The gifts of the Holy Spirit

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Scriptures record a spectacular display of the Holy Spirit rushing upon the apostles as tongues of fire and sending them on a mission to spread the Gospel message on that first Pentecost.

Since that birth of the church, some are still confused about who the Holy Spirit is or unaware he is actively working through the sacraments of the church and its teachings. As Pope Francis said to the crowds gathered in St. Peter’s Square on Pentecost Sunday in 2014, “Church is one that surprises us and stirs things up.”

Victoria Harris said myths about the Holy Spirit and his gifts prevent Catholics from utilizing them for God’s glory and building up the church.

She spoke about her journey with the Holy Spirit at the Women in Spirit meeting May 23 at St. Joseph Cathedral in Baton Rouge.

Harris grew up as a parishioner of Sacred Heart Church in Baton Rouge and attended Sacred Heart School. She graduated in 2006 from St. Joseph’s Academy in Baton Rouge. She moved to Nashville and began a career in Christian music. She has performed at Christian musical festivals, appeared at March for Life events with Cardinal Timothy Dolan and performed music at retreats led by internationally known speakers.

She moved to Dallas and developed...
Saints of summer

With a gamut of ways to spend summer leisure hours, as you pack the sunscreen and beach towel, load your camping gear, check your flight reservations or set your GPS, take “the saints of summer” with you.

Want to be sure you have a smooth trip to your getaway? Call on St. Christopher, the patron saint of travel.

If the airline loses your luggage, pray to St. Anthony.

Taking an ocean cruise? A prayer to St. Nicholas, the patron saint of sailors and ships, may help keep the waters calm.

If you’re prone to seasickness, carsickness or will be trying new foods, St. Erasmus (Elmo), who suffered cruel torture involving his intestines, may help settle your stomach.

Those boarding a plane can pray for the pilot and for friendly skies to smooth their journey. Ask St. John of Cupertino, who was often seen levitating.

With the upcoming Fourth of July celebrations and trips to amusement parks with festive displays, have a blast with St. Barbara, the patron saint of fire, fireworks and artillerymen.

If you are heading to the woods or national parks, St. John Gualbert is your “go to guy” as he is the patron saint of forests, parks and park rangers.

If you will be walking the trails or pitching camp, ask St. George for help. Although known for battling a dragon, he is also the patron saint of camping and hiking. Other good saints are still around today.

If you have an outdoor activity planned, St. Rita of Cascia is also a good one to call on as she is the patron saint of lawyers, attorneys and saddlers. She is also the patron saint of people with stomach troubles.

If you are hiking or pitching camp, ask St. George for help. If you have an outdoor activity planned, St. Rita of Cascia is also a good one to call on as she is the patron saint of lawyers, attorneys and saddlers. She is also the patron saint of people with stomach troubles.

The power of the Holy Spirit

“And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them” (Acts 2: 2-3). So much for a gentle breeze.

The Holy Spirit pierced the epicenter of the holy city, with divine power. This same person hovered over the waters and filled the nostrils of Adam. This same person’s voice is one heard through patriarchs, prophets and St. John the Baptist, each anointed and chosen. This is the same person from whom the Incarnation, baptism, signs, miracles, teachings and endurance in passion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus made manifest. The Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, came loudly and rested upon the earth” (Ps 104) and continues to do the same today.

Fully revealed

“When the day of Pentecost came, the Christ’s Passover is fulfilled in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, manifested, given and communicated as a divine person: of his fullness, Christ, the Lord, pours out the Spirit in abundance. On that day, the Holy Trinity is fully revealed (Catechism of the Catholic Church #731-732).

The Holy Spirit united the apostles as one, fortifying each with wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, fortitude, piety and fear of the Lord. The same reality occurs as we receive the Holy Spirit in baptism and confirmation, where grace “is made perfect.” This is why the sacrament of confirmation is vital. We receive perfection of grace. If you by chance have yet to receive this holy sacrament, I urge you to begin the journey today. If you know someone who is Catholic and has yet to receive this holy sacrament, encourage him or her to begin the journey. Why? Simply stated, because it is necessary.

The sacrament of confirmation is like filling a car with gasoline. Without gas, one can still move the car, albeit difficult, especially when travelling uphill. Just as a car engine converts gas into motion, we are filled by the grace of the sacrament of confirmation for supernatural life (sanctifying grace) and supernatural gift (actual grace) to live out our calling as missionary disciples. “For ‘by the sacrament of confirmation, (the baptized) are more perfectly bound to the church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed” (CCC #1285).

Our first prayer

Our first prayer is our present prayer and see Gospel page 8.
‘Sweet Dreams’ becomes a reality

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

St. Vincent de Paul Society blessed the present and offered a view into the future during a dual ceremony May 22 at its mid-city Baton Rouge campus.

Bishop Michael G. Duca joined community and civic leaders as well as Bishop Emeritus Robert W. Muench to cut the ribbon on the recently completed Bishop Ott Sweet Dreams Shelter expansion, which provides an additional 36 beds to homeless women with children, single women and for the first time homeless families. Bishop Duca began the ceremony by blessing the building, before helping St. Vincent de Paul executive director Michael Acaldo and other dignitaries cut the ribbon.

Following the ribbon-cutting, those same officials, including Bishop Duca and Bishop Emeritus Muench, broke ground on the recently completed Bishop Ott Sweet Dreams Shelter expansion, which provides an additional 36 beds to homeless women with children, single women and for the first time homeless families. Bishop Duca began the ceremony by blessing the building, before helping St. Vincent de Paul executive director Michael Acaldo and other dignitaries cut the ribbon.

“We recognized that we wanted to do more for families, and we determined that we had a good program with the current (Bishop Ott) shelter,” Acaldo said, adding that a decision was made to expand the shelter into what was the parking lot.

The original goal was set at $750,000 but because of rising construction costs, especially during the days following the flood of 2016, the final cost, with furnishings, topped $1.4 million. St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge played a significant role in the fundraising effort with a $100,000 donation.

Pastor Father Randy Cuevas said St. Aloysius has a tradition that when launching a capital campaign, a percentage is set aside for a socially responsible causes. In the past, funds from St. Aloysius capital campaigns have funded a Habitat for Humanity house and a house managed by Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge that provides temporary housing for incoming refugee families.

In 2016, St. Aloysius launched a $12 million campaign, of which $100,000 was earmarked for the Sweet Dreams Shelter.

“The parish has always believed that charity begins at home,” Father Cuevas said. “And we want to keep our parishioners aware that missionary/evangelization needs and outreach opportunities exist in our own backyard.”

SEE DREAMS PAGE 7
Diocese of Baton Rouge Seminary Scholarship Funds

What is a Seminary Scholarship fund?
A seminary scholarship fund is an invested sum of money, the interest of which is used in perpetuity to help fund the education of men studying for the priesthood.

How does someone establish a fund?
It is simple. A fund may be established and named for anyone you choose – friend, family, bishop, priest, religious, etc. Anyone can name or establish a fund.

Who do I contact to establish or contribute to a fund?
To create a fund or to make a contribution to an existing fund, please send it to the Vocations and Seminarians Department, P. O. Box 2028, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-2028. For information, call 225-336-8778.

This is only a partial list of all Seminary Scholarship Funds.
Visit our website at www.diobr.org//vocations for a complete list of Seminary Scholarship Funds.

Scholarship Fund Contributions January thru April

Archbishop Antoine Blanc
In Memory of: Emerson LeBlanc Sr.
By: M/M Joseph Daigle
$10.00
In Memory of: James Horace Ransome Jr.
By: Father Louis Savoure KC Council #8878
$173.00 $21,973.31

Louis and Nita Bonfanti
By: Louis/Lisa Bonfanti $200.00 $2,765.00
In Memory of: Emerson LeBlanc Sr.
By: Father Louis Savoure KC Council #8878

Father Michael "Mike" John Collins
By: Court Regina Coeli #2063 CDA
$100.00
In Memory of: Lillie Territo and Anne Morris
By: Court Regina Coeli #2063/CDA
$50.00 $11,254.35

Knights of Peter Claver, Ladies of Grace Division
Fr. David A. Vavasseur and Fr. Henry C. Vavasseur
In Memory of: Fr. Henry C Vavasseur and Rose Brignac
By: Mrs. Rita B. Valentine
$100.00 $23,388.17

Father Than Vu
In Memory of: Father Vu
By: Anna/Wilfred Barry
$2,500.00 $10,590.50

Father Clarence Waguespack Jr.
By: Claire W. Amedee $50.00
By: Karl/Elizabeth Becnel
$250.00 $19,846.00

George R. Reymond .............................................. $20,000.00
Monsignor Leonard Robin ..................................... $21,774.16
Father James Rodriguez ........................................ $20,605.00
Alphonse and Edna B. Rodriguez ......................... $20,000.00
Michael Romano ................................................. $13,310.27
William and Camilla Roszko ................................ $20,000.00
Russo Family ..................................................... $2,000.00
Mr. & Mrs. Joseph A. Sarradet, Sr. .................. $60,000.00
Father Louis Savoure .......................................... $20,000.00
Deceased Members of Ciro Spedale Family .......... $20,000.00

Father John Spriggs .............................................. $20,000.00
The Parishioners of St. Pius X .................. $20,000.00
Stine Family ...................................................... $6,908.14
Bishop Joseph V. Sullivan .................................. $11,201.92
Father Adalbert Svreck ........................................ $20,000.00
Bishop Robert E. Tracy ...................................... $20,000.00
Vavasseur Family .............................................. $20,000.00
Father Than Vu .................................................. $8,090.50
Albert J. Waguespack ......................................... $16,399.41
Deacon Francis A. Waguespack Jr. ...................... $5,705.00
Monsignor John A. Weber ................................. $61,021.22
Mr. & Mrs. Weeks, Sr. and Dr. & Mrs. Wall, Jr. .......... $20,000.00

Father Augustine M. Wyshoff .................. $20,000.00
Kay M. Acosta and Ann Marie .............. $4,138.62
Father Thomas J. Allain ......................... $23,637.39
Father J. D. Amedee .......................................... $20,000.00
Mr. & Mrs. Sidney V. Arbour, Sr. .............. $20,000.00
Archdiocese of New Orleans ..................... $60,000.00
Mr. & Mrs. J. Andrew Bahlinger, Jr. ............ $20,000.00

Father John M. Barbe .................................... $20,000.00
Father Victor Baron ......................................... $20,000.00
Monsignor D. J. Becnel .................................. $20,000.00
Cecelia "Cess" Bergeron ..................... $20,000.00
Father Jules Berthault ....................... $20,370.00
Archbishop Antoine Blanc .................. $21,790.31
Brian Blanchard ......................................... $27,280.00
Monsignor Dominic Blasco .................. $20,000.00

Additional Scholarship Funds

The Catholic Commentator National | International June 7, 2019

Diocesan statement on Father Ohankwere

The Diocese of Baton Rouge issued a statement May 30 on the arrest of Father Desmond Ohankwere MSP, a former pastor at St. Catherine of Sienna Church in Donaldsonville.

Father Ohankwere was pastor in the parish from October 2014, to July 31, 2018.

The diocese was made aware of some questionable expenditures at the parish and, along with its insurance company, began an investigation in February of this year. The insurance company was notified because losses from theft are covered by the diocese’s policy.

Ascension Parish civil authorities were also notified and joined the investigation. Father Ohankwere was indicted in May by an Ascension Parish Grand Jury and was arrested May 29 in Texas.

The total amount of questionable expenditures has not yet been determined because a forensic review of the parish’s books is ongoing. The diocese continues to cooperate with Ascension Parish authorities in the investigation.

Father Ohankwere is a member of the Missionary Society of St. Paul. At the time of his arrest he was pastor at St. Gregory the Great parish in Houston. He was ordained for his missionary society on July 1, 1991.
Joseph Homes looking to connect with employers

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

From construction to customer service, employers in need of employees gathered recently at the Catholic Life Center in Baton Rouge to discuss challenges and possibilities for formerly incarcerated men looking for jobs. The luncheon, sponsored by Joseph Homes of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, was the first step in opening the door for communicating needs on both sides of the table.

Joseph Homes provides housing for homeless ex-offenders. One of the requirements for residing in the temporary affordable housing is employment. “It’s very difficult looking for a job with a criminal record, and the guys struggle with that, whether it’s an application online or a paper application,” said Linda Fjeldsjo, coordinator of Joseph Homes.

She also noted that each application is different regarding criminal history with some asking, “Have you ever been convicted of a felony?” or “Have you been convicted of a felony in the past seven years?” “So how do you answer that you were convicted 20 years ago? You don’t want to lie on the application,” noted Fjeldsjo. “At one time it was rare for a company to do a background check. Now it’s rare for somebody not to do a background check.”

LaToya Pierson, recruiting manager for the city of Baton Rouge, said those who apply for a job with the city are able to go through the interview process before a criminal background check is conducted. “This gives them a chance to go to an interview and present themselves, talk about their skills before they get to the background check,” Pierson said. “This gives them an opportunity to sell themselves first. And if something comes back on the background check it does not automatically bar them from getting the job.”

The city of Baton Rouge is an employer of second chances,” said Brian Bernard, Director of Human Resources for the city. “The mayor (Sharon Weston Broome) pushes that very hard. We are one of the places that ban the box. We don’t ask questions about criminal background throughout the application process, when someone has been chosen for the job then they get a background check.”

According to Bernard, “the economy is the best it’s been in years” and those who want to work are working, so the city has had to search non-traditional places for employees including re-entry programs focused on those released from prison. He also added that seasonal work is on-going throughout the city and that provides another employment opportunity.

“The city of Baton Rouge is an employer of second chances,” said Bishop Duca. Bishop Duca emphasized it will take sacrifice and obedience to him and his successors.

“During the litany of supplication, the elect prostrated themselves before the altar. After Bishop Duca laid hands on the elect and prayed the prayer of ordination to the priesthood, Father Grimes was vested with the stole and chasuble with assistance from Father Matthew Graham and Father Paul Counce. Father Vu was vested with assistance from his brother, Father Joseph Vu, and Father An Vu.

With the oil of chrism, Bishop Duca anointed the hands of the kneeling Father Vu and Father Grimes as he prayed, “The Lord Jesus Christ, whom the Father anointed with the Holy Spirit and power, guard and preserve you, that you may sanctify the Christian people and offer sacrifice to God.”

The gifts of bread and wine were then brought forward to the altar table for the celebration of the Eucharist. The Mass concluded with the blessing of the newly ordained, the elect prostrated themselves before the altar during the Litany of Saints. Photos by Richard Meek

Bishop Duca, who in turn, gave it to the two new priests with the instructions to celebrate the Eucharist and conform their lives to Christ.

Following Bishop Duca’s kiss of peace to the newly ordained, the priests came forward and gave Father Vu and Father Grimes a fraternal kiss as a sign of their being joined to the order of priests.

Following the welcome, the newly ordained joined at the altar table for the celebration of the Eucharist.

The Mass concluded with congratulations from Bishop Duca to the diocese’s newest priests and words of thanks to their families and all who supported the two on their journey to ordination.

During the concluding prayer, Bishop Duca extend- ed his hands over the newly ordained. Following the final blessing, bells pealed and the hymn “Oh God Beyond All Praising” reverberated in the cathedral as family and friends streamed outside to embrace and be blessed by Father Vu and Father Grimes.
Meaning of ‘153 fish’ / Missing Mass while traveling

Q Recently the Gospel read at Sunday Mass was from the 21st chapter of St. John, where Jesus appears to the apostles after his resurrection and tells them to lower their nets into the sea and they catch 153 fish. Our visiting priest said in his homily that the number 153 related to the number of regional territories in that era. But then I read Bishop Robert Barron’s explanation that 153 was the number of species of fish known at the time. I’m confused. Which is it? And does it matter? Help! (Conyers, Georgia)

A I am tempted to side with the second part of your question – “Does it matter?” I confess that it’s never been an issue that has kept me awake at night. But on the other hand, if St. John chose to use this precise number in his inspired writing, some allegorical significance may well have been intended.

Two theories proposed by scriptural scholars over the years are the ones you mentioned that “153” stands for the species of fish in the Sea of Galilee at the time or that the number indicates the number of regional territories in that era. St. Jerome, who died around 420, first mentioned that “153” stands for the species of fish known at the time. St. John’s mention of 153 was the number of fish in the Sea of Galilee at the time it was mentioned. Scholars over the years are the ones you mentioned that the number indicates the number of regional territories in that era.

Either way, though, I think the general meaning is the same: that the mission and message of Jesus, and the salvation he was offering, were not just for the Jews of his day but for all people of every generation.

Q Now is the time of year when I book a summer tour for my family. I always try for a place where I know there will be an accessible Saturday evening or Sunday Mass; although my intentions are good, sometimes I am not successful. We then go to Mass as soon as we can on the trip, or right away when we arrive home. Is it OK to go to Mass during the week to make up for an unintentional miss on Sunday? (Johnstown, Pennsylvania)

A If this happens only rarely, I think you are fine, and I admire that you want to “catch up” by attending Mass later. But what I would do if you foresee that Sunday Mass will not be possible is to talk to a priest ahead of time and get a dispensation.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church notes that “the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor” (No. 2183). Relaxation and recreation are legitimate needs, but the Eucharist happens to be the one specific way that Jesus asked us to keep his memory alive, so I wouldn’t use this permission too often.

When I was in the seminary, one of the world’s pre-eminent moral theologians was a Redemptorist priest named Father Francis Connell. He had been dean of theology at The Catholic University of America and served as a “peritus” (expert) at the Second Vatican Council.

In 1965, in a book called “More Answers to Today’s Moral Problems,” Father Connell responded to the same question you ask. His answer was that, in the circumstances you indicate, someone would be justified in missing Mass, perhaps once or twice a year. (But he also said, “Certainly a person would not be excused from attending Mass merely because the journey to church would take an hour by car.”)

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.

Sister Carolyn Brady dies

Sister Carolyn Brady CSJ (formerly Sister Irene Marie), a Sister of St. Joseph for 71 years, passed away at the Sisters of St. Joseph Convent in Baton Rouge on Tuesday, May 21 at the age of 87.

Sister Carolyn was born in Baton Rouge, the only child of the late Irene Anclin and Buel J. Brady. She is survived by cousins Butch (Carolyn) Millet, Carolyn Rowland Richert (Jimmy), Robert Rowland, James Rowland (Carol), Thomas Rowland and Jane W. Randolph.

Sister Carolyn was predeceased by uncles and cousins including her aunts, Ethel Anclin Gaudin (Clarence), Letitia and Aimee Brady, Beatrice Anclin Walsh (Lawrence) and cousin Aida Millet Rowland (Robert).

Sister Carolyn graduated from St. Joseph’s Academy in Baton Rouge and entered the Sisters of St. Joseph in New Orleans in 1948, professing first vows in 1950 and perpetual vows in 1953. Her preparation for teaching and school administration included a B.S. in secondary education with a minor in math from Loyola University in New Orleans and an M.S. in Mathematics from Notre Dame University.

Sister Carolyn began teaching in New Orleans at St. Ann School in 1950 and St Rose School in 1952. She then taught two years at St. Joseph Academy in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi and 10 years at St. Joseph’s Academy in Baton Rouge. She served as principal in New Orleans at Our Lady of the Rosary parochial school from 1965 to 1971. She returned to St. Joseph’s Academy and served in multiple roles as math teacher, assistant principal, disciplinarian and finance director from 1971 to 1985.

From 1985 to 1993 she was provincial treasurer for the southern region of the congregation and continued working in administration for St. Joseph’s Academy. In 1993-94 she was congregational treasurer and the following two years worked in development for St. Alphonsus School in Gretna. From 1996 to 2005 she served as development director for the southern region of the congregation.

She continued to assist with development for the newly established Congregation of St. Joseph and to serve on the People Program Board in New Orleans. She served on the board of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Baton Rouge, for which she received the Top Hat Award in 2014 for outstanding commitment and service. She was on the SJA Foundation Board at St. Joseph’s Academy until her retirement in 2017.

A funeral Mass was celebrated May 25 at Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Baton Rouge. Burial was in Roselawn Cemetery. Memorial donations may be made to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul at P.O. Box 127, Baton Rouge, LA 70821 or to the SJA Foundation at 3015 Broussard St., Baton Rouge, LA 70808.
SPIRIT ▼

From page 1

Arise Ministry at Mary Immaculate Parish in Farmers Branch, Texas with her pastor, Father Michael D. Forge, whom Bishop Michael G. Duca vested when he was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Dallas.

Father Forge encouraged Harris, who studied the gifts and role of the Holy Spirit with scholars, clergy and lay people at Dunwoody Seminary in Yonkers, New York, to research the Catholic Church’s response to teachings of the New Apostolic Reformation movement within the Pentecostal movement.

She also discovered their teachings focus on the gifts as an end in themselves rather than a means of redemption and building up of the body of Christ as taught by the Catholic Church and its Charismatic Renewal ministries.

Before looking at gifts of the Holy Spirit, people must understand who he is, Harris said.

The Holy Spirit is not a nebulous spirit, but God’s active presence in the world, she emphasized.

Harris acknowledged miracles happen, such as cures, freedom and deliverance, at Bethel.

She also discovered their teachings happen, such as cures, freedom and deliverance, at Bethel.

She also discovered their teachings focus on the gifts as an end in themselves rather than a means of redemption and building up of the body of Christ as taught by the Catholic Church and its Charismatic Renewal ministries.

Before looking at gifts of the Holy Spirit, people must understand who he is, Harris said.

The Holy Spirit is not a nebulous spirit, but God’s active presence in the world, she emphasized. Jesus revealed to the disciples at the Last Supper who the Holy Spirit is when he said the father will send them another advocate, “the Spirit of truth,” who will be with them always.

Jesus said, “The advocate, the Holy Spirit that the father will send in my name — he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you” (Jn 14:26).

But those gifts did not end with the disciples and the early church, Harris said.

“We celebrate the mysteries and the lives of the saints. But the church believes that all baptized people have received the fullness of the Holy Spirit and thus the potential to yield his power through charisms,” Harris said.

She pointed out that Lumen Gentium states, “It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries of the church that the Holy Spirit sanctified and leads the people of God and enriches it with virtues, but allotting his gifts to everyone according as he wills (1 Cor 12:11).”

Nor are those gifts for “the most holy among us,” because the gifts are ultimately from God, Harris said.

“One’s ability to yield to God’s spirit to prophesy or pray for the healing, for example, is not an indication of the personal holiness of that individual. It is tempting to give glory to an individual who has laid hands on another and brought healing, but all glory should really be going to God.”

This demonstrates that no one “owns” their gifts, but it is through grace they are able to do so, according to Harris.

Another Holy Spirit myth is that God gives people specific gifts and they can only operate in those.

“When we read the Scriptures, we see the apostles and disciples operating in many gifts and charisms, typically the gifts that is most needed to call to conversion the individual in front of them,” said Harris. “We don’t receive gifts. We receive the giver of the gifts, the Holy Spirit himself. And just as a pipe allows water to flow through it, so we cooperate with the Spirit to allow him to manifest his presence through us. However he manifests we call a charism, but it is the same Spirit.”

Harris said it is not prideful to ask God to be able to yield to the Holy Spirit and move in the charisms, because the church needs the laity to be docile to God’s Holy Spirit, according to Harris.

There should also be a proper understanding about the manifestation of the gifts, Harris said.

“Tongues doesn’t always need to be translated,” Harris said. “There are two forms: a private (between a person and God only) and a public tongue. The difference between the two is the public is translated.”

People may also misunderstand the gifts of healing to mean the cure or absence of some malady.

Harris noted Pope Benedict XVI was prefect (as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith when it published “Instructions on Prayer for Healing” in 2000.

“In the church identifies that in the Catholic world we have three levels and three modes of healing – physical, emotional and spiritual – and that when Christ healed people he healed them with their eternal destiny in mind. When the church approached healing it approaches with that spiritual healing – that internal healing – that is highest, first and prominent,” said Harris.

“Earthly death is part of the journey to heaven.”

DREAMS ▼

From page 3

“(The shelter) is very dear to the heart of our parishioners,” he added. “We’ve already made that statement. We are the only parish that has invested $7 million in a child care center for our own children. So it would only make sense that we would provide funds for a shelter that is for the most vulnerable children in our area.”

“It’s a first time experience for me as a pastor and one more thing that tells you how unique this parish is.”

Acaldo said without the donation from St. Aloysius the “project does not happen. We are extremely grateful to them and I think their donation inspired other people to give.”

Another $43,000 was donated from the estate of Baton Rouge resident Clifton LeBlanc. In his will, LeBlanc left money to the poor among the diocese, and he wanted it to be an endowment. “What’s going to be nice is that money is being provided to us and we can’t think of anyone more poor than homeless families and mothers with children,” Acaldo said.

According to relatives, LeBlanc was a lifelong Catholic and a parishioner at St. Gerard Church in Baton Rouge who believed the diocese to be the hub of Catholic outreach in the community. Through the years, LeBlanc was faithful in his giving and was involved in activities at Redemptorist High School in Baton Rouge.

Acaldo said the original Sweet Dreams shelter had 36 beds and eight cribs, so the expansion is doubling the number of beds and cribs. The shelter is built in a hotel style, with separate rooms and private bathrooms. Because of that configuration, homeless families will be able to stay together for the first time.

“We realized that we needed to fill that gap,” Acaldo said.

The day shelter will provide a place for individuals with toddlers and young children to go during the day. Daily, St. Vincent sends a bus to pick up homeless women staying at the St. Agnes shelter in Baton Rouge to bring them back to the day shelter.

Along with serving breakfast and lunch, the existing day shelter provides case management services, job counseling, life skills training and whatever else is necessary to help homeless men and women obtain employment and secure permanent housing.

During times of severe weather conditions, such as hurricanes or freezing temperatures, 36 cots will be set up in the day shelter for temporary housing.

Acaldo said the 36,000-square foot day shelter should be completed by January and that donations are being sought to finance the $196,000 still needed.

For more information or to donate go to swvhbr.org.
The Trinitarian prayer, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” the Trinitarian formula is the lived reality of grace today. It is a prayer to honor, adore, petition, surrender, trust, protect, witness, love, forgive, embrace, begin, endure and end. We see parents teaching the Sign of the Cross to their babies during Mass, as well as people in public spaces crossing themselves. It has meaning. It carries inspiration. It is evangelization, giving witness of faith. It is our final prayer in heaven as we behold the fullness of God for eternity.

This prayer acknowledges father, son and Holy Spirit “as it was in the beginning,” to the present moment “is now,” and our eternal home “ever shall be world without end.” This is our deepest life-giving intimacy with God the father, who is love; God the son, Jesus who shows us love; and God the Holy Spirit, who moves us to love. “Glory be to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end. Amen.”

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

World Refugee Day expanding

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

World Refugee Day in Baton Rouge is expanding as organizers attempt to include the community in appreciating the richness refugees bring to the city, said Jean Dresley, Director of Refugee Settlement for Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Rather than the traditional one-day event, as it has been for years, the annual celebration will kick off June 14 with the showing of the documentary “This is Home: A Refugee Story” at 6:30 p.m. at the theatre at the Bishop Robert E. Tracy Center.

Following the showing of the film a panel discussion will be held, and will include a refugee, a representative from CCBDR discussing resettlement and an attorney addressing legal implications of being a refugee.

Admission is $5 to view the documentary, which chronicles the lives of four Syrian families who resettled in Baltimore.

“It’s a timely movie and talks about what (the families) go through during the first 90 days when they are trying to find their feet and all of the struggles they go through,” Dresley said.

Bishop Michael G. Duca is scheduled to bless a much larger celebration June 23 from 3:30-7:30 p.m. at the Goodwood Library in Baton Rouge. That event will include speakers, events, activities for children, an outdoor band as well as indoor entertainment, vendors selling their specialty items and food featuring dishes from around the world.

Also included will be local agencies distributing information about the services they offer.

“We want to make it a festive event as it has been for years, the annual celebration will kick off June 14 with the showing of the documentary “This is Home: A Refugee Story” at 6:30 p.m. at the theatre at the Bishop Robert E. Tracy Center.

Dresley said the event is open to the public and there is no charge for admission. She added that volunteers and sponsorships are being sought.

“Really want to attract the public, we want them to know who are the refugees, what they are doing in our communities, the strength they have.”

Dresley called refugee resettlement the “issue of our time,” and admitted it can spark fear.

“A lot of people are afraid, but we are hoping an event like this will help people see there is nothing to be afraid of, that (refugees) are amazing people who are contributing to our community and add to the richness and diversity of our community.”

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St. Gabriel launches 250th anniversary celebration

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Perched atop a meandering crescent of the Mississippi River sits St. Gabriel Church in St. Gabriel, the river is a welcome mat to one of the oldest and historic churches in the state.

The community was founded in 1768 and by 1771 the original church was completed, a structure still standing although the invading river has forced relocation of the building on several occasions.

Current parishioners, many of whom are descendants of original settlers who were exiled from Nova Scotia, filled the church on May 14 as Bishop Michael G. Duca celebrated Mass, kicking off the parish’s 250th anniversary celebration, which will conclude with a grander event Feb. 2, 2020.

Bishop Duca began his homily addressing the Scripture readings, calling Jesus the ark of salvation that “renews us. He is the covenant of love.”

“Some 250 years ago, (Acadians) brought that ark of salvation to this place, a place people could gather in Christ,” he said. “Christ was the one who kept us protected.”

Bishop Duca told the congregation that “we are the ancestors. We are the ones who benefitted from that. All of us benefit from the work they have done to build this place, to build this church, to build this ark of salvation, where we can come in contact with Jesus Christ and all of the saving grace he wants to give us.

“It’s a great tradition to know we have that kind of stability and roots in the ground here.”

The bishop also pointed out the early Acadians saw the St. Gabriel area as a place of value, as a place of not only getting away from the world but also a place to strengthen their faith and go out and transform the world. He said St. Gabriel grew and was strengthened “precisely because of the sacrifice and the dedication and the faithfulness of the people before us who were witnesses to Christ.”

“The ark is not just something to keep us from the world,” he added. “It’s a place where we can gain strength and weather the storm. We are called to go and transform the world and make a difference in the world. Amid the chaos bring Christ to calm the chaos, and more important today to bring hope into the world where hope has been lost.

“Maybe that is the most important message today.”

Bishop Duca challenged parishioners to evangelize and invite those unchurched to come witness what the Catholic Church has to offer and ask them if they would like to be a part of it. He said that is the mission of the church, and that as Catholics “we are the missionary disciples.”

He also encouraged parishioners to take this anniversary year to evangelize themselves. He said he would like for each parishioner to tap into that missionary spirit, to see the ark of Peter, the ark of salvation.

“Build that foundation deep so this church, this ark of Christ, for another 250 years will proclaim and live the light of Jesus Christ by proclaiming with our words and our lives.

“I pray during this anniversary year that you appreciate the tradition of faith and more and more make you witnesses of Christ in the world,” Bishop Duca said.

The community gathered for a luncheon following the Mass.
Father Grimes’ mission is clearly defined as he embarks on his priestly ministry. Quite simply, he wants to be guided by the words of Pope Francis, who recently said a priest “should smell like the sheep.”

For Father Grimes, who was ordained May 25 along with Father John Vu at St. Joseph Cathedral in Baton Rouge, the meaning is obvious.

“I want to be someone that is always willing to be available to the people,” said Father Grimes, a Baton Rouge native and graduate of University High. “Someone willing to enter into people’s lives. Hopefully the parish I go to (his first assignment is parochial vicar at St. Joseph the Worker in Pierre Part) people will feel like ‘he is one of us.’”

“I’m among them, just like a shepherd is with his sheep,” he added. “So I really take a lot of guidance of Pope Francis’ words.”

Father Grimes’ calling came at an age when many of his peers were fretting about a date to the homecoming dance. During his junior year in high school, he had attended the annual Abbey Youth Festival in St. Benedict and said it was during that weekend he first began thinking about the priesthood.

After the weekend, he spoke with a couple of priests who encouraged him and advised him to “stay close to the Lord and our lady in prayer.”

Father Grimes, 28, said his parents and many of his friends were supportive. In fact, some of his friends even said they had seen (him being a priest) in him, which was helpful.

Before entering St. Joseph Seminary College in St. Benedict, however, he elected to spend two years in college. So he attended LSU, first majoring in business before switching to philosophy.

“I felt the call in my heart but I felt I wanted an out of seminary experience before entering the seminary,” he said. “I have always grown up a big LSU fan so I wanted some of that experience.”

After spending two years at LSU, he admitted to a bit of an adjustment living in the quiet solitude of St. Joseph, where seminarians attend daily Mass, pray morning and evening prayers together and in their own solitude are required to pray the Liturgy of the Hours. Coming from a musical family, Father Grimes was in the choir during his seminary days.

His summer seminarian assignments included St. Margaret Queen of Scotland, Albany, the cluster parishes of St. Elizabeth in Paincourtville and St. Jules in Belle Rose and the cluster parishes of St. James in St. James and St. Phillip and Our Lady of Peace in Vacherie.

He also just finished up an assignment at Ascension of Our Lord in Donaldsonville.

“The assignments helped me to know what the flow of parish life is like,” Father Grimes said. “That is one of the big adjustments. In seminary, the schedule is very structured but once you get into the parish, things can be hectic.”

During each assignment he was able to shadow each priest as he went about his daily schedule, whether it was administrative, hearing confession or celebrating a funeral. Father Grimes said those experiences slightly altered his perception about his idea of priestly life.

“I’ve gotten more of an appreciation for what a priest is called to do,” he said. “More of an understanding, there is so much more a priest does than just the sacraments and the Mass. The sacraments are important but there are a lot of things that are just as essential to the people’s lives as well.”

He said he also has a better understanding of how much of a public person he will be, realizing he is “not so much a private individual anymore. I always want to be aware of what I post online.”

Father Grimes said he is now entering what he called the “ministry of presence.” He admitted to not being the life of the party but he hopes to “put myself out there and be present at different events with different people.”

“I want to be a priest among the people; that’s the best way I can put it,” he said.
By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

At the height of his wrestling match with God over whether to pursue a vocation to the priesthood, Father John Vu cried out in prayer “give me a sign” and collided with the Holy Spirit.


One of two siblings who now answers to the name of “Father Vu,” Father John Vu said his journey to the priesthood began as a 10-year-old youth in his home parish of Sts. Anthony and Le Van Phung in Baton Rouge when a priest said, “Anyone who thinks they have a vocation stand up for a blessing.”

“Me being a 10-year-old, I thought he said ‘vacation’ so I thought, ‘Yeah, I would love a blessing for my vacation, who wouldn’t?’ So I stood up,” mused Father Vu.

Throughout high school he had this “nagging feeling” that God wanted him to give his life to him. During his freshmen year, Father Vu was surprised when his brother, Father Joseph Vu entered seminary at St. Joseph Abbey in St. Benedict. Father Joseph Vu now serves as pastor of St. Philomena Church in Labadieville, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Plattenville and St. Anne Church in Napoleonville.

“He’s very interactive with people and into his faith, but for some reason, he was the last person I would expect to join the seminary. It was kind of like, ‘(God) are you calling me to follow as well? Do I have a calling?’” said Father Vu, who is close to his brother.

But he pushed the thought to the back of his mind. “One of the best ways to help people was to become a doctor. That is why I love science and pursued a degree in biology,” Father Vu said.

While studying at LSU Father Vu still attended Mass and said night prayers with his family when he was at home, but otherwise fell away from the faith.

“It was all superficial,” said Father Vu. “There was nothing below the surface. I did it out of obligation because my parents wanted me to.”

Father Vu said while it was “all about technology and medicine” and God had no place in his life at that time, he still saw his parents had happiness through their faith. With that mustard seed of thoughts about seminary in the back of Father Vu’s mind, the issue was confronted, literally head on, during a Christmas break road trip to California with his friends.

“I remember clearly it was 3-30 a.m.,” said Father Vu. “I was the one driving and everyone else was asleep. I used the opportunity to pray to God and I thought, ‘God if you want me to enter seminary, you’ve gotta give me a sign.'”

And that’s when a “sacrificial deer” jumped out into the path of the car, and Father Vu hit it going 75 miles per hour.

“Even though I could have died, I was able to get a hold of the car and pull it over to the side. Everyone else was like, ‘What’s going on?’ because it was a heavy impact because it was a big-sized deer.”

“And I remember thinking, ‘I think I just hit the Holy Spirit.'”

Father Vu was enveloped with an overwhelming sense of peace. “Everyone else was (saying) ‘What are we going to do?’ We barely had cell phone signal. And I can still remember the stench because we had cut the deer in half. Our car was pretty much totaled and there were blood and guts everywhere … in the engine compartment … the headlights were busted.”

“I thought, ‘Well this is definitely the sign, whether it was the kind of sign I wanted or not.’ The group completed their trip to California, and Father Vu continued to reflect on the accident. Yet he still hesitated to enter seminary as his graduation day from LSU approached.

Having told no one about his “inkling” to pursue a path to priesthood, Father Vu called the person whom he knew would understand the situation best, his brother (Father Joseph Vu).

His brother was overjoyed and said he would help him apply for seminary.

Procrastination slowing Father Vu’s footsteps, a meeting was final set up on his graduation day with Father Matthew Dupré, then vocations director for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

“My parents asked, ‘Why aren’t you going to walk at your graduation?’ and I said, ‘I think I have a more important meeting to go to.’”

Father Dupré told him they would get the application to St. Ben’s started, but with the registration for fall classes about to close, Father Vu might not be able to start until the spring semester.

“I thought, ‘You know if I am going to have to wait until the spring I might as well (continue on) with school and not worry about it at all.”’

But to his surprise, Father Dupré got him in for the fall semester.

That first year at seminary, Father Vu remembers his time revolved around praying about his vocational call. Otherwise, he isolated himself from others.

About a year and a half into his studies at St. Ben, he confided his conflicting feelings to his spiritual director who said, “Since you are already here, why don’t you assume you already have a vocation and work towards that.” He reasoned Father Vu would receive graces from that and God would naturally tell him whether priesthood was meant to be.

“He told me ‘Give it everything you got and God will respond,'” said Father Vu. He emphasized that he felt free after “letting go” and developed spiritually and as a human being.

“I came out of my shell and shared my talents and gave more of myself to the community,” said Father Vu. “And when I saw that my talents were appreciated and encouraged it helped me understand the parable of the talents and that your talents aren’t for you alone.

“And there’s nothing more that I want to do than just serve his people and serve God through his people.”

Eager to start first assignment July 1 as parochial vicar of the cluster parishes of St. James Church in St. James, St. Philip Church and Our Lady of Peace Church in Vacherie, Father Vu said, “I’m excited, very anxious – a whole range of emotions and joy that God chose me even though I’m unworthy. Just having that faith that he no longer calls me a slave but friend and he finds me worthy and having that confidence in him that he will do great things through me.”

From ‘vacation’ to ‘vocation’ for Father Vu
Evangelizing hearts begins in the classroom

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

As Catholic school students throughout the Diocese of Baton Rouge bask in the glow of summer, enjoying a break from schoolwork, teachers are heading back to class to learn more about the Catholic faith. Since 2011, the Catholic Schools Office has been working with the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis to help teachers become certified in faith formation through Ministry and Theology (MAT) classes. That’s when the CSO required teachers to get certification as part of their employment contracts.

“When I got here, the policy stated that teachers ‘should’ work toward basic certification,” recalled Dr. Melanie Verges, who took over as superintendent of CSO in 2009. “I discovered that we had 20-year veteran teachers who had never completed it.”

Working with the diocesan Office of Evangelization and Catechesis to accommodate the vast number of teachers who would soon be enrolling in MAT classes, Verges said the requirement was added to the CSO handbook within two years.

Dina Dow, director of OEC, said there were no Catholic school teachers enrolled when she was teaching MAT classes in 2010 but that quickly changed the next year.

“It was interesting because some of the Catholic school teachers are not Catholic,” said Dow. “So, to me, it’s an opportunity for evangelization and increasing their understanding of what the Catholic faith is. You also have some teachers that may not be practicing their Catholic faith for whatever reason and it’s an invitation for them to grow in their understanding and grow in their love of Christ and to come home.”

For those who are practicing their Catholic faith, Dow said she has noticed an “awakening” in their understanding of the faith, even among those teachers who graduated from Catholic high school.

“Now during your late 20s and early 30s you’ve never studied anything formally about the faith, you’ve skipped out on 10 or 12 years of growth and wisdom in the church,” said Dow. “So, there’s been new popes, there’s been new encyclicals, there’s been different ways of articulation. Plus, if they haven’t prayed, there have been missed opportunities to grow in the word of God.”

“So, we try to invite people to a relationship with Christ through these classes. And, the reactions are mixed because it’s a new thing, by the end of the class, people will have a conversion or have some type of enlightenment ... only because the Holy Spirit is moving them.”

Dow recalled one teacher who shared information from the class with her non-church going husband, who ended up returning to Mass. She said other teachers have been able to “articulate the faith whenever it comes up in the classroom despite the subject.” She said this is especially important in science “to understand the balance between faith and science and how those actually go together.”

She noted one social studies teacher incorporated the history of the faith during a study on the history of Europe.

“It’s kind of a blending of both worlds,” said Dow. “It showed how the faith impacted the secular world and vice versa.”

The driving force behind the basic certification requirement was Catholic identity, according to Verges.

“That was the whole thing because you have more and more laypeople working in schools and so they don’t have the theology background,” said Verges. “They probably don’t have the background that we would want for someone to teach in a Catholic school, whether they teach math or physics or English.

“They need to have basic certification because that’s part of our Catholic identity. And, that’s the first part of our vision to evangelize hearts and you can’t give what you don’t have.”

A teacher’s first contract with CSO requires the new hire to complete 20 hours (two classes) or more of religious education within the one-year term of the contract. If the contract is renewed, a teacher must complete eight classes in order to have basic certification within four years. According to Verges, many of the schools pay for the classes. She added that principals and assistant principals are required to go to the next level with intermediate certification.

“The game changer,” according to Verges, was putting all of the information of certification into a centralized database to keep up with 1,185 teachers. Previously, that information was maintained by each school’s church parish, which also had to keep up with parish employees.

“Sometimes I’d visit a school and ask for certifications and the parish person showed me a stack two- and three-feet high which had to be entered individually,” she recalled. “Now, it’s a much better system. The teacher of each MAT class enters the credit of their 20 students into the database and that’s managed by Evangelization. And every year I get a list.”

As Catholic school teachers learn more about their faith, so in turn do their students. Verges said students’ scores on the Assessment of Catholic Religious Education (ACRE) tests are above the national average of students enrolled in Catholic schools and the scores continue to rise.

“It is because our teachers are now more aware of the church’s teaching and everything they’ve learned, they weave it into English, they weave it into social studies — more prayer goes into math class than any other class,” she said. “They are able to weave it in because they understand the church’s teachings better. Catholic identity is stronger across the diocese because of this.”

One thing that was added to the Catholic Educators’ Gathering for the 2018-19 school year was special recognition for those teachers who have completed basic certification, something that will continue at the August gathering.

MAT classes are not just for educators; they are also available to the public. For more information contact Dina Dow at 225-242-0141 or visit evangeltbr.org.
EAT, MOVE, GROW – Catholic Elementary of Pointe Coupee’s physical education teacher, Starr Grizaffi, received a grant through the Eat, Move, Grow Foundation during the 2017-2018 school year. Grizaffi teamed up with first-grade teacher, Megan Girlinghouse, and purchased several pieces of kinesthetic furniture with the grant. The furniture was used in Girlinghouse’s classroom and has helped aid in the growth of her students. The furniture, purchased through Action Based Learning, gives the students a new, fun way to learn. Photo provided by Megan Girlinghouse | Catholic Elementary of Pointe Coupee

MATH MASTERS – Members of the middle school math team at Holy Family School in Port Allen competed in St. Joseph’s Academy Math Tournament and walked away with four awards. Holy Family principal Michael Comeau said involving students in math competitions is an important part of the math program. Pictured, clockwise from left, are team relay winners Weston Miller, Baleigh Tanner, Hunter Distefano and Brein Ledford. Photo provided by Annette Fitzgerald | Holy Family School

LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE – St. Michael the Archangel High School in Baton Rouge student council representatives, from left, Ben Messina, Morgyn Gauthier and Abby Button, attended the Leadership Experience and Development (LEAD) Conference in Chicago. Students attended workshops on improving leadership skills, problem solving, project planning, fundraising, team building, idea sharing and networking. Gauthier said the best part of the event was meeting new people and learning new ideas and skills that you can share with your school. “I learned a lot about how to better myself as a person and a leader and how to spread that goodness to other people and my school. I think it is important to attend a conference like this as a high school student because the earlier you learn these skills, the more you can practice them.” Photo provided by Leighann King | St. Michael School

BISHOP VISIT – On Friday, March 29, Bishop Michael G. Duca visited St. Jean Vianney School in Baton Rouge and concelebrated Mass with Father Tom Ranzino, pastor of St. Jean Vianney Church. Bishop Duca also toured the campus and spoke with students in their classrooms. Photo provided by Abby King | St. Jean Vianney School

The Back to School special section will be in the July 19 issue of The Catholic Commentator. Find out what will be happening in the Diocese of Baton Rouge Catholic Schools for the 2018-2019 school year. Deadline is June 28!
**Aladdin**

Spirited live-action remake of the 1992 animated feature in which the street lad of the title (Mena Massoud) is aided by a genie (Will Smith) both in his seemingly hopeless pursuit of the princess (Naomi Scott) for whom he's fallen and in thwarting the evil schemes of her father the sultan's (Nedial Negahban) chief adviser (Marwan Kenzari). Exuberant and lavish, director and co-writer Guy Ritchie's musical fantasy will have viewers rooting for its underdog hero, savoring the pretentiousness which the script, penned with John August, airily excuses in a way that might take some sorting through with impressionable kids. Occult material, a benign view of minor wrongdoing, considerable peril. A-II; PG

**A Dog's Journey**

Universal

This sequel to 2017's "A Dog's Purpose" once again follows a beloved pet (voiced by Josh Gad) through a number of lives as he bonds with the granddaughter of the man (Dennis Quaid) who in youth rescued and adopted him. As she journeys through childhood (Emma Volk, Abby Rider Fortson) and adolescence (Kathryn Prescott), the repeatedly reincarnated canine does everything he can to protect her from danger and bring love into her life. With a screenplay by W. Bruce Cameron (based on his novel), Maya Forbes, Cathryn Michon and Wallace Wolodarsky and directed by Gail Mancuso, the film celebrates family, reconciliation and loyalty. A nongraphic scene of attempted sexual abuse, a car accident, thematic material that could be confusing for kids. A-II; PG

**Poms**

STX

Well-meaning but feeble comedy in which a retired teacher (Diane Keaton) suffering from ovarian cancer relocates to a community for senior citizens and, together with her new next-door neighbor (Jacki Weaver), organizes a cheerleading club (Rhea Perlman and Pam Grier play its most prominent members). As the squad struggles to overcome the physical limitations of old age and the opposition of the snobby local power broker (Celia Weston), director Zara Hayes' film sends messages about friendship, determination and the enduring abilities of the elderly. But the story arc is painfully predictable, and the slack pacing could use a dose of Geritol. Considerable sexual humor, a few uses of profanity, a couple of mild oaths, about a dozen crude terms, a handful of crass expressions, an obscene gesture. A-III; PG-13

**The Sun Is Also a Star**

Warner Bros.

Uneven adaptation of Nicola Yoon's best-selling novel for young adults chronicles a day in the lives of a pragmatic would-be astronaut (Yara Shahidi) struggling to keep her Jamaican family from being deported from New York and a Korean-American true believer in romance (Charles Melton) whose parents are forcing him to become a doctor rather than the poet he aspires to be. After their paths cross at Grand Central Terminal, he insists that they were destined to be together, but she has her doubts. So long as director Ry Russo-Young keeps the focus on the central pair, the quirky chutzpah of Melton's character, out to win over his lady love, is sufficiently appealing to maintain viewer interest. The pretentious pronouncements about life, the universe and everything that lard Tracy Oliver's script, by contrast, will likely try moviegoers' patience. Possibly acceptable for mature teens. Scenes of sensuality, a couple of mild oaths, at least one rough term, several crude and crass expressions. A-III; PG-13

**The Hustle**

MGM

This spiritless, by-the-numbers comedy is a gender-swapped remake of 1988's "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels," which was itself based on 1964's "Bedtime Story." Two con artists (Anne Hathaway and Rebel Wilson) in the south of France collaborate to scam $500,000 from someone they think is a tech mogul (Alex Sharp). Working from a script by Jac Schaeffer, director Chris Addison relies on hit-or-miss sight gags instead of wit, and the story comes off as an outdated mechanical ride punctuated by occasional attempts at crass humor. An implied casual sexual encounter, a few crude terms, a handful of crass expressions, an obscene gesture. A-II; PG-13

**John Wick: Chapter 3 Parabellum**

Liongate

Slick but nasty action picture in which the assassin of the title (Keanu Reeves), cut off from the worldwide criminal enterprise he previously served and with a sizable bounty on his head, battles hordes of opponents (most prominently John Wick: Chapter 3 Parabellum)

**MOVIE REVIEWS**

USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting classifications:

- **A-I** – General patronage
- **A-II** – Adults and adolescents
- **A-III** – Adults
- **A-IV** – Adults, with reservations
- **L** – Limited adult audience
- **O** – Morally offensive

Motion Picture Association of America ratings:

- **G** – General audiences; all ages admitted
- **PG** – Parental guidance suggested; some material not 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
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**The Hustle**

MGM

This spiritless, by-the-numbers comedy is a gender-swapped remake of 1988's "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels," which was itself based on 1964's "Bedtime Story." Two con artists (Anne Hathaway and Rebel Wilson) in the south of France collaborate to scam $500,000 from someone they think is a tech mogul (Alex Sharp). Working from a script by Jac Schaeffer, director Chris Addison relies on hit-or-miss sight gags instead of wit, and the story comes off as an outdated mechanical ride punctuated by occasional attempts at crass humor. An implied casual sexual encounter, a few crude terms, a handful of crass expressions, an obscene gesture. A-II; PG-13

**John Wick: Chapter 3 Parabellum**

Liongate

Slick but nasty action picture in which the assassin of the title (Keanu Reeves), cut off from the worldwide criminal enterprise he previously served and with a sizable bounty on his head, battles hordes of opponents (most prominently John Wick: Chapter 3 Parabellum)
Lawmakers deny voters

Louisiana appeared to be on the precipice of making history but unfortunately has been stymied by state lawmakers.

Two proposed constitutional amendments, both addressing pro-life issues but coming from entirely opposing angles, were considered during the recent legislative session. One, a proposed amendment to the state constitution that states no woman has the right to an abortion, easily passed legislative muster and will go to the voters in October.

The second, which would have allowed Louisiana residents the opportunity to vote on abolishing capital punishment, did not fare so well. Rather than affording constituents the opportunity to voice their opinion via the ballot box, elected officials decided they knew best and squashed the proposal, effectively muzzling citizens.

Such an action is contrary to the very foundation of government, which ostensibly exists to serve the people. To blatantly abandon that principle was a relinquishment of legislative responsibility.

One can legitimately argue the amendment would have faced stiff opposition in a state that has a long history of being pro-death penalty. But as voters, as citizens, didn’t we have the right to decide and not be disregarded by legislators?

Gov. John Bel Edwards said in a recent statement that Louisiana is the most pro-life state in the country. We beg to differ.

Gratefully, Louisiana is likely the most anti-abortion state in the country, and we should wear that mantle with pride. But to be truly considered pro-life, we must advocate for the eradication of the death penalty. Only then can Louisiana be considered a true pro-life state, protecting a person’s right to life from conception to natural death.

Another Perspective
Father John Carville

Jesus came to preach God’s mercy, not man’s justice

In the Old Testament, God is often called “just” when he saves his chosen people from the consequences of their own sinfulness. In other words, the justice of God is really mercy. Justice is not a quid-pro-quo that is owed by God. His chosen people have broken all of God’s commandments and gotten themselves into trouble, yet God forgives them time and again, saving them from the evil they have caused themselves. God’s mercy reaches its height in the New Testament sending of Jesus, God’s only begotten son, who is sent as our savior and redeemer, the final, ultimate proof of God’s loving mercy.

It is divine irony that Jesus, the only sinless one, is recognized as such by the cruel Roman pilot, and nevertheless condemned to death on the demand of the leaders of his own people. Every time we look at a crucifix, we wonder why. Could it be that God wanted us to realize that without his grace, our eye-for-an-eye justice can never be a solution to our propensity for evil?

Early in the morning of April 24, the Associated Press reported the following: “Huntsville, Texas A man who orchestrated one of the most terrible hate crimes in the history of the United States is set to be executed (today) for the dragging death of James Byrd Jr. nearly 21 years ago. John William King, who is white and an avowed racist, was sentenced to death for chaining James Byrd Jr. to the back of a truck and dragging his body for nearly 3 miles along an isolated path in the pine forest outside of Jasper, Texas. Byrd, 49, who was black, was alive at least 2 miles before his body was ripped to pieces in the early morning hours of June 7, 1998. Prosecutors said he was attacked because he was black.

Authorities say the 44-year-old King is openly racist and has offensive tattoos on his body, including one of a black man with a rope around his neck hanging from a tree...Louvon Byrd Harris, one of Byrd’s sisters, said the address will be 350 words and should contain the name and address of the writer, though the address will not be printed. We reserve the right to edit all letters. Send to: Letters to the Editor, The Catholic Commentator, P. O. Box 3316, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-3316, or to tcc@diobr.org.

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

Letters to the Editor

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

PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PRAY FOR US

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

June 13
Rev. Frank B. Bass
Dcn. Guy E. Decker
Br. James Burns SC
June 14
Rev. M. Jeffery Bayhi
Dcn. Benjamin J. Dunbar Jr.
Sr. Helen Cahill FMOL
June 15
Rev. Mark B. Beard
Dcn. Kirk Duplantis
Br. William Cawley SC
June 16
Rev. Robert H. Berggreen
Dcn. W. Brent Duplessis
Sr. Demetria Castro HMSS
June 17
Rev. Donald V. Blanchard
Dcn. Jeff R. Easley
Br. Ramon Daunins SC
Rev. Patrick Broussard
Dcn. Natale (Nat) J. Garofalo
Sr. M. Celian MC
June 18
Rev. Jules A. Brunet
Dcn. Edward J. Gauthreaux
Br. Alan Drain SC
June 19
Rev. Richard O. Buhrer SJ
Dcn. Steven C. Gonzales
Sr. M. Christa MC
June 20
Rev. Gerald H. Burns
Dcn. Richard H. Grant
Br. Clement Furno CSsR
Rev. Peter J. Callery SJ
Br. Tim Grimes
Sr. Judith Couturie CSJ
Rev. Joseph M. Camilleri
Dcn. Ronald J. Hebert
June 21
Br. Harold Harris SC
Dcn. Clayton A. Hollier
June 22
Sr. Renee Daigle MSC
Rev. John Carville
Dcn. William H. Holtman
June 23
Rev. Chuong Cao CSsR
Dcn. Ronald Hingle SC
June 24
Rev. Chuong Cao CSsR
Dcn. George Hooper
June 25
Sr. Mary Ann Diaz DM
I know you probably thought this day might never come when you first started, and now it is here. You are now to be ordained a priest. You can rightly say, “I am being ordained a priest. I am receiving the sacrament of Holy Orders.” And in this sacrament, you’ll be marked by God as his servant for all times in a unique role as priest. And you can say that it is yours rightly so because God has chosen you, and that is not unimportant. He has chosen you because of your unique place in the body of Christ, your unique talents and gifts, maybe even more than that – your insight, your view of the world. You each carry with you a certain history, challenges, successes and culture, and you will bring to your priesthood a unique, creative even, presence of that priesthood in the world. Not creative in the sense that you will be creating new things – there’re a lot of old things first, so get though the old stuff first and then you can start with the new (laughter). But creative in the sense that you will bring your own flavor, your unique insight into proclaiming the Gospel. But also, in addition to your talents, and certainly just as important, it will be your weakness from which you will draw the greatest and deepest wisdom as long as you are not afraid to let that weakness be shown to the people and let them gain from the wisdom you have learned of what it means to be weak so that Christ can be strong. So rightly you can consider this your ordination, your priesthood, your sacrament.

But in another way it’s not your sacrament at all, for you are called to the service of the people of God. You are given this gift not as just a benefit, but also a responsibility to take the people of God into your heart and to bring Christ to them, first of all, through the sacraments and then, just as important, by your pastoral presence. To this vocation of service God did not call you once many years ago and you have simply been making that one call come to life. I hope that you see in your spiritual life God calls you every day to be faithful to his call, and when he calls your name from now on, he’ll be calling you forth as priest, and in that you will find your greatest joy, but perhaps I should say it this way: When Archbishop Sambi called me the first time to tell me I was going to be the bishop in Shreveport he said, “Well, Monsignor Duca, this will be your greatest joy and your heaviest cross.” I said, “Thank you, I think, Bishop, thank you?” But it will be in that kind of living of the sacrament that you will come to discover who you most deeply are, and you’ll discover also the deepest nature of your priesthood as a priesthood for all.

Pope Francis has given us some powerful imagery. In a talk a few years ago he spoke about the anointing of the hands and how important it is to understanding the mission of the priest. Your hands are being anointed because it is through your hands that you will minister to the people of God. And why is it important that the hands be anointed? Well first of all, it’ll be hands that will pour the waters of baptism; hands that will be raised in absolution; hands that will take the bread and the wine and proclaim, “This is my body.” It is your hands that will anoint the sick; it is your hands that will hold the hands of the dying. They are being anointed because they are the place of God. You each carry with you a certain history, challenges, successes and culture, and you will bring to your priesthood a unique, creative even, presence of that priesthood in the world. Not creative in the sense that you will be creating new things – there’re a lot of old things first, so get though the old stuff first and then you can start with the new (laughter). But creative in the sense that you will bring your own flavor, your unique insight into proclaiming the Gospel. But also, in addition to your talents, and certainly just as important, it will be your weakness from which you will draw the greatest and deepest wisdom as long as you are not afraid to let that weakness be shown to the people and let them gain from the wisdom you have learned of what it means to be weak so that Christ can be strong. So rightly you can consider this your ordination, your priesthood, your sacrament.

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### Jean Vanier (1928-2019)

Our differences are not a threat but a treasure. Jean Vanier, the Founder of L’Arche, who died in Paris on May 7 wrote those words, but their truth is far from self-evident. One might question whether those words are simply a nice-sounding pietism or whether they contain an actual truth. Our differences, in fact, are often a threat. Moreover, it’s one thing to mouth those words; it’s quite another thing to have the moral courage to speak them. Few have that authority. Jean Vanier did. His whole life and work testify to the fact that our differences can indeed be a treasure and can, in the end, be that precise element of community that serves up for us the particular grace we need.

Vanier saw differences, whether of faith, religion, culture, language, gender, ideology or genetic endowment, as graces to enrich a community rather than as threats to its unity. And while Vanier gave witness to this in all aspects of his life, he was of course best known for how he appropriated that appropriate among the differences that have, seemingly since forever, separated people with intellectual disabilities from the rest of the community, isolating them, assigning them second-class status and depriving the rest of us of the unique grace they bring. Someone once described Vanier as initiating a new Copernican revolution in that, prior to him, we used to think of our service to the poor one-sidedly, we give to them. Now that we recognize our former arrogance and naiveté, the poor bring a great service to us. One of the persons who gave a powerful personal testimony to that was Father Henri Nouwen, the renowned spiritual writer. Tenured at both Yale and Harvard, an immensely respected speaker, and a man loved and adulated by a large public, Father Nouwen, nursing his own disabilities, was for most of his life unable to healthily absorb very much from that immense amount of love that was being bestowed on him and remained deeply insecure within himself, unsure he was loved, until he went to live in one of Vanier’s communities. There, living with men and women who were completely unaware of his achievements and his fame and who offered him no adulation, he began his first time in his life to finally sense his own worth and to feel himself as loved. That great grace came from living with those who were different. We have Jean Vanier to thank for teaching that to the rest of us as well.

I first heard Vanier speak when I was a 22-year-old seminarian. For many of my colleagues, he was a spiritual rock-star, but that idolization was a negative for me. I went to hear him with a certain bias: Nobody can be that good! But he was!

Admittedly that’s ambiguous. Talent and charisma can seduce us towards selfishness just as easily as invite us towards nobility of soul. Someone can be a powerful speaker without that charisma witnessing at all to that person’s human and moral integrity and without that seductiveness inviting anyone to what’s more-noble inside him or her. But Vanier’s person, message and charisma, through all his years, suffered from no such ambiguity. The transparency, simplicity, depth, wisdom and faith that were contained in his person and his word beckoned us only in one direction, that is, towards to all that’s one, good, true and beautiful, which are the properties of God. Meeting him made you want, like the disciples in the Gospels, to leave your boats and nets behind and set off on a new, more radical road. Few persons have that power.

Perhaps the best criterion by which to judge Christian discipleship is look at who’s moving downwards, who fits this description of Jesus: “Though he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather he emptied himself by immersing himself into the lives of the poor, letting his gifts bless them, even as he received a rich blessing in return. He modeled a true discipleship of Jesus, namely, stepping downward into a second-baptism, immersion into the poor, where community and joy are found. And to this he invited us.

In her poem, “The Leaf and the Cloud,” Mary Oliver wrote: “I will sing for the broken doors of the poor, and for the sorrow of the rich, who are mistaken and lonely.” Jean Vanier, through all the years of his life, stepped through the broken doors of the poor and found community and joy there. For him, our differences were not a threat but a treasure.

Oblate Father Ron Rolheiser, theologian, teacher and award-winning author, is president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. He can be contacted through his website ronrolheiser.com and facebook.com/ronrolheiser.
Summer MAT Courses  Registration is now being accepted for summer Ministry and Theology Courses. Offered by the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis of the Diocese of Baton Rouge. Basic and intermediate certification levels are available. Register at learn.evangeatbr.org.

Discalced Carmelites  The Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites will meet Sunday, June 9, 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.

Pentecost Mass  Father Anthony Odiong, pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Church in Luling, will celebrate a Pentecost Mass with healing service Sunday, June 9 at St. Joseph Church, 15710 Hwy. 16, French Settlement. Praise and Worship will begin at 1:30 p.m. and the Mass will begin at 2 p.m. Father Odiong will pray for the sick after Mass. For information, call 225-698-3110.

St. Agnes Masses  St. Agnes Church, 740 East Blvd., Baton Rouge, will host the following Masses: Acolyte Mass Tuesday, June 11, 5:30 p.m., and a St. Charbel Healing Mass Sunday, June 23, 6 p.m. For more information, call 225-383-4127.

Engaged Couples Retreat  Engaged couples are invited to an retreat, “Called to Love” Friday, June 14 – Sunday, June 16 at the Bishop Robert E. Tracy Center, 1800 S. Acadian Thwy., Baton Rouge. To register and for more information, visit mfdlb.org.

Willows Retreat  Willows Community will sponsor a married couples retreat Friday, June 21 – Sunday, 23 at the St. Joseph Christian Life Center in St. Benedict. For more information and to register, visit willows.org/events or call 504-830-3760.

Marriage Encounter Weekend  Married couples looking for growth and enrichment in their relationship are invited to a Marriage Encounter Weekend Friday, June 21 – Sunday, June 23, at the Robert E. Tracy Center, 1800 S. Acadian Thwy., Baton Rouge. Register at LAMS-wvme.org or call Matt and Gail Quinn at 813-548-1655.

New Orleans Retreat  Father Simeon Gallager OFMCap will present a preached silent retreat, “Holiness is Next Door,” Friday, June 28 – Sunday, June 30 at the Archdiocese of New Orleans Retreat Center, 5500 St. Mary St., Metairie. Call 504-267-9604 for more information and to register.

Meeting on Racism  The Office of Black Catholics of the Diocese of Baton Rouge will host a “Listening Session on the Pastoral Letter Against Racism” at the Catholic Life Center, led by Bishop Michael G. Duca and Bishop Shelton J. Fabre of the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, Saturday, June 29, 10 a.m. – noon, at the Catholic Life Center, 1800 S. Acadian Thwy., Baton Rouge. For more information, call 225-362-3525.

Centering Prayer Workshop  Vivien and Ed Michaels will present a free centering prayer workshop on Saturday, June 29, 6:30 – 9 p.m., at Rosaryville Spirit Life Center, 39000 Rosaryville Road, Ponchatoula. For more information, call 225-294-5039.

Byzantine Icon Workshop  Registration is being accepted for a Byzantine icon workshop on St. Michael the Archangel at the Ione E. Burden that will be held Monday, July 22 – Friday, July 26, 9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. at the Ione E. Conference Center, 4500 Essex Lane Baton Rouge. For more information about cost, call 225-284-7440 or 225-927-8646.

WINE Conference  Registration is begun taken for the Diocese of Baton Rouge’s first Women in the New Evangelization (WINE) Conference Saturday, July 27 at Holy Rosary Church, 44450 Hwy. 425, St. Amant. For more information, visit CatholicVineyard.com and to register visit beautifullyunitedla.eventbrite.com.

Adoration Chapel Anniversary  St. Philomena Church, 108 Brulé Road Labadieville, will celebrate the 25th anniversary of its adoration chapel on Tuesday, July 30, 6:30 p.m. The celebration will begin with Mass at 6 p.m. For more information, call 985-526-4247.

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From page 17

hands of the sacrament.

Every sacrament involves a touch and there is even a more important reason we anoint your hands: You cannot minister to the people only from the pulpit. You have to minister to them by touching them. We’ve all been baptized into this ministry of Christ’s priesthood in some way through our baptism. We talk about helping he poor, and one of the questions we ask is, “Where do we touch the poor? Actually touch them? Greet them? Hold them? Support them?”

Your hands are being anointed because it tells what kind of ministry you are asked to give. Pope Francis says, “unction, not function.” It’s not about fulfilling a job description. It’s about a loving presence to your people as sacramental minister, as priest, as the presence of Christ who reaches out to touch them. People will say that it was so important that “a priest touched my heart.” He didn’t touch it just with words. He touched it by the presence of his heart that they felt through his words or they felt through his touch at their sickbed, when they were sick, at their marriage, at their baptism, in the confessional, at the Eucharist. Your hands are being anointed because they will be the hands of Christ. Unction, not function.

This year Pope Francis also talked about how priests are to be close to their people, close enough to touch them. People will say, “That priest is close to his people; that priest is close to us” – meaning that when they call at two o’clock in the morning he is there. When they need his help, he is there. Pope Francis also said in his talk when someone goes up to a priest who is close to his people they will say, “Father, can you help me? Father, help me.” If someone goes up to a priest who is too busy or is not too close to his people they will say, “Father, if you have time, can you help me?” as though they are an imposition on the priest’s life. Never let that be the case. The people of God must always be first in your panorama of love.

In addition to the anointing of the hands and being close your people, Pope Francis says you are supposed to smell like a sheep! So you have to get close enough to see what the sheep smell like so you can take on their smell, you might say. Love to see a priest that walks so close with his people that they feel like he’s one of them. Wow! What a great compliment: one of them! But not so close that he cannot also be strong to lead, but also close enough that he allows them to see his weakness. Often times, I say it’s important that a priest not only love his people, but he allows them to love him. Allow your people to love you. Show that vulnerability that sometimes you need their help and support, but also know that sometimes you are called to be strong when they need your strength. You bring a unique strength to the sacrament for you not only bring yourself, you bring the whole church with you.

The last thing you must learn in your life as a priest is obedience. You will promise obedience today to me and to my successors. You will be asked to be obedient to your bishop, obedient to your bishop, obedient to your bishop (laughter). But I’m talking about something more than obeying your bishop. That should be the fruit of a deeper obedience in your life, and the deeper obedience is being obedient to your vocation. When you get that hospital call at two in the morning, being obedient to what it means to be a servant. When you’re asked to be a mediator in a difficult conflict in your parish, being obedient to that call to be the peacemaker. When you are called stand up for some strong truth, a difficult truth, being obedient to your call to the priesthood. When you are called to give your people Mass at a time when it’s inconvenient for you but convenient for them, well, consider that option and be obedient to the call of needs of your people. That is a deeper obedience, your ability to hear God’s will in your vocation.

And in being obedient you begin to be stretched by God, because there will come a time when the people will tire you out. Pope Francis said the other day about being close to the people, “The people are great, but they can sometimes be very tiring.” I’m sorry, but you can be very tiring (laughter)! So when you as a priest are tired at the end of the day, you could be sitting down in front of the TV because you are too tired to pray. Or you are obedient to God’s call to pray and say, “Lord, I’ve got nothing to give you but trust that you are with me now.” And you sit down in front of the Blessed Sacrament, or in a place of prayer, to gather your thoughts together at the end of the day. Be obedient in that call to prayer.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus questions Peter three times, “Do you love me?” He’s asking this to see how deep his love is, because he says, Peter, when you were a child, you went about as a child. When you were a seminarian, you went about as a seminarian. You could be a great seminarian. People loved you. Not too much responsibility. You know, you were the person everybody loved when you came into the room. That’s good. That’s good to have that. But he then tells Peter, I tell you there will come a day – and most married people or anyone who has made a commitment of love will know this – “there will come a day when someone will come and tie you up and take you where you do not want to go. Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.”

But I think the same holds true in your obedience to your vocation. There will come a time when God will stretch you beyond your comfort zone. In fact, one time a priest told us at a vocation conference, “A vocation is a call beyond your own self-understanding.” Your life as a priest will call you beyond your own self-understanding of yourself and your own self-understanding of your priesthood.

Don’t bring your priesthood to the people as though you know what it is, as though your learning is finished and you are going to save them because you know what a priest is. Until you have walked through those moments where God tells you, “I want to take you where you do not want to go. I want to take you to face failure and live through it trusting in me.” I want you to follow me in difficult times. I want you to pray when you don’t want to pray.” When you have walked through those moments you will begin to see the priesthood that God has called you to. It will include something of what you know. It will include the best of who you are, but it will be beyond your self-understanding right now. It will be better, deeper, but you will have to cast off things that are superficial in order to walk that deeper path, just as Jesus was stripped in his final passage to the cross. He died on the cross.

As Archbishop Sambi told me being bishop would be my greatest joy and my greatest cross. But the cross is not defeat. The cross is the gateway to resurrection. If we die with the Lord in our priesthood, we will rise with the Lord. And there in the dying and rising you experience the heart of the priestly ministry. There you understand the Eucharist. There you understand what it means to be a priest. And you will be humbled, and you will be freed. I pray that you find that in your priesthood, and that you discover the deeper joy that comes with being a priest.

My brothers, if you are ready to accept this joyful vocation, have your hands anointed for ministry, pledge to be close to your people in love, and promise to be obedient to Christ in his call to priesthood, then come now and be questioned about your intentions to be received into this order of presbyter.

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Pro-life bills gaining momentum amid backlash

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

A series of bills approved in several states, especially in the South, have given momentum to the pro-life movement but have also escalated tensions, said Danielle Van Haute, pro-life director for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Statewide, the news continues to be positive as several anti-abortion bills appear to be moving steadily through the Legislature.

Lawmakers in several states, including Alabama, Ohio, Georgia and Missouri, have adopted so-called heartbeat bills, prohibiting abortion from the time a baby’s heartbeat has been detected, traditionally around six weeks. A similar bill was approved in Louisiana and signed by Gov. John Bel Edwards.

If passed, Louisiana’s law would only go into effect if a similar measure previously adopted in Mississippi is upheld in the higher courts, although it was dealt a set back in one federal court.

Van Haute said the backlash on a national level is unfortunate but not surprising.

“We have seen (backlash) in response to other pro-life bills and at large pro-life rallies,” she said. “We have seen (backlash) in response to other pro-life bills and at large pro-life rallies,” she said. “I think the difference now is the almost constancy of it, because every new state that is passing a piece of pro-life legislation is fueling this fire.”

She said much of the backlash has come via social media, and despite the success in recent states, pro-life supporters must continue to be pro-active and engage people in heartfelt, but non-confrontational conversation about church teachings.

“How is this an issue that we should all be concerned about, not just women?” Van Haute said. “And why abortion hurts women. We need to be able to communicate that.”

She attributes the growing trend in pro-life legislation as a reaction to the radical pro-abortion legislation recently adopted in some states, including New York’s controversial law that a baby who has survived a botched abortion attempt might have its life taken away on the delivery table. Van Haute says that legislation was startling for many people who were either undecided about abortion or were in favor of the right of a woman to abort her baby up to a certain point.

“When that legislation (in New York) passed, it was almost a wakeup call for them,” Van Haute said. “It helped them to see that it really is an easy issue in terms of is abortion right or wrong.

“Circumstances surrounding a woman can be complicated but the right and wrong of abortion became very easy for them to see.”

“And the fact that on a national level we have not been able to ban infanticide,” she added. “That’s alarming.”

Louisiana lawmakers will also likely approve a proposed amendment that would alter language in the constitution saying that women do not have a right to an abortion or even public funding of an abortion in Louisiana.

Gov. John Bel Edwards is expected to sign the various pro-life pieces of legislation.