortunately limited our conversation, but after a couple of hours of hiking together we discovered a mutual love for the Catholic Church.

Later, we were passing through one of the many small towns along the Camino and stumbled upon a little Catholic church. Prior to my trip, a priest had suggested that I dedicate each church I visited to someone back home, and so I asked Blandine if she would like to make a quick stop.

As we stepped into the stone church, Blandine, with her heavy French accent asked, “I sit?” Confused about why she asked, I answered yes and went on with my business by kneeling in one of the pews.

As I opened up in prayer, I suddenly began to feel this gloomy, chamber-like church come to life with the most astounding voice harmonizing “Ave María.” In awe, I turned around and suddenly realized that Blandine had not asked me if she could sit but if she could sing.

I will never forget the soulful harmonic sound of her voice echoing off the old stone walls. There are no words that could sum up that moment other than pure bliss. It was a moment that I never wanted to end, and as the song came to a close, Blandine, seeing the tears and shock in my eyes, smiled at me and slowly said: “God gave me this gift. Every time I enter his house, I can do nothing more than give it back to him.”

I will never forget that day on the Camino, because I think it is the day that I met a saint.

I still can recall the first time I heard about the Camino. I was in my junior year of high school, and my theology teacher, Father Ryan Hallford, powerfully shared with us his journey on the Camino. I remember thinking to myself, “Well, if people from all the ends of the Earth are traveling to Spain to walk this trail, there must be something more there than a beaten path. Some day I am going to set out and find that something.”

The years came and went, and I soon found myself in my final quarter of college at Louisiana Tech asking myself that all-too-familiar question that we all ask ourselves as a chapter of our life comes to an end “What do I do now?”

The truth is, I wanted any other answer than “starting work.” What I really wanted was time to reflect on who I was and what it was that I had to offer to the working world that was in-
REFLECTIONS ▼
From page 8

From page 8

Michael Hilborn hiking the nearly 500-mile Camino de Santiago trail.

evitably before me. I knew that I wanted to get out of my comfort zone, and I was determined to achieve something that at first seemed unimaginable.

From that realization, the idea of hiking the Camino started to resurface in my mind. As I started to pray about it, I immediately felt that God had an opportunity waiting for me on that trail, one that I could not come to understand unless I set off to find it myself.

It wasn’t until I was discussing my upcoming trip with a friend that I finally asked myself the question: “What am I looking for?” Upon comprehending the fact that I indeed did not have an answer, I realized that I could not accomplish “What?” until I understood “Why?”

I realized that I wanted the Camino to be a battle and an adventure, but in (in a book I read prior to leaving) I learned that there was something far greater that God wanted me to pursue on this trail, an elusive something that can only be found through the help of getting lost in his creation. God wanted me to go find my own heart.

I believe that with every moment, whether it is filled with joy or with tribulation, God is trying to speak to us. Although we sometimes can’t feel or hear it, God is continuously knocking at the door of our hearts asking us to let ourselves be loved by him even more.

I believe that it took God pushing me out of my comfort zone and everyday routine to see all that I was missing. With work, family, friends and so many other daily obligations, our culture quietly makes it dangerously easy to marginalize our daily time spent with the Lord until it is altogether nonexistent.

I quickly realized that in my relationship with him, I had done all of the talking, and that it was time for me to do some listening.

The Camino brought daily solitude through early morning hiking that really allowed me to dig deep into my roots. The winding path of wondrous mountains and desolate valleys provided me with a deeper understanding of both God’s sovereignty and the peace found in simplicity.

The trials and exciting moments that came with the Camino gave me time to reflect on all the joys and sorrowful moments of my life and to recognize how he was using those moments to work through me. Furthermore, the Camino gave me a battle that I regretfully had asked for: a battle of my feet. Like any walk of faith, I believe that God used my feet to break me down both physically and mentally to the point where I had to rely on him like never before.

God wanted to teach me the true meaning of perseverance, through the blistering and swelling of my feet. During mountain ascents, he taught me that at times life can be an uphill battle, and that he calls us to fight nonetheless. I learned that there is never a moment in this journey of life that we ever travel alone.

When I reflect on my journey, one life-changing lesson never ceases to come to mind: God waits to be wanted. God is constantly waiting for us to take the time to put the world aside and make him our main priority.

So whether it is the Camino or something entirely less extreme, there is a closed door in your life that God is perpetually knocking at. Open it, and see what Camino God has waiting for you.

(Hilborn is a parishioner at St. Jean Vianney Church in Baton Rouge.)
Monica’s Journey

By Bonny Van

The Catholic Commentator

Monica’s Journey, a support group for women from broken families, started at St. Joseph four years ago. The ministry, which maintains strict privacy rules for safety and personal reasons, was the brainchild of Leslie Gardner, who developed the idea for a women’s support group following a retreat.

Being a divorced woman, I used to sit in Mass with my son and think, “Look at all these families together. There’s really nothing for people like me,” she recalled. “I used to pray for God to shine that light, like, ‘Here’s this thing.’ But at the retreat, it was almost like a light bulb went off over my head, like, ‘You do it.’”

Gardner’s focus was women facing issues such as broken marriages, problems with children, problems with parents and abusive relationships. She named the ministry in honor of St. Monica, who spent 17 years praying for her wayward son when he finally converted to Christianity and after death was canonized as St. Augustine, viewed as one of the most important church fathers.

“St. Monica was a mother who suffered a lot for her child,” said Gardner, explaining why she chose the saint for the group’s name. “She sacrificed and prayed and wept for her child, and eventually paid off big time, until that’s what I would hope for my child.”

After gathering materials and formulating prayers, Gardner met with St. Joseph pastor Father Paul McDuffie about the new ministry.

After more prayer and discernment, Gardner held the first meeting of Monica’s Journey on March 26, 2015. Four years later, the women in Monica’s Journey are keeping a vigil for their own children. “Because it’s Lent; it’s time for repentance and a return to the Lord,” said Gardner. “It’s close to my heart as a mother. It’s what our families, started at St. Joseph, is all about, is our families and broken families – that’s why we chose St. Monica as our patron saint. She’s been through a lot. She will always come through for us, and our children. All we have to do is trust and place them in her arms, like she wants them to be.”
Serving up flexible meal options

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

Carol Forbes gave one final glance at her cafeteria staff at St. Aloysius School in Baton Rouge, bracing for what would soon be growling young stomachs ready to pounce on their lunch offering.

“Here they come!” Forbes said as she gazed at the double doors, where the sounds of kindergarten voices yelped their anticipation.

Within seconds, dozens of energetic young students bounded into the lunchroom, filling the air with chatter and laughter of kids using their outside voices inside. Behind the serving line, Bishop Michael G. Duca joined Catholic schools superintendent Dr. Melanie Verges, St. Aloysius principal Erin Candilora and pastor Father Randy Cuevas, loading up trays with fruits, vegetables and a cupcake.

March is Child Nutrition Month and Lynda Carville, director of child nutrition for the Diocese of Baton Rouge, uses the time to let lawmakers and policy makers understand the importance of funding school lunch programs.

From March 18 – March 26, local officials, state and federal lawmakers and USDA representatives made lunch stops at Catholic school cafeterias throughout the diocese.

“We serve nine different (civil) parishes – it’s a lot,” said Carville. “But we want to let them know we do a lot of cooking from scratch and we want them to see how the actual system works.

“People don’t realize, it’s just not as simple as opening a can of beans. It’s a process and our staff works very hard to serve our children to provide a nutritional meal.”

According to Carville, child nutrition directors across the U.S. battle two areas: funding and flexibility on guidelines on what must be served, including calorie count, sodium intake and serving sizes.

“We’re seeing a lot of waste and that’s the biggest thing because we have to serve a half a cup and they have to take a fruit or a vegetable and some children don’t want that. And, some people can’t eat a half a cup of fruit and so a lot of it goes into the trash and so we’re trying to minimize that from happening,” she said.

Rep. Garret Graves (R-LA) joined workers at Sacred Heart of Jesus School in Baton Rouge in the service line, then sat for lunch with students and a visit with child nutrition staffers to learn more about the challenges in creating healthy menus, including requirements of whole grain-rich foods.

“When the (USDA) first came in and made some of the changes on nutrition standards, there are a lot of popular meals in Louisiana that were just not compatible to the standards,” said Rep. Graves. “I use brown rice a lot but never, ever for my jambalaya.”

Another area of concern, according to the congressman, was the half-cup portion servings regardless of the age of the student. Guidelines require a student to choose a fruit or vegetable.

“We need to do a better job tailoring different portion increments to kindergarteners that are never going to eat that much while we’re effectively not providing the calories that our upper-grade students need,” he said. “We’ve got to have more flexibility to where we can have a win-win, where we can be providing food that people actually enjoy eating, and nutritious food and we’re efficiently spending the money on things that people will actually consume.”

USDA Special Nutrition Programs Director Eddie Longoria, who visited the lunchroom at St. Jude the Apostle School in Baton Rouge during the week, talked about the idea of “share tables.”

“It’s an opportunity for children, who may not want to finish their entire meal, to take some of the items, for example an orange or an apple, and place it on the share table for other children who may want to partake of that item,” said Longoria.

New rules from the USDA that allow more flexibility on flavored milk options, sodium standards and whole grains go into effect July 1.
SAINTLY STUDENTS – Students at St. Elizabeth School in Paincourtville dress as saints during Catholic Schools Week. Photo provided by Dr. Kathy Herpich | St. Elizabeth School

HAVE A HEART – Students at Holy Ghost School in Hammond chose the Louisiana Pediatric Cardiology Foundation as the recipient of February’s service project. For a monetary donation, students wore a pink, red, or blue shirt to school with their jeans for a casual dress day. Pictured, front row from left, are Trace Thomas, Emery Tantillo, Emily Ballay, Kate Harris, and Ellie Peterman. Pictured, back row from left, are Eliza Foster, Hudson Tantillo, Knox Peterman, Sarah Beth Thompson, teacher Lindsay Thompson and Graceylnn Canzoneri. Photo provided by Cindy Wagner | Holy Ghost School

STEM NIGHT – Science, technology, engineering and math were center stage at STEM Night hosted by Holy Family School in Port Allen on Feb. 28. This is the second year for the event, which was coordinated by Annie Cagle, technology director for Holy Family School. Area companies showcased their use of STEM in such areas as electricity, drones, rockets, computers and more. Students also participated in science experiments, including making slime and ice cream. Photo provided by Annette Fitzgerald | Holy Family School

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Captain Marvel
Disney
Lavish origin story finds the superhero of the title (Brie Larson) faithfully serving the alien civilization that trained her as a warrior in its struggle against the encroachments of a race of shape-shifting enemies (led by Ben Mendelsohn). But when she joins her military mentor (Jude Law) on a mission to 1995 Earth, persistent flashbacks to a previous life become more ever troubling and confusing for her, especially after she joins forces with a SHIELD officer (Samuel L. Jackson) on a mission to 1995 Earth, persistent flashbacks to a previous life become more ever troubling and confusing for her, especially after she joins forces with a SHIELD officer (Samuel L. Jackson) and the two go in search of the scientist (Annette Bening) who seems to be crucial both to the intergalactic conflict and to her missing past. Wit and positive messages about working for peace and the resilience of the human spirit buoy co-writers (with Geneva Robertson-Dworet) and directors Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck's Marvel Comics adaptation. While the inclusion of an invisible being called the Supreme Intelligence might confuse youngsters still being formed in their faith, the film is possibly acceptable for mature teens. Much combat violence, most of it stylized but some of it harsh, fleeting anat omical humor, a few mild oaths, at least one rough term, a handful of crude and crass expressions. A-III; PG-13

Tyler Perry’s A Madea Family Funeral
Liongate
Writer-director and star Tyler Perry has given his alter ego Mabel “Madea” Simmons a sweet and funny valedictory as she organizes a family funeral and dispenses relationship wisdom to younger family members caught in the pain of infidelity. It’s an immensely satisfying story that returns to the formula of Perry’s successful stage plays. Madea spends most of the movie steadied and firing off blurt ripostes, as if Perry—who, in addition to Madea, also plays her brother Joe, Joe’s son Brian, and a new character, legless throat-cancer victim Cousin Heathrow—is reluctant to let her go without allowing her to share everything she has on her mind. An adultery theme, mature references, including sexual activity and drug use, some sexual humor, fleeting crude banter, three racial slurs. A-III; PG-13

Five Feet Apart
Liongate
This generally engaging young-adult romantic drama about the redeeming power of sacrificial love is aimed, with the precision of a heat-seeking missile, at 17-year-old girls. But mature themes, including sexuality, preclude endorsement for most adolescents. Director Justin Baldoni and screenwriters Mikki Daughtry and Tobias Iaconis take on mortality from cystic fibrosis, a subject that could easily have led them into tasteless mawkishness. Instead, they’ve treated their material in a way that’s compassionate, medically correct and, for the most part, morally sound. Two teens (Haley Lu Richardson and Cole Sprouse) participating in a clinical trial of innovative medications take the first steps toward falling in love despite not being able to kiss or even touch each other for fear of a potentially fatal sharing of bacteria. She has a couple of tragic secrets; he proves eager to be under her moral tutelage; and the parents of both, as is de rigueur for the genre, appear only briefly as supporting players, a situation that requires the duo to work out their issues for themselves. References to homosexuality, a single instance of rough language, fleeting crude talk. A-III; PG-13

Wonder Park
Paramount
When her mother (voice of Jennifer Garner) becomes seriously ill and must go away for medical treatment, a young girl (voice of Brianna Denski) lashes out by turning her back on the imaginary amusement park they had created together with the help of an ensemble of stuffed animals (the most prominent voiced by Norbert Leo Butz, Ken Hudson Campbell and Mila Kunis). But on a journey through the woods near her home she stumbles on a real-life version of the venue and finds that it’s in crisis because of her anger and neglect. As penned by Josh Appelbaum and Andre Nemec, this animated adventure rambles and, though objectionable elements are absent, the many dangers the characters face, together with the fraught emotional situation, will likely prove too scary and upsetting for little kids. Frequent peril, somber plot developments, brief mild gross-out humor. A-I; PG
Prayer was the secret of the saints, and we can join them

O ur Catholic Church seems to be getting beat up all around our country and the world today. It is the season of Lent, however, and all the bad news does put us out in the desert with Jesus. It is interesting to note when he prayed and when his saints who best responded to his Spirit prayed. Jesus prayed when he was sad, like at the death of his friend, Lazarus. He also prayed when he faced suffering. In his agony in the garden, he prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me.” Then after anguished prayer he came to a resolution, “... not my will but yours be done.”

Jesus prayed at other times, which I plan to write about after Lent, but Jesus also taught his disciples to pray, and they have taught us through the centuries. So let’s take a look at that. It is a tradition that gives us strength, consolation and joy.

“To pray is to listen with the heart.” I remember this quote from somewhere, though I cannot remember who said it. It certainly rings true in the lives of the saints. St. Bernadette listened so well to the words and the music, and the Bible and the saints, on the basis of all retreats given by the Jesuits remain faithful to the teachings of his friend, Lazarus. Also, when his saints went to the Abbey of Montserrat, above Barcelona, and dedicated his life to God, he made a retreat in a small place called Manresa where there were caves inhabited by those seeking a place to pray. He recorded the results of his prayer and meditation in his “Spiritual Exercises.” Down to today they are the basis of all retreats given by the order he founded, the Society of Jesus.

In baptism we are all called to be saints. As St. Ignatius taught, and St. Theresa and St. Bernadette practiced, holiness always begins with prayer. Lent is a time to travel in good company with Jesus and his saints.

Another Perspective
Father John Carville

“I am the Immaculate Conception.” This was the answer of the lady to Bernadette’s question, “Who are you?” The pope believed her story of the apparitions because such an unlettered girl in a tiny village hidden away in the Pyrenees could not have understood, or probably even heard of the dogma proclaimed in Rome only a few years before. Yet, Bernadette did understand who the lady was because she often listened in prayer at that spot. And the first message she received to communicate to the world was that we should all pray, pray for this sinful world.

St. Ignatius of Loyola received his conversion and the inspiration for his great work, “The Spiritual Exercises,” while listening in prayer. Convalescing from a wound in battle, he asked for books about his favorite subjects, military heroes and romantic love. Instead, he was given the Bible and the lives of the saints. Later he got the books he had asked for, but discovered something. Military exploits and love, his former passions, left him strangely unfilled. The Bible and the saints, on the other hand, filled him with peace and satisfaction that remained. He went to the Abbey of Montserrat, above Barcelona, and dedicated his life to God. Then he made a retreat in a small place called Manresa where there were caves inhabited by those seeking a place to pray. He recorded the results of his prayer and meditation in his “Spiritual Exercises.” Down to today they are the basis of all retreats given by the order he founded, the Society of Jesus. Although active in education, missionary work, science and many other fields, his Jesuits remain faithful to the teaching and example of St. Ignatius: it all must start with prayer so that whatever they do will be true to the motto he left them: “Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam” (For the greater glory of God).

Another Spanish saint, Theresa of Avila, left us a masterpiece on prayer entitled “The Interior Life.” Although her spiritual writing pictures prayer at times as a struggle, she was never a stranger to God. Her relationship with her father in heaven was such that she could address him with great familiarity. “No wonder that you have so few friends when you treat the ones you have so badly.”

This was after being thrown out of her carriage into the mud while visiting one of the many convents she founded. Most of the time she was happy, even in adversity, because she saw God everywhere, and her prayer was to talk to him often and naturally. Her prayer was a dialogue with God, and she sometimes recorded what she thought he was replying as she listened. When one of her recalcitrant abbesses was being particularly tiresome, she prayed, “Lord, if I had my way, that woman wouldn’t be superior here.” And God answered her just as wryly. “Theresa,” he said, “if I had my way, she wouldn’t be either.”

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

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Prayer was the secret of the saints, and we can join them

Our Catholic Church seems to be getting beat up all around our country and the world today. It is the season of Lent, however, and all the bad news does put us out in the desert with Jesus. It is interesting to note when he prayed and when his saints who best responded to His Spirit prayed. Jesus prayed when he was sad, like at the death of his friend, Lazarus. He also prayed when he faced suffering. In his agony in the garden, he prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me.” Then after anguished prayer he came to a resolution, “... not my will but yours be done.”

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“Yes to pray is to listen with the heart.” I remember this quote from somewhere, though I cannot remember who said it. It certainly rings true in the lives of the saints. St. Bernadette listened so well to the Blessed Virgin’s pleas for prayers at Lourdes that today the place of her encounter with the “lovely lady” is a world-famous place of pilgrimage. What strikes the pilgrim to Lourdes most is the atmosphere of prayer on the grounds of the shrine. Whether he got the books he had asked for, or made the Way of the Cross, or visited one of the many convents she founded. Most of the time she was happy, even in adversity, because she saw God everywhere, and her prayer was to talk to him often and naturally. Her prayer was a dialogue with God, and she sometimes recorded what she thought he was replying as she listened. When one of her recalcitrant abbesses was being particularly tiresome, she prayed, “Lord, if I had my way, that woman wouldn’t be superior here.” And God answered her just as wryly. “Theresa,” he said, “if I had my way, she wouldn’t be either.”

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Our struggle for proper celebration

We don’t know how to celebrate things as they’re meant to be celebrated. We want to, but mostly we don’t know how. Generally we celebrate badly. How do we normally celebrate? By overdoing things; by taking a lot of the things we ordinarily do, drinking, eating, talking, singing and humming, and bringing them to excess. For most of us, celebration means eating too much, drinking too much, singing too loudly, telling one joke too many, and hoping that somewhere in all that excess we will find the secret to make this occasion extraordinary.

We have this odd idea that we can find special joy and delight by pushing things beyond their normal limits. But there’s precious little real delight in this. Heightened enjoyment is found in connecting with others more deeply, in feeling our emotions and playfulness in a special way. But that doesn’t happen in a frenzy. Hence our celebrations are mostly followed by a hangover, physical and emotional. Why? Why is genuine celebration so hard to do?

Perhaps the main reason is that we struggle congenitally to simply enjoy things, to simply take life, pleasure, love and our enjoyment as gracious gifts from God, pure and simple. It’s not that we lack this capacity for this. God has given us this gift. More at issue is the fact that our capacity to enjoy is often mixed with inchoate feelings of guilt about experiencing pleasure (and the greater the pleasure, the deeper our feeling of guilt). Among other things, because of this, we often struggle to enjoy what’s legitimately given to us by God, because consciously or unconsciously, we feel that our experience of pleasure is somehow “stealing from God.” This is an uneasiness that particularly afflicts sensitive and moral souls. Somehow, in the name of God, we struggle to give ourselves full permission to enjoy, and this leaves us prone to excess (which is invariably a substitute for genuine enjoyment).

Whatever the reasons, we struggle with this and thus many of us go through life deprived of a healthy capacity to enjoy and, since nature will still have its way, we end up alternating between rebellious enjoyment (“pleasure we steal from God”, but feel guilty about) and dutiful discipline (which we do without a lot of delight). But we’re rarely able to genuinely celebrate. We rarely find the genuine delight we are looking for in life and this pushes us into pseudo-celebration, namely, excess. Put simply, because we struggle give ourselves permission to enjoy, ironically we tend to pursue enjoyment too much and often not in the right ways. We confuse pleasure, delight, excess with ecstasy, and the obliteration of consciousness with heightened awareness. Because we cannot simply enjoy, we go to excess, burst our normal limits, and hope that obliterating our awareness will heighten it.

And yet, celebrate we must. We have an innate need to celebrate because certain moments and events of our lives (e.g., a birthday, a wedding, a graduation, a commitment, an achievement, or even a funeral) simply demand it. They demand to be surrounded with rituals which heighten and intensify their meaning and they demand that they be shared in a special, highlighted way with others. What we cease to celebrate we will soon cease to cherish. The same is true of some of our deeper loving, playful and creative moments. They too demand to be celebrated:

highlighted, widened and shared with others. We have an irrepressible need to celebrate, that’s good. Indeed the need for ecstasy is hardwired into our very DNA. But ecstasy is heightened awareness, not obliterated consciousness. Celebration is meant to intensify our awareness, not deaden it. The object of celebration is to highlight certain events and feelings so as to share them with others in an extraordinary way. But, given our misunderstandings about celebration, we mostly make pseudo-celebration, that is, we overdo things to a point where we take our own awareness and our awareness of the occasion out of the equation.

We have a lot to overcome in our struggle to come to genuine celebration. We still need to learn that heightened enjoyment is not found in excess, deeper community is not found in mindless intimacy, and heightened awareness is not found in a frenzied deadening of our consciousness. Until we learn that lesson we will still mostly trudge home hungover, more empty, more tired and more alone than before the party. A hangover is a sure sign that, somewhere back down the road, we missed a sign post. We struggle to know how to celebrate, but we must continue to try.

Cutting back on digital devices leads to ‘deep work’

There are some recent signs that the culture is coming around to something more sacramental in our increasingly digitized landscape. Cal Newport is an associate professor of computer science at Georgetown University in Washington but does not own a cellphone and has no social media accounts. His two most recent books are not theological in any sense, but they hint at a sacramental sensibility, and the church would do well to pay attention to what he’s saying.

Newport’s 2016 bestseller “Deep Work” makes a case for pursuing a “state of distraction-free concentration.” His argument goes that we are losing touch with “deep work” because our networked tools like email and social media encourage skimming across the surface of things, leading to shallow work habits that have little value. We read headlines without reading the articles and respond too quickly to things that require more thought.

What are the benefits of slowing down and doing deep work? Improved skill and the creation of new value that is hard to replicate. Newport cites the productive success of people like Woody Allen and “Harry Potter” author J.K. Rowling, who both practice forms of deep work by avoiding social media and using distraction-free tools like Allen’s German Olympia SM3 manual typewriter.

Newport’s argument is a version of the one made by the French philosopher Simone Weil, who said, “Attention, taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer. It presupposes faith and love.” When we devote our full and undivided attention to something, no matter what it is, we build a capacity within ourselves to experience something deeper. And when our capacity is directed toward God in prayer, we open ourselves up to perceiving God’s grace, the real deep work of the spiritual life.

Newport’s follow-up book, “Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World,” takes the concept a step further by suggesting that we need more than just “life hacks” and tips for becoming less ensnared in digital distraction. Rather, we need a “philosophy of media” that stems from our deeply held beliefs. More than a “digital Sabbath” where we spend a day or two divorced from our digital devices, digital minimalism goes deeper.

The moment we start rationalizing our behavior by admitting that we are, in fact, more distracted but it is nice to be in touch with far-flung family on Facebook, we have given in to a shallow view that our tools have costs and benefits, but the benefits outweigh the costs.

A more meaningful approach would be to confront the root sources of our unease. It is not the distraction that is most worrisome, it is our loss of self-control and autonomy, both of which are necessary for taming the passions and experiencing the interior freedom that our faith offers.

Read in tandem, Newport’s books offer an implicitly Catholic case for rethinking our relationship to technology. The author’s audience is clearly corporate types and harried professionals who are looking for more meaning and clarity of focus in their work, but the lessons are just as applicable to our spiritual lives. The challenge is controlling the passions, a problem that humans have had since the beginning. When someone like Newport says that we need to work backward from our deep values to our technology choices, the church should take notice.

It is far too common to adopt new tools uncritically and judge their utility based on whether they can supplement the church’s mission of evangelization. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as Bishop Robert E. Barron of Los Angeles and others have shown through their use of new media, but what is the church’s philosophy of media? How do we discern what we use and what we avoid when it comes to preserving the higher ideals that the church serves? We might start with the idea of a thoughtfully considered minimalism when it comes to the temptations of technology.

ROBINSON is director of communications and Catholic media studies at the University of Notre Dame McGrath Institute for Church Life.
The Catholic Commentator

COMING EVENTS
March 29, 2019

Passion of Christ – Sister Dulce Maria CSMPC will present a reflection on the Stations of the Cross, each station inspired by the Blessed Mother, Friday, April 5, 5 – 8 p.m., at the Cypress Springs Meredithian Prayer Center, 17560 George O’Neal Road, Baton Rouge. There will be a fish dinner from 5 – 6:45 p.m., and the program begins at 7 p.m. The event is $15, which includes the fish dinner. For tickets, visit passionofchrist19.eventbrite.com or call 225-752-8480.

St. James Prayer Breakfast – Cassandra Will, president of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, will speak at a prayer breakfast Saturday, April 6, 9 – 11 a.m., at the St. James Church Parish Hall, 6613 Hwy. 18, St. James. Tickets are $15 each and can be purchased by calling Cynthia Clifton at 225-892-0375.

Fourth Cup Presentation – Mike Fulmer will present “The Fourth Cup and Lamb of God” with Seder Meal Monday, April 8, at the Holy Rosary Church Parish Activity Center, 44450 Hwy. 429, St. Amant. There will be a pot luck from 5:30 – 6:30 p.m. and the presentation starts at 6:30 p.m. RSVP by calling Amy Sanders at 225-571-2680 or email amylsvanders@yahoo.com.

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren – The free 22nd annual Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Conference will be held Friday, April 12, 8:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m., at the Holiday Inn South, 9940 Airline Hwy., Baton Rouge. There will be a panel answering legal questions, health screenings from Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University in Baton Rouge. To register, call 225-810-3555 or fax to 225-216-2662.

Magnificat Breakfast – Karen Sheehy, regional specialist for Women in the New Evangelization, will speak at a Magnificat prayer breakfast Saturday, April 13, 9 a.m. – noon, at the Oak Lodge Reception Center, 2834 S. Sherwood Forest Blvd., Baton Rouge. Tickets are $22 each and will be sold through Wednesday, April 10. To purchase tickets, send a check made to BR Magnificat indicating the number of attendees to Kathy Simonex, 9650 Victory Lane, Denham Springs or register online at bit.ly/MagBRApril2019.

Day of Reflection – Becky Eldredge will present a day of reflection, “Taking Stock: Living Your Greater Yes,” at Rosaryville Spirit Life Center, 39003 Rosaryville Road, Ponchatoula on Saturday, April 13, beginning at 9 a.m. and concluding with Mass at 4 p.m., for more information, visit catholiccathereventcenter.org.

Last Supper Dramatization – Our Lady of Pompeii Church, 14450 Hwy. 442, Tickfaw, will present a dramatization of Leonardo Da Vinci’s painting “The Last Supper” on Palm Sunday, April 14, 7 p.m. For more information, call the church office at 985-345-8957.

Discaled Carmelites – The Secular Order of Discaled Carmelites will meet Sunday, April 14, 1:30 p.m., at the Our Lady of Mercy Parish Activity Center in the St. Gabriel Room, 444 Marquette Ave., Baton Rouge. For details, call Ethlyn White at 225-803-3391 or email robertwhite456@att.net.

Pastalaya Dinner Benefit – Knights of Columbus Council #2807 of St. Alphonsus Church in Greenwell Springs will host a pastalaya dinner with proceeds going to help Vince Dileo Jr. with his costs of fighting cancer, Saturday, April 27, 11 a.m. – till, at Oak Point Shopping Center, 14485 Greenwell Springs Road, Greenwell Springs. Dinners are $8. For more information, call 225-261-1222.

Prospopon Icon Workshop – A Prosopon icon workshop will be held Monday, May 20 – Saturday, May 25, at St. Joseph Abbey 75376 River Road, St. Benedict. The workshop will include daily prayer with the monks at St. Joseph Abbey. Deadline to register is Tuesday, April 9. For more information, email christendaunis@yahoo.com or call 225-252-3090.
Men encouraged to ‘Get up and follow Jesus’

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Getting up and leaving one’s comfort zone to follow Jesus is perhaps one of the most difficult challenges a person can face.

But doing so helps one become the man God called him to be.

That was Bishop Michael G. Duca’s message during his homily at the 3rd annual “A Call to Battle” Catholic Men’s Conference presented by the Men of the Immaculata on March 9 at St. George Church in Baton Rouge.

“I can’t tell you how important it is in the spiritual life to just get up,” he said, following up on the Gospel reading when Levi got up to follow Jesus. “The hardest thing to do is to get up because it means leaving the comfortable, leaving the familiar. It means taking on the yoke of responsibility.”

Bishop Duca admitted getting up and saying you’re sorry is never easy, and but said those who trust in the Lord and take that first step find “grace upon grace, answers that we never thought were possible.”

Bishop Duca found it so captivating he stayed all night reading about the Virgin Mary.

“Look at your life; what are the things you run to?” he said. “What are the things you look forward to? Does it have to with prayer or service to others?”

“We find hope, we find the spiritual life to just get up,” he said, following up on the Gospel reading when Levi got up to follow Jesus. “The hardest thing to do is to get up because it means leaving the comfortable, leaving the familiar. It means taking on the yoke of responsibility.”

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“Look at your life; what are the things you run to?” he said. “What are the things you look forward to? Does it have to with prayer or service to others?”

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“Working too much,” addiction to pornography, whatever it is, you will waste so much time, energy and money in your quest for happiness and you’ll never find it until you humbly surrender to the truth,” Father Calloway said.

He said he went through a radical conversion and “fell madly in love with Jesus.” He cut his hair, got a job and went into what he called “serious battle mode” trying to get his manhood back. He signed up for RCIA classes and at one point even admitted he had to “duke it out with the devil,” before eventually becoming an ordained priest.

Father Johnson admitted growing up he did not always love Jesus because he didn’t know Jesus. He said he began to drift even further away from God through his teen years but also began to experience an ache in his heart.

Father Johnson said his conversion came during a spiritual retreat in Alexandria when he came face to face with Christ and dropped to his knees to pray, and also began to cry.

He asked God what was his will.

“What God looked at me, all my brokenness and he saved me,” Father Johnson said. “He had me; I was done.”

Bishop Duca ended the conference by asking the men to go to confession, take the time during Lent to read one of the Gospels from beginning to end, and pray the prayer of St. Patrick, which he prayed as the final blessing of the day.

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The Catholic Commentator  March 29, 2019

St. Alphonsus.
Norman grew up in the Lutheran Church in St. Louis, Missouri and attended the Lutheran School until he was in the eighth grade. Judy grew up in Cape Girardeau, Missouri.

The couple met at Southeast Missouri State in Cape Girardeau. After they married, they lived in San Diego for 33 years.

While Judy was growing up, she attended a neighborhood Baptist Church, but stopped attending as she got older. It wasn't until after she and Norman married that Judy attended church again. Their son, Hunter, was baptized in the Lutheran Church.

The Weisses left the Lutheran Church for a while and attended a congregational church before returning.

But even then, seeds were planted in the Weiss’ minds about joining the Catholic Church.

“My story started about 15 years ago,” said Judy. “I had questions that kept coming up when we’d go to church and take communion. It always kind of bothered me that it (Lutheran) communion was just ‘a remembrance.’”

While Norman was at work one day, Judy flipped through the channels and came across an episode of “The Journey Home” on EWTN. She then watched the program regularly. She bought the Catechism of the Catholic Church and Catholic Bible and also enjoyed reading “The Four Witnesses” by Rod Bennett.

Judy shared with Norman her thoughts about the “The Journey Home,” which he sometimes watched, and about what she was learning in her readings. But they did not explicitly talk about joining the Catholic faith.

After Hunter went off to college and later married, the Weisses wanted to live near them, so they moved to Baton Rouge, the home of Hunter’s wife, Angel, who is expecting the couple’s first child on April 8. The Weisses reasoned, “It’s warm and it has palm trees.”

They said Angel’s parents, Thomas and Lonnie Daggett, who are active members of Our Lady of Mercy Church in Baton Rouge, have been instrumental in their journey. Thomas Daggett is an RCIA instructor at Our Lady of Mercy. One of the Weiss’ favorite things is eating breakfast Saturday mornings at Frank’s Restaurant with the Daggetts and other Catholic couples.

But the spiritual nourishment of Jesus in the Eucharist is what the Weiss’ look forward to most about joining the church.

“Imagine looking forward to receiving that first Communion because that’s the reason I wanted to come into the Catholic Church in the first place,” said Judy.

Norman, who already enjoys his “God and Coffee” time in the mornings going through daily prayers, Bible versus of the day, praying the rosary etc., said, “I also look forward to getting deeper into studying the tradition something I’ve never done before.”

Belonging to a large group of Catholics worshipping God through the same Mass liturgy also appeals to the Weisses.

“When you’re in Mass you know Catholics around the world are doing the same Mass. That’s the one church I’ve always felt that God wanted us to be,” said Judy.

RCIA ▼

From page 1

GOSPEL ▼

From page 2

Two Ways You Can Help the Needy This Lenten Season!

We never know who will come through the doors of our St. Vincent de Paul Community Pharmacy. Last year, we filled over $1.5 million worth of life-sustaining prescriptions. The people we serve are much more than faceless numbers. They are people just like you and me, with one exception: They are sick and can’t afford their life-sustaining medications. We see the fear, the worried expressions and, quite often, the shame at having to ask for help. The St. Vincent de Paul Community Pharmacy isn’t about numbers; it’s about people helping people, and you don’t have to be a doctor or pharmacist to help fill a prescription. For so many, our pharmacy is the answer to their prayers.

Christ asks us to share His love within our communities and throughout the entire world. Our pharmacy is working hard to follow this call by providing a helping hand of mercy to people in desperate need of their prescription medications. Last year, our pharmacy filled thousands of prescriptions for people who desperately needed a helping hand – people who were suffering from heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and other life-threatening illnesses.

The Fill a Prescription for the Needy Campaign is a response to this community need. WBRZ-Channel 2, Pat Shingleton, and the Baton Rouge Clinic have come together to ask you to fill a prescription for the needy. You can save someone’s life by making a gift in the enclosed envelope insert or by making a gift online at svdpbr.org.

Learn more about how you can save a life today in the enclosed envelope insert in this issue. Give online at Svdpbr.org.

Build A Basket For Needy Kids

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

Join us in providing Easter baskets for thousands of needy children. You can actually build a basket yourself or make a contribution to the effort online at www.svdpbr.org, and we will build it for you and give it to a needy or homeless child. This is a great project for church groups, schools and clubs. For more information, call us at (225) 383-7837 or visit us at svdpbr.org. Bring Christ into the lives of those in need.