Blue Mass celebrated

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

As blue skies made way for billowing clouds on July 21, men and women, many wearing law enforcement uniforms, warmly greeted each other in the portico of St. Gerard Majella Church in North Baton Rouge. The crowd was there to attend a special Blue Mass, honoring first responders and their families but also to commemorate the first Blue Mass held at St. Gerard, three years earlier.

On that Sunday, July 17, three law enforcement officers, Corporal Montrell Jackson and Officer Matthew Gerald with the Baton Rouge Police Department, and Deputy Brad Garafola, with the East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff’s Office, were shot and killed in the line of duty. It happened less than two weeks after the police shooting of Alton Sterling, a Baton Rouge African-American. According to former BRPD chief Pat Englade, that event was the reason a special Mass was already scheduled that fateful morning at the Plank Road church.

“It was directly after the Alton Sterling situation (July 5), (people) were going to have a protest so we wanted to get the community together and just have a listen and talk about this. This was a perfect chance to do it in North Baton Rouge,” recalled Englade. “And then as we were walking into the church, we heard about the shooting that morning, multiple officers were down. We didn’t really know what was going on at that point. I was supposed to speak and it was very tough getting through that, not knowing what had happened that morning.”

Englade, an alumni of Redemptorist High School and organizer of the Blue Mass, spoke July 21, welcoming officers and first responders; families and

Ministry helps weather life’s storms

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

From Merlyna Valentine’s outward appearance and lively personality one may think she sails smoothly through life. But her sunny outlook and sharp wit belies the fact that the quadruple amputee has weathered many storms, from being born when Hurricane Betsy struck New Orleans in 1965 to surviving Hurricane Katrina four decades later.

Valentine discussed the storms of life she has endured during a July 17 meeting of the new Cross Wise ministry at St. Patrick Church in Baton Rouge.

Cross Wise developed from a positive response to an end-of-life issues series, according to pastoral associate Pam Folse. She said Cross Wise focuses on the wisdom people have collected and earned based on hard life issues.

“Without the cross, without Christ, without our faith, we probably would not have made it through or not have made it through in the way that we did,” Folse said.

Valentine’s own journey through troubled waters started at birth.

“I was born (during Hurricane Betsy) in a hospital with no electricity and rising water on the floor and sent home to a house with no electricity for three weeks,” said Valentine, a native of Edgard. She wryly added, “First, I thanked my parents for not naming me Betsy.”

She added in a serious tone, “And second that was a foreshadowing of the life I would live and that I would be able to overcome all storms and shadows that come my way.”
Inexhaustible treasure

By Dina Dow

The Mass readings for the 18th and 19th Sundays in Ordinary Time invite us to examine what we treasure most in life and if this steers us toward eternity. The Old Testament Scripture readings from Wisdom, together with the epistles and the Gospel of St. Luke, offer inspiration for those seeking the inexhaustible treasure of life.

Have you ever asked yourself, “Why am I doing this?” The author of Ecclesiastes would say, “What you are doing may not matter after you are gone from this earth.”

Herein lies skepticism when it comes to human toil. The realization of mortality plays a significant part in this poetic description of the “great misfortune of human toil.” With the labor of our hands comes an increasing anxiety of doing what may be fulfilling for the moment but lacks meaning in eternity. Do we perform actions which actually take root, provide meaning and are sustaining?

The author describes his toils, doing a variety of good works, accumulating earthly stuff, then realizing both shall pass away in the blink of an eye as soon as death comes. Rather than despair, we, like the author, can accept the invitation to do what is pleasing to God, who is our counsel and gives all that is good. Our acceptance of heavenly guidance transforms the toils of our labor into that which is fruitful, pleasing and beautiful for God. Are our toils done in vain, filled with emptiness and fleeting joy? Are we doing what is pleasing to God? Are our toils life-giving, filled with faith, hope and focused on eternal life?

St. Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, invites the faithful to “think of what is above, not of what is on earth” (Col 3:2). He is inviting us to focus on spiritual and corporal works that move us toward Christ. St. Paul even provides a list of actions which cause an inward turn motivated by pleasure, power and honor. These, he denotes, are “evil.” Are we seeking a renewal of knowledge in God through Jesus Christ? Or are we seeking knowledge elsewhere? If, by baptism we accept the invitation to do what is pleasing to God, who is our counsel and gives all that is good. Our acceptance of heavenly guidance transforms the toils of our labor into that which is fruitful, pleasing and beautiful for God. Are our toils done in vain, filled with emptiness and fleeting joy? Are we doing what is pleasing to God? Are our toils life-giving, filled with faith, hope and focused on eternal life?

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In St. Luke’s Gospel, Jesus places before us a challenge: Do we trust in God to provide all we need, or do we tightly grab on to passing earthly possessions to sustain life? The parable is powerful. A farmer’s abundant harvest causes him to lack storage space. As a result, he tears down his barn, then builds a larger one to store the grain for future use. Complicity sets in as he hangs on to this lottery-winning crop, keeping it all for himself. He sits back, celebrates and is quite happy. He locked the barn, held tightly to the key and limited access to only himself. His work; his goods; his treasure; his greed. Then, he dies that very night. Who benefitted from the fruit of his labor? No one. He kept it all to himself. It passed when he passed.

We have an abundant harvest. Our life in Christ is as abundant as it gets on earth. Earthly fruits, both material and spiritual, are for building the kingdom of God, not for storing or hiding or hoarding. Do we detach from what is earth-binding and attach to what is kingdom-building? Do we choose to do what is good and pleasing to God in love and service to one another? St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta wrote, “Our lives, to be fruitful, must be full of Christ.”

A treasury of faith from Abraham

Psalm 33 reads, “Blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own.” God chooses all to be his own. We are to acknowledge God’s call by faith and with trust, which nurtures the courage to act. Faith elicits hope. Abraham, the father of faith, is a superior example of one chosen by God, as retold in the Letter to the Hebrews, and found in the Book of Genesis.

The main characteristics of Abraham’s “yes” include obedience to God, trust in the unknown future, hope in God’s promise and courageous surrender. The depth of Abraham’s faith is such that he did whatever God asked of him. He knew that God’s command is truth. Abraham’s treasury of faith handed on hope and life to countless people for generations, until the fulfillment of the promise in Jesus. Abraham’s heart was with God.

On Aug. 15, countries around the world will celebrate in different ways the Blessed Virgin Mary during the Feast of The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, also called the Feast of Dormition by the Eastern Orthodox Church.

In ancient times, the Assumption of Mary was celebrated by public illumination and nighttime bonfires. In Italy, there are colorful processions through the streets and a fireworks exhibit, according to aglobalworld.com. In Sicily and rural areas outside of Rome, the processions are the main event. A group of people carry the statue of Mary, which is decorated with flowers, through the town toward another group carrying a statue of Jesus. They wait on the coming of Mary’s statue. The statues are then taken toward each other three times.

In San Paulo and other parts of southern Brazil the feast is called “Our Lady of the Navigators.” Parades are held with large canoes carrying three musicians, two rowers and a pursuer, dressed as the Three Wise Men in the Bible.

Assumption Day is also popular in the villages and the towns of Greece.

In Poland, the feast is known as the Feast of Our Lady of Herbs. The city is decorated with bouquets of flowers and herbs. The children sing hymns in English and Polish and dance their regional dance in the church.

In Portugal the Assumption is called the Romeia, which includes music from brass bands and drums and bagpipes at churches. Statues of Mary Queen of Angels are crowned.

In Searland and Bavaria, the Assumption is a public holiday. The church started the celebrations, which initially featured unique traditions that included trees and plants. The first rippled walnuts, which are called Mary’s nuts, are offered to the children. People may also go into the field to collect such herbs as agrimony, clover, mullein, m u g w o r t , verbena and yarrow.

The Feast of the Assumption is combined with Mother’s Day in Costa Rica.

Guatemala also celebrates the Assumption of Mary as a public holiday. In addition to feasts, families get together and celebrate the day as a time of reflection.

The Assumption (L’Assumption de Marie) is also a public holiday in France, whose patroness is Mary.

In many coastal towns in England and the United States there are blessings of the water. The tradition originated in 15th century Italy, when a bishop traveling from Venice during a storm while at sea on the Feast of the Assumption prayed and threw his pastoral ring into the sea. The waters were calmed. In the U.S. celebrations take place in Atlantic City, Camden, Long Island and other cities along the eastern seaboard. In some of the “blessings of the sea” celebrations, after the priest or bishop has blessed the water, the people wade out into the water and fill bottles with it and apparently use it like holy water. In Atlantic City, the feast is called the “wedding of the sea” and part of the ceremony involves the bishop or priest throwing a wreath of flowers and a ring from a boat into the water, symbolizing the union of the city and the sea.

Celebrating Mary

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In Poland, the feast is known as the Feast of Our Lady of Herbs. The city is decorated with bouquets of flowers and herbs. The children sing hymns in English and Polish and dance their regional dance in the church. The public holiday is also called Polish Army Day and is connected with the anniversary of the Battle of Warsaw in 1920. In fact, many of the churches have services to remember Polish soldiers who died fighting for their country. Gatherings take place at some cemeteries where readings are made in honor of dead soldiers. Another ceremonial event on Aug. 15 is the changing of the guards near the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Warsaw.
Father Andrus receives Urban League Award

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

From a childhood spent in northwest Ohio along the shores of Lake Erie, to his teen years in the coal mining country of West Virginia, the roots of social justice were planted in Father Rick Andrus SVD at an early age.

His ministry is witness to his relentless crusade to eradicating racism, reaching out to those often ignored by society and finding ways to mediate peace even in the most threatening of circumstances.

During his six years in Baton Rouge, Father Andrus has established himself as an articulate leader in the African-American community, especially in north Baton Rouge where he is pastor at St. Paul Church. In 2015 he helped organize a rally at the state Capitol, where he also spoke, when Baton Rouge General Hospital announced the closing of its emergency center during the flood of 2016.

For his commitment to touching the lives of those in need, including his work with Together Baton Rouge, Father Andrus was recently awarded the Louisiana Urban League Award for 2019.

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Father Andrus was also outspoken in his efforts to establish peace during the tumultuous time following the shooting of Alton Sterling in 2016.

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“The direction of my ministry has been working with the poor, with the captive, with those unjustly imprisoned, those who are justly imprisoned, with the hungry, and the hurting and with the broken,” Father Andrus said, adding the Gospel messages of St. Luke and St. Matthew have been his spiritual exemplar. “The award has been given for the good work I’ve done, for the work that I’ve done, for the work that I’ve done, for the work that I’ve done, for the work that I’ve done.”

Father Andrus also established a distribution center at the church’s parish center during the flood of 2016, as well as a local skating rink where white and African-American young people mixed freely.

Social justice took an ever stronger hold on Father Andrus when he was assigned in the late 1960s to work at St. Augustine in New Orleans during his formation. That era was a time of unrest, with the controversial Vietnam crisis coming to an end, race riots dividing the country, and the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Bobby Kennedy.

“I felt the division and I felt that somebody has got to do something,” Father Andrus said. “I realized somewhere along the line I was going to be one of those somebodies.”

During his novitiate year at St. Rose De Lima Church in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, Father Andrus ingratiated himself into the African-American community, spending many hours in “back of town,” which even today is considered the African-American area of the city.

“There was a very divisive line of demarcation, a division where African-Americans lived and whites lived, and I thought this just isn’t right,” said Father Andrus, who also protested the closing of St. Rose School.

He said the experience taught him what he calls the systemic pieces of racism and how that is built into society, including racial and economic divides.

“A lot of things kind of came to me,” Father Andrus said, adding that is what makes the award so special to him. “Even though nobody sees it, I see it covering the entire scope of my ministry. It’s been what it’s about, not so much in the last six years but in the last 36 years because I’ve done a lot of work dealing with the same kinds of things.”

Father Andrus was part of a group that included Together Baton Rouge in developing a list of proposals for police reform in the community, a list that East Baton Rouge Mayor/President Sharon Broome enacted via executive order during her first day in office.

Father Andrus also established a distribution center at the church’s parish center during the flood of 2016, as well as a place serving meals. Some displaced flood victims were also able to use the center for temporary housing.

“Those were the kind of things that we were doing, putting the Gospel into practice,” he said. “And I can remember a number of people telling me they never expected to see the parish center being used as a shelter for homeless people.”

Father Andrus said he will continue to be a voice for social justice because, quite simply, “Jesus did the same things.” He cited Gospel passages where Jesus went out of his way to minister to those in need or those shamed by society.

“Jesus often addressed the physical needs of people before he even dealt with the spiritual,” he said. “We want to take care of spiritual needs, and we want people to meet our expectations. “Jesus told the church to go into the world. I think that’s one of the greatest gifts that I have learned.”

Your Catholic Wedding 2019

A Guide to the Sacrament of Marriage in the Diocese of Baton Rouge

Be a part of the The Catholic Commentator’s Wedding Section in the September 13 issue. The Catholic Commentator will publish a complete wedding guide filled with information for those planning for the Sacrament of Marriage in the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

If a couple wishes to marry in the Catholic Church, there are guidelines that must be followed and preparation programs the couple must attend. Some 40,000 copies will be distributed including those to be placed in Wedding Packets at each church.

Deadline for advertising is September 4.

For information, call Wanda Koch at 225-387-0983 or email wkoch@diobr.org.
Death penalty reinstatement brings unwelcome news

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The July 25 announcement by the Justice Department that it is reinstating the federal death penalty for the first time in 16 years was unwelcome news for Catholic leaders who have advocated against capital punishment.

“The United States’ death penalty system is tragically flawed. Resuming federal executions – especially by an administration that identifies itself as ‘pro-life’ – is wrongheaded and unconscionable,” said Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy, executive director of Catholic Mobilizing Network, a group that champions restorative justice and an end to the death penalty.

The execution of five inmates on federal death row will take place from December 2019 through next January.

Inmates in the group include convicted Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev and Charleston, South Carolina, church shooter Dylann Roof.

Sister Helen Prejean, a Sister of St. Joseph of Medaille, who is a longtime opponent of capital punishment, tweeted a brief reaction to the July 25 announcement saying that as she was about to “board a plane to Alaska to join the celebrations of 62 years without the death penalty in that state” when she learned “the federal government plans to restart executions later this year after a 16-year hiatus.”

In 2014, President Barack Obama directed the Bureau of Prisons to conduct a review of federal capital punishment cases and issues surrounding the use of lethal injection drugs. According to the July 25 announcement, that review is complete and the executions can proceed.

Currently, there are 62 inmates – 61 men and 1 woman – on federal death row, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. Most of the federal death-row prisoners are at the U.S. Penitentiary in Terre Haute, Indiana.

Federal death penalty cases are authorized by the Department of Justice in consultation with local U.S. Attorney Offices.

Vaillancourt Murphy said in her July 25 statement that in the 16 years since the federal government executed a death-row prisoner, the American public has changed its collective thinking on the death penalty. Last October, she said 49 percent of Americans said they believed the punishment is applied fairly and currently, 25 states have distanced themselves from the death penalty in some capacity, most recently, California, with its governor-imposed execution ban in March and New Hampshire’s repeal of capital punishment by legislative veto override in May.

“The DOJ regresses as the rest of our country evolves,” she added.

The Catholic Church’s teaching is very clear on capital punishment, she said, noting the Catechism of the Catholic Church calls it “inadmissible” in all cases “because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person.”

She said the decision also “promotes a culture of death where we so desperately need a culture of life.”
Men’s conference scheduled Aug. 10 at Holy Rosary

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Reaching Jesus through Mary will be the theme of the 19th annual Men’s Conference scheduled Aug. 10 at Holy Rosary Church in St. Amant.

Holy Rosary pastor Father Joshua Johnson and St. Helena Church in Amite pastor Father Mark Beard are the scheduled presenters, addressing the theme “To Jesus through Mary.”

Father Johnson’s presentation will focus on St. John Paul the Great’s Letter on the Rosary. Father Beard is scheduled to share his conversion story and the Blessed Mother’s role in his vocation.

The conference will include talks on the Blessed Mother, followed by intentional small group sharing, Father Johnson said. “We hope the men who attend this conference will have a better understanding of Mary’s role in salvation history, the need to lean on every member in the body of Christ, including the Blessed Virgin Mary,” Father Johnson said. “Mary always points us to Jesus and during this conference we believe she will invite her sons to encounter Christ in the sacramental life of the Catholic Church.

“It is an occasion for individual spiritual growth achieved through prayer and personal reflection. The Holy Spirit will be our guide throughout the day.” He added that he and Father Beard will administer the sacrament of reconciliation throughout the conference. Eucharistic adoration will also be available and Father Johnson will lead the men in a decade of the rosary. The conference will include a concluding Mass.

The conference, which is open to the public, is presented by Holy Rosary parishioners, who started the planning before Easter, with the official kickoff being the annual Good Friday Walk with the Cross.

Organizers said the conference is an opportunity to hear and discuss how men live as Catholics in a modern, complex society. Men share their testimony to the challenges they face with the increasing demands of everyday life.

“Jesus Christ, our savior, is offering you a chance to respond to a closer and deeper relationship with him,” Father Johnson said. “Sacraments are the focal point of the day.”

Registration for the conference, which is expected to draw more than 150 men although capacity is 500, begins at 7 a.m. Mass is scheduled for 4 p.m. with a meal to follow. The suggested donation is $30 and includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.

For more information, call Tim Lessard at 225-715-5103 or visit olohr.com/Men-of-the-Cross.

Carmelites celebrate special day

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

On July 16, the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Ethalyn White of Port Allen, and Carmelite Proline of Baton Rouge, joined other members of their order for Mass at Our Lady of Mercy Church in Baton Rouge. Identified by their large brown cloth scapulars, this was a special day for the group who are members of the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites.

“It is a special feast day,” said White, who has been a member for 30 years. “We wear these (scapulars) to our meetings and any special feast day where we’re gathered.”

“It’s just like a Sunday,” said Proline, explaining the importance of this special feast.

According to “Magnificat” magazine, the feast day of Our Lady of Mount Carmel marks the day in 1251 when Our Lady gave the brown scapular to St. Simon Stock. White stated members of the secular group spend their time growing in faith and in the Divine Office (Liturgy of the Hours). With 30 members, not all of them active, the Discalced Carmelites in Baton Rouge are always looking for new members.

“We’re not very visible because our charism is one of prayer and it’s mostly interior, it’s not something you’re going to see out on the streets very much,” noted White. “But anybody that’s interested, we would be glad to have you come and visit with us and see what we’re all about. We draw our members from all over the diocese.”

“People come from Plaquemine, Denham Springs, all the way from LaPlace,” added Proline, a Discalced Carmelite for 19 years. “We’d love to have new members. We’re ordinary people from all walks of life. It’s a calling. It’s a vocation.”

For those interested in learning more, the Discalced Carmelites will host a day of recollection at St. George Church in Baton Rouge on Sat., Aug. 10, 8 – 10 a.m., with Father Eric Guyan, pastor of St. Theresa of Avila Church in Gonzales, as the retreat master.
Mary during ministry of Jesus/ Catholics and prenuptial agreements

Q I am wondering what Mary did and where she lived during the three years of Jesus’ ministry. Did she travel with the “women who ministered to him” (Wichita, Kansas)

A In the Gospels, once the public ministry of Jesus has begun, Mary is mentioned in only a few scenes. We can assume that his mother did not accompany him throughout the course of that 2 1/2-year period but continued to reside at Nazareth.

At a general audience in March 1997, Pope John Paul II said: “The beginning of Jesus’ mission also meant separation from his mother and from family affection, as can be inferred from the conditions he gave his disciples for following him and for dedicating themselves to proclaiming God’s kingdom.”

Mary was present, of course, at the wedding feast of Cana (Jn 2:1-11), where Jesus saved the hosts from embarrassment by providing more wine at his mother’s request. Also, on one occasion during the course of Christ’s preaching journeys, we learn (Lk 8:19) that Mary and Jesus’ brothers came to hear him but could not enter because of the crowd.

It was then that Jesus explained, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it” (Lk 8:21). Mary was present, of course, at the foot of the cross during Christ’s passion, and it was there that Jesus committed his mother (Jn 19:26-27) to the care of his beloved disciple John.

Q These days, people are entering into marriage at a later age. Many bring with them considerable financial assets and, seeking ways to protect those assets, are drawing up prenuptial agreements by which they attempt to exclude their spouse’s claim on this wealth should a divorce occur.

I have always understood that this type of agreement is an impediment to a Catholic marriage; it calls into question the total commitment required for a marriage, since the agreement is predicated on the marriage’s dissolution.

Recently, a relative of mine and her fiance who are in a similar situation met with their parish priest, who never brought up this issue in their pre-Cana counseling. So my questions are these: Is this type of prenuptial agreement, in fact, an impediment? If so, are priests as part of their premarital counseling instructed to bring this issue up? If not, should they be? (Slingerlands, New York)

A The church does not have a blanket prohibition against prenuptial agreements, and so such an agreement does not in itself constitute an impediment to a Catholic marriage. In certain specific circumstances, a “prenup” can be warranted.

Let’s say, for example, that a widow marries a widower and they both have children from their previous marriages; a prenup is a legitimate way of clarifying what is common property and what is separate, as a basis for determining the inheritance rights of each spouse’s children.

In most cases, though, the mention of a prenup should raise concerns in a priest’s mind. The clear teaching of the Catholic Church is that marriage is permanent and requires an unconditional commitment.

“In a wedding ceremony, before they take the vows, I ask the couple, “Have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?”

Apart from the sort of situation I indicated above, it would make me nervous for a couple to raise the issue of a prenup, and I would always question them about their understanding of indissolubility and their pledge to permanence. I certainly would not marry a couple if I thought they were simply trying to create an “escape hatch.”

Q Are the movie ratings done by Catholic News Service binding in conscience? I am a young adult and am curious to know whether all movies rated as acceptable either for general patronage, for adults and adolescents or only for adults are OK for me to watch so long as they do not lead me to sin.

In other words, if a film contains occasional sinful action – bad language, impure jokes, sexual content (no nudity) and violence is it OK for me to attend or is my own presence scandalous since it might encourage attendance by others for whom the same scenes might be more troublesome? (Oklahoma City)

A Since 1936, the Catholic Church in America has been rating and reviewing movies to help people determine which films might be suitable for their viewing in accord with Catholic values.

As Catholic News Service explains on its website, the material provided by its Media Review Office is intended “to provide the public with a spiritual, moral and artistic evaluation … based on the standards of faith and morals presented in Scripture and transmitted by the church’s teaching authority.”

The office’s determination of a movie’s merit and acceptability is made not so much on whether a film portrays immoral and unethical behavior but on “the extent that any film … positively endorses such behavior as either normative or acceptable.”

The office’s reviews and classifications are meant simply to offer guidance; only the individual knows how a film might affect him or her, and you correctly indicate that one should avoid any movie that might create temptations to which one is likely to succumb or move the viewer away from Christian values.

To your question, I think you needn’t worry that your own presence at an A-I, A-II or A-III movie might be scandalous to someone else; that person needs to make his own decision. What I would not do, though, is bring anyone else to see a problematic film if I were not sure how that other person might react.

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.
Society aims to develop community among young Catholics

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

The early church practices of disciples living in community and forming other disciples is the model the Society of St. John, West Giffin, associate director of youth and young adult ministry for the Diocese of Baton Rouge, said.

Giffin pointed out that with the growing number of young people disaffiliating themselves from the Catholic Church, those affiliated with the church need community to retain their Catholic identity and evangelize the culture.

Citing research studies by the Pew Research Center, as well as St. Mary’s Press Catholic Research Group, Giffin noted that 31.7 percent of U.S. young adults claim to have been raised Catholic. Of that percentage, more than 40 percent claim to no longer identify themselves as Catholic. This compares to only 2 percent that claim to have converted to Catholicism in their lifetime. This means that 12.9 percent of young Americans are former Catholics, Giffin said.

The median ages at which young adults become disaffiliated is 13-years-old, the studies indicate. The top reason (60 percent) these people said they are no longer Catholic is because they question or have questions about church teachings that aren’t being answered.

“They (the disaffiliated) are embracing a culture separate from our church community and culture which I would say is growing less tolerant of religious communities,” said Giffin.

He added, “What we’re seeing in this disaffiliation is that it is really hurting someone’s ability to stand tall and be proud to be Catholic.”

The St. John Society’s mission will be carried out through small peer-ministry groups facilitated by adult mentors.

“The society is an exercise in faith lived through the reality and beauty of the church and through a community of peers all striving to live that life well,” Giffin said.

The groups will have the opportunity to develop a rule of life and charism for which they will be held accountable throughout the year, enter into intentional prayer and service to other groups and dive into faith formation.

Giffin said that members of the small communities will not only be responsible for holding each other accountable but lifting each other up through prayer and encouragement during times of trials and hardships.

“For a community to work we have to support one another and we don’t want any one of our fellow brothers or sisters to be left without support,” said Giffin.

Through the friendships and faith connections made in the small groups, the young Catholics will be encouraged to start their own communities and make disciples of others in their college, friendships, workplace and “life.”

They can carry it with them wherever they go,” Giffin said.

The society will start on a small scale, and during the next few months Giffin and other adult Catholic leaders will obtain feedback from the “pilot communities.”

The goal of the St. John Society is to increase on a larger scale and develop multiple small communities in the spring of 2020, according to Giffin. People who are interested in serving as adult mentors can contact Giffin at wgiffin@diobr.org.

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State Farm
Good times shopping for school uniforms

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

Victoria Woods gingerly opened the door to the dressing room and stepped out wearing her summer T-shirt and brand new navy uniform pants. Her eager face and eyes locked on to her daughter as she handed the 10-year-old an- other pair of new navy shorts to try on.

Three weeks before school starts, Woods, of Baton Rouge, brought her children, including 8-year-old Tyler Palmer, shopping for new school uniforms at the St. Vincent de Paul Store on Plank Road in Baton Rouge as part of the Uniforms for Kids Program. The 21-year-old program operates on the second floor of the SVDP building in a warehouse-style room.

From floor to ceiling, tall metal shelves line the perimeter of the room, loaded with neatly folded navy and khaki shorts and pants and polo-style shirts in navy, red, white, green and burgundy. A small section was set aside for dressing rooms. In a corner of the room is the base of operations: volunteers and workers accepting paperwork from families who have signed up to outfit their young children.

“This program helps single mothers and children that are sometimes less fortunate and not able to afford these uniforms,” said Woods. “St. Vincent de Paul sends letters to parents to help the kids get what they need for their uniforms. Most parents aren’t able to get the uniforms so it helps us out a lot.”

Parents, grandparents and legal guardians of children in pre-K-through-eighth grades have been bringing in the students to shop since the uniform distribution began July 9. According to Cheryl Scott, director of Uniform for Kids, the program helps approximately 2,500 kids annually in 12 civil parishes that make up the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

“We’re getting more families, we’re getting more grandparents that are raising grandchildren,” explained Scott. “At the end of the year we have an inventory of the sizes, so we ordered according to the need for sizes. This year we order more than 30,000 pieces.”

Nancy Thomas of Baton Rouge brought her children Jeremeyah Booker, 3, and Trevor Hymes, 8, to shop. Each child receives two bottoms and two tops. Thomas, who has three older children, including one in college, said Uniforms for Kids helps her stretch her dollars.

“It allows me to be able to buy other things without having to worry about buying uniforms,” said Thomas. “It helps because I can buy school supplies or other things.”

Although the back-to-school uniform distribution wraps up on Aug. 9, situations continue throughout the school year when a student needs a new uniform, according to Michael Acaldo, president and CEO of St. Vincent de Paul. He said some people might have transportation issues while others don’t know about the program. In those cases, Uniforms for Kids provides “emergency uniform boxes.”

“We have a tremendous number of children that are living in poverty in our diocese and this is a way we can reach those children and help them in their education, to help propel them to successful outcomes,” Acaldo stated. “I can tell you, through the years, I’ve been to some of these schools where children show up and they’re lacking a uniform and saw their humiliation.”

Acaldo noted other emergencies that might arise during the school year including a house fire or an eviction that sends a family to the Bishop Ott Sweet Dreams Shelter.

“This is a way that we can respond and help that child when they come to the homeless shelter,” Acaldo stated. “So that’s a way that those uniforms can be provided from the beginning of school all the way through to the end of the school year.”

The Uniforms for Kids program is funded by private donations and partnerships with WAFB Channel 9, Locke Meredith-Sean Fagan and Associates, Our Lady of the Lake Children’s Health in Baton Rouge and the Albemarle Foundation.

“I think it’s really, really good because you can see that there’s some good people in the community that understand that everybody has a rough patch. And, when their uniforms are too small for them, I actually re-donate them to help someone else out,” said Thomas.

“Thank you, God, so much – we’re really grateful.”
Bible learning made fun

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

Outside of the school gym at St. Alphonsus of Liguori Church in Greenwell Springs, the sound of music and voices could be heard. The commotion inside was coming from 250 kids, ages four through 13, separated into groups identified as animals from safari: crocodiles, cheetahs, lions, elephants, etc. Among the deafening noises from this summer Vacation Bible School was a single message of knowing God’s love.

“The idea is that all of the kids have come to the African savannah and we’re showing them how they can find God there through different animal characters,” said Kaitlyn Johnson, director of VBS at St. Alphonsus.

At St. Francis Xavier Church in Baton Rouge, all ages participate in Vacation Bible School in activities sorted by age group.

“High-schoolers help lead different activities and we have an adult bible study,” said Ladira James, VBS director at St. Francis.

According to James, the VBS format includes an opening, a rotation of activities, conclusion and a meal, which is provided by the church’s different ministries and a meal, which is provided by the church’s different ministries.

At St. Theresa of Avila in Gonzales, Duke Soulier, the youth activity coordinator, also encourages participation for all ages, even if they participate only as volunteers. While the program focuses on three-year-olds-to-eight-graders, volunteers, up to age 20 and beyond are encouraged “to come hang out with us, as long as they take the diocesan requirements for child safety,” according to Soulier.

“I mostly like to do the fun activities,” said Sydney Anderson, a rising fourth-grader. “I always learn a lot from the Bible, too. The crafts are my favorite.”

I feel very passionately about it because this is an opportunity for every parishioner of every age, from babies to 90—something year olds, to get together, and celebrate learning about Jesus and being united in that vision,” Soulier said.

Soulier also stated that VBS leaders from St. Theresa join forces with those from St. John the Evangelist Church in Prairieville and St. Mark Church in Gonzales to share resources and manpower.

“We get together at the beginning of the summer and we make the decorations together and plan things together and we share the decorations at each others’ VBS,” said Soulier. “St. John is usually the first one to kick it off in our area. St. Mark’s is this week and at the end of this week, St. Theresa will go and help them take their stuff down so we can bring it over to our campus. It’s a blast, it really is.”

At St. Theresa of Avila Church in Gonzales, Photos by Bonny Van | The Catholic Commentator

I think the children are happy to do this,” said Greely. “I think they feel like they’re doing something good for somebody else, and I think it’s a good way to teach them how to share what they have with somebody else.”

“Vacation Bible School is important because it gives the youth of our parish an opportunity to be engaged and entertained while learning about Jesus Christ. VBS offers an avenue for children and teens to become immersed in the stories of the Bible while giving back to our church community of St. George,” said Catherine Alford, director of Child Faith Formation at St. George Church in Baton Rouge.

“Besides it being an important time for our children, it’s also a great opportunity for our volunteers to come in and share their gifts and talents with the children,” said Greely. “We are so blessed to have such wonderful volunteers. That’s what makes this program work.”

Besides the fun activities at VBS, the children involved in many of the programs are encouraged to participate in community projects whether through donations from the younger kids or service projects for the older ones.

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“The kids have been really engaged,” said Johnson. “A lot of them are just loving it. When we come together each morning our leader helps the kids remember those moments that they saw God. It’s been such an awesome response each morning to hear those stories.”

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At St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge, an army of volunteers and organizers played host to more than 300 children. More than 100 adult volunteers and 50 junior volunteers stepped in to assist. The theme followed the travels of St. Paul and volunteers set up tents throughout the parish hall for the youth. Scripture readings and daily activities focused on that theme, according to Tricia Greely, director of Children Formation at St. Aloysius.

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“The kids have been really engaged,” said Johnson. “A lot of them are just loving it. When we come together each morning our leader helps the kids remember those moments that they saw God. It’s been such an awesome response each morning to hear those stories.”
Unable to drive after outpatient eye surgery, an aggressively macho police detective (Dave Bautista) is forced to call an Uber when he suddenly gets a lead on the whereabouts of the drug dealer (Iko Uwais) he’s been obsessively pursuing ever since the pusher killed his partner. The timid driver who responds (Kumail Nanjiani) finds himself unwillingly drawn into the chase and into some perilous crimefighting. Director Michael Dowse’s irritating odd-couple buddy movie does highlight the good influence the part-time chauffeur has on his passenger’s previously neglectful relationship with his grown daughter (Kaya Scodelario). But the occasional one-liners that work are far outnumbered, in Tripper Clancy’s script, by lazy, distasteful jokes. Considerable harsh violence with gore, torture, much sexual humor, including a sight gag involving a glimpse of full male nudity, about a half-dozen uses of profanity, a couple of milder oaths, pervasive rough language. L; R

**Crawl**  
*Paramount*  
Gory horror flick, set in Florida, traps a semi-estranged father (Barry Pepper) and daughter (Kaya Scodelario) in a basement crawl space that’s rapidly being flooded by a hurricane and pits them against a host of man-eating alligators. Those not put off by watching the main characters be gnawed on and the extras devoured will discern the glimmers of a family-solidarity theme faintly gleaming through the murky waters of director Alexandre Aja’s deliberately claustrophobic chiller. But the desperate proceedings will strike most as more torturous than entertaining. Much explicit bloody violence, numerous gruesome sights, a vague sexual reference, occasional rough language, some crude terms. L; R

**The Lion King**  
*Disney*  
Director Jon Favreau’s remake of the 1994 animated musical uses a blend of live-action techniques and computer-generated imagery to tell the story of a lovable young lion (voice of Donald Glover) with a royal destiny. While his birth is greeted with joy by most of the animals over whom his parents (voices of James Earl Jones and Alfre Woodard) benevolently rule, the evil uncle (voice of Chiwetel Ejiofor) the young prince replaces as heir to the throne successfully schemes against him, eventually convincing him to go into self-imposed exile. Two friends (voices of Billy Eichner and Seth Rogen) he takes up with during his absence urge him to pursue a carefree existence, but his best pal from childhood (voice of Beyonce Knowles-Carter), with whom he ultimately shares a deeper bond, remains resolute that he should fulfill his weighty responsibilities. Although the two outlooks on life presented in Jeff Nathanson’s script are strictly secular, it is the more ethically respectable view that prevails. The struggle to achieve a happy ending, though, involves animal combat, that would likely prove upsetting to small kids. And some parents may not care much for the momentary gastrointestinal humor in which Nathanson dabbles. As for diehard fans of the original, they may find the whole project redundant. Considerable stylized violence among animals, characters in peril, nonsensical languages, fleeting scatological humor. A-II; PG
By Debbie Shelley  
The Catholic Commentator

Patient advocacy is urgently needed to combat a cultural trend in which profit and convenience are valued more than human life, according to Bobby Schindler, president of the nonprofit organization Terri Schiavo Life and Hope Network.

Schindler, who spoke at Our Lady of Mercy Church in Baton Rouge on July 10, founded the organization that helps medically vulnerable families to honor his sister, Terri Schiavo, whose case gained national attention after she collapsed at her home on Feb. 25, 1990, and was left with a profound brain injury. After years of legal battles, Schiavo’s estranged husband was given permission to have her feeding tube removed, and she died 13 days later, March 11, 2005.

“We really need to pay attention and understand exactly the direction of our healthcare today. Because it seems to me although there’s some wonderful doctors out there and there are some wonderful facilities that will care for us, it seems to me that we’re moving in a direction where hospitals now are out for their best interests rather than the patient,” said Schindler.

“And we’re seeing this before our eyes in cases that we receive, hear about everyday. Nothing shocks me anymore,” said Schindler, whose organization has been involved in more than 3,000 individual cases, as well as calls and questions about health ethics and advanced directives.

He said overall the health care system has become so massive and is primarily driven by economic power, both of which compromise people’s wellbeing.

“It is also the state of our culture today. We’ve seen everything. The devaluation of life and how our human dignity is being attacked,” said Schindler.

The same organizations and language used to support abortion, that a person is not a “human being,” are involved in issues that devalue human life at all stages, according to Schindler.

“Once we devalue the human being, it’s a matter of time before it spills over into the cultural divide. And we are in need of protecting people – the elderly, the disabled and those with brain injuries who are becoming more and more vulnerable because legislation is being passed that puts more and more power in the hands of clinicians, hospitals and insurance companies than in the hands of the patient,” he said.

Schindler noted physician-assisted suicide is legal in eight states, which can open opportunities to take advantage of, and coerce vulnerable elderly adults and the disabled.

“We have to fight for the life of the unborn, but we’re also losing the battle to protect ourselves,” said Schindler.

He showed a video of his sister responding to verbal cues, such as to open her eyes, which he said for the most part were ignored by mass media or explained away. He said the mass media took on an approach that was negative toward Schiavo’s case and her family and was more sympathetic to her estranged husband. Additionally, he showed a syndicated cartoon that mocked Schiavo, which drew gasps of shock from the audience.

Watching Schiavo slowly die was painful for her family, Schindler said.

“Our family witnessed what no family should witness,” said Schindler.

He said the approach of his organization, which takes medical cases on an individual basis, is advocacy and education to navigate the maze of legal medical issues.

“There’s a lot of frightening decisions being made and our medical rights are being eroded before our eyes,” said Schindler.

He said, “The best way people can protect themselves is by appointing a healthcare surrogate, durable power of attorney, that we trust who is going to stand in and speak for us in case we become incapacitated ... and that person needs to be someone who has the ability and capability to be tough with these clinicians and these hospitals.”

He also encouraged people to have an advanced directive making known their wishes concerning medical care should they become incapacitated.

The Terri Schiavo Life and Hope Network provides patient and family advocacy; attorney and crisis physician referrals; emotional and spiritual support; advanced and directive care; and, ethics guidance.

The group also has a national hotline at 1-855-300-4673 (HOPE) and lifeline@lifelhopen.com. For more information about the foundation, visit lifelhopen.com.

Patient advocacy urged in changing market

ACROSS
1. Roman or Ambrosian
6. African country
10. Coarse file
14. Make amends
15. Thick cord
16. A canal or lake
17. Begging orders (e.g. Franciscans)
19. Objectionable
20. Author Grey
21. Roman general and statesman
23. Safe
26. Inhibit
27. From the _of_ Peter
28. Holy one, in Paris
30. Epistle
32. Seed containers
33. Watch pocket
36. What we are required to do regarding The Commandments
37. Overjoy
39. Matter
40. A son of Jacob
41. Pertaining to the non-ordained members of the Church
42. Saint of Molokai
44. Ended the card play
46. Rove
47. Midwest Catholic university
50. Diners
52. Doesn’t play fair
53. ___________ honor
54. Biblical nation
55. Secure place for reservation of the Blessed Sacrament
61. Drill a hole
62. Religious statue, holy picture, etc.
63. Jacob saw a ladder to heaven in one of these
64. “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I _ into hell?’” (Is 6:8)
65. Some people don’t have a red one
66. Sores

DOWN
1. Animal of sacrifice in the Old Testament
2. Israel ending
3. It may be long or it may be short
4. “... world without ____. Amen”
5. Takeover
6. Washing birds
7. Sharpen
8. Disposed
9. “...He ______ into hell…” (Apostles’ Creed)
10. Venerate
11. “Little girl, I say to you ______!” (Mk 6:41)
12. Barnabas’ partner
13. Nobles
16. Automobile
22. Rentals (abbr.)
23. The queen from this country came to hear Solomon speak
24. Consumed
25. ______ of God by St. Augustine
26. What Paul’s presence at the Temple caused
27. Oaf
29. With speed
31. Interested in what is practical
32. Aviator
34. Biblical measures
35. Prohibits
38. Tapios
39. Michelle’s friend
41. A boor
43. It is present at, as a liturgy
44. Bubbled over
45. Respectable
47. Strike breakers
48. Paroxysm
49. Get to know
51. Height (combs)
53. Distrustful black
56. You should always keep one in the hole
57. Part of verb “to be”
58. Certain letter
59. Boy
60. Printer’s measures

Solution on page 14
Humanitarian crisis

Immigration wears many faces, a fact not lost on more than 300 refugees and immigrants who on a recent sun-splashed summer afternoon gathered to celebrate World Refugee Day at the Goodwood Library in Baton Rouge.

But even as the atmosphere was festive in Baton Rouge, disturbing images began to surface of a young girl and her father who died in the Rio Grande River fleeing the dangers of their homeland, showing one of the darker faces of immigration.

These two events occurred at a time when such catch-phrases as building of walls and separating children from their parents have become part of the political discourse.

And the ultimate solution must be Gospel-based, one that will protect and guarantee the human dignity of every immigrant and refugee.

As unimaginable as it may seem, especially in a country that was built on the backs of immigrants fleeing their own homelands for freedom and opportunity, according to news reports from numerous sources, some of the worst conditions are occurring at our own border, a place that should be a safety net, a welcome mat, for those seeking freedom, in a country that was built on the backs of immigrants.

The liturgy, our best theologian

The last Mass of the Easter Season which we celebrated was for Corpus Christi, the feast of the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. We are now back in the Masses of “Ordinary Time.” I celebrated Corpus Christi twice, in the Jetson location of Women’s State Prison and again for the Spanish liturgy at Christ the King Church and Catholic Center.

In neither place was the special hymn or sequence, “Laud O Sion,” read in its entirety. It is long, but is also beautiful poetry and music, and a very good theology of the Eucharist. The same can be said of the sequences for Pentecost (“Come, Holy Spirit” and for Easter, “To the Paschal Victim”).

I guess that I am nostalgic, remembering these sequences sung in Latin by the monks at the Benedictine Abbey in St. Benedict during four years at St. Joseph Seminary College. They are, however, part of our Catholic heritage and explain the divine mysteries of our faith better than any sermons that I have heard. They are proof of the observation attributed to St. Augustine, “Lex orandi, lex credendi.” (The rule of our prayer is the rule of our believing.)

Consider what we believe of the Eucharist. The Mass is the celebration of a sacrificial meal. Remember the descriptive definition of a sacrament. A sacrament is a visible sign of an invisible reality. In the Eucharist the invisible reality is the real presence of Jesus in the signs of his body and blood, the bread and wine.

The Mass was first offered by Jesus at the Last Supper. The bread and wine were perfect signs of the sacrifice Jesus would offer to his heavenly father through his crucifixion the following day on Good Friday. After telling the apostles to “take and eat” and “take and drink,” he told them, “Do this in memory of me.” Every Mass we celebrate is a call to unite ourselves to Jesus by offering ourselves to God in everything he asks us to do in this life.

The readings we listen to at Mass, particularly the Masses of major feasts, picture Jesus doing and teaching things he challenges his disciples and us also to do. For instance the Gospel for Corpus Christi is about the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. Notice what he tells his disciples what they should do for the crowd of hungry people: “Feed them yourselves.”

Feeding the hungry, whether they be our loved ones or the needy, is just one of the ways in which our participation in the Eucharist challenges us to offer our lives to God as Jesus did.

The Passover Supper that Jesus celebrated with his apostles was held every year by the Jews at the command of God through Moses to remind them of the meal that preceded the act of God that saved them from slavery and made them his chosen people united to him and to each other.

In the same way, the Eucharist is a celebration of Jesus redeeming all humanity by making us the sons and daughters of God united to him and to each other. Therefore, it is a celebration of who we are today and who we have always been as a church. We are the mystical body of Jesus, continuing his work in the world.

The sequence for Corpus Christi expresses beautifully how we unite with Jesus and each other in the Mass:

“Laud O Sion, your salvation, Laud with hymns of exultation/ Christ, your king and shepherd true./ Bring him all praise you know./ He is more than you bestow./ Never can you reach his due....

What did he do at supper seated,/ Christ ordained to be repeated,/ His memorial ne’er to cease./ And his rule for guidance taking,/ Bread and wine we hallow, making,/ Thus our sacrifice of peace.

This the truth each Christian learns,/ Bread into his flesh he turns,/ To his precious blood the wine./

Sight has failed, nor thought conceives/ But a dauntless faith believes,/ Resting on a power divine.

Here beneath these signs are hidden/ Priceless things to sense forbidden,/ Signs, not things as all we see./ Blood is poured and flesh is broken,/ Yet in either wondrous token/ Christ entire we know to be.....

Very bread, good shepherd tend us,/ Jesus, of your love befriend us,/ You refresh us, you defend us./ Your eternal goodness send us/ In the land of life to see./

You who all things can and know,/ Who on earth such food bestow,/ Grant us with your saints, though lowest,/ Where the heav’nly feast you show,/ Fellow heirs and guest to be. Amen. Alleluia.”

Father John Carville

Another Perspective

FATHER CARVILLE is a retired priest in the Diocese of Baton Rouge and writes on current topics for The Catholic Commentator. He can be reached at johnncarville@gmail.com.
What does it mean ‘to be born again?’

What does it mean to “be born again, to “be born from above?” If you’re an Evangelical or Baptist, you’ve probably already answered that for yourself. However, if you’re a Roman Catholic or a mainline Protestant then the phrase probably isn’t a normal part of your spiritual vocabulary and, indeed, might connote for you a biblical fundamentalism which confuses you.

What does it mean to “be born again?” The expression appears in John’s Gospel in a conversation Jesus has with a man named Nicodemus. Jesus tells him that he “must be born again from above.” Nicodemus takes this literally and protests that it’s impossible for a grown man to re-enter his mother’s womb so as to be born a second time. So Jesus recasts the phrase metaphorically, telling Nicodemus that one’s second birth, unlike the first, is not from the flesh, but “from water and the Spirit.” Well … that doesn’t clarify things much for Nicodemus, or for us. What does it mean to be born again from above?

Perhaps there are as many answers to that as there are people in the world. Spiritual birth, unlike physical birth, doesn’t mean the same thing for everyone. I have Evangelical friends who share that for them this refers to a particularly powerful affective moment within their lives when, like Mary Magdala in the Garden with Jesus on Easter Sunday, they had a deep personal encounter with Jesus that indelibly affirmed his intimate love for them. In that moment, in their words, “they met Jesus Christ” and “were born again,” even though from their very childhood they had always known about Jesus Christ and been Christians.

Most Roman Catholics and mainline Protestants do not identify “knowing Jesus Christ” with one such personal affective experience. But then they’re left wondering what Jesus meant exactly when he challenges us “to be born again, from above.”

A priest that I know shares this story regarding his understanding of this. His mother, widowed sometime before his ordination, lived in the same parish where he had been assigned to minister. It was a mixed blessing, nice to see her every day in church but she, widowed and alone, began to lean pretty heavily upon him in terms of wanting his time and he, the dutiful son, now had to spend all his free time with his mother, taking her for meals, taking her for drives, and being her one vital contact with the world outside the narrow confines of the seniors’ home within which she lived. During their time together she reminisced a lot and not infrequently complained about being alone and lonely. But one day, on a drive with her, after a period of silence, she said something that surprised him and caught his deeper attention: “I’ve given up on fear!” she said, “I’m no longer afraid of anything. I’ve lost my whole life living in fear. But now, I’ve given up on it because I’ve nothing to lose! I’ve already lost everything, my husband, my youthful health, my place in the world and much of my pride and dignity. But I’m alive! I’m no longer afraid!”

Her son, who had only been half-listening to her for a long time, now began to listen. He began to spend longer hours with her, recognizing that she had something important to teach him. After a couple of more years, she died. But, by then, she had been able to impart to her son some things that helped him understand his life more deeply. “My mother gave me birth twice; once from below, and once from above,” he says. He now understands something that Nicodemus couldn’t quite grasp.

We all, no doubt, have our own stories. And what do the biblical scholars teach about this? The Synoptic Gospels, scholars say, tell us that we can only enter the kingdom of God if we become like little children, meaning that we must, in our very way of living, acknowledge our dependence upon God and others. We are not self-sufficient and that means truly recognizing and living out our human dependence upon the gratuitous providence of God. To do that, is to be born from above.

St. John’s Gospel adds something to this. Raymond E Brown, commenting on John’s Gospel, puts it this way: To be born again from above means we must, at some point in our lives, come to understand that our life comes from beyond this world, from a place and source beyond our mother’s womb, and that deeper life and deeper meaning lie there. And so we must have two births, one that gives us biological life (births us into this world) and another that gives us eschatological life (births us into the world of faith, soul, love and spirit). And sometimes, as was the case with my friend, it can be your own birthmother who does the major midwifing in that second birth. Nicodemus couldn’t quite get past his instinctual empiricism. In the end, he didn’t get it. Do we?

OBLATE FATHER RON ROLHEISER, theologian, teacher and award-winning author, is president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. He can be contacted through his website ronrolheiser.com and facebook.com/ronrolheiser.

The search for more

Summer time used to be about big blockbuster movies. This summer box office receipts are sagging and even the sequels are having a hard time. The “Avengers: Endgame” phenomenon is an exception, but it points to a big shift in our popular culture landscape.

The movie industry is playing an endgame of its own as it tries to figure out whether theaters are still viable in an age of cheaper offerings like Netflix. The church should pay attention to this trend as well.

The theater has historically been a communal place of “worship.” Not worship in the religious sense but in a secular sense, what James K.A. Smith calls a “cultural liturgy.” These are activities that form our imaginations and worldviews in particular ways, and they don’t have to take place in a church.

Movies, sporting events and concerts are cultural liturgies because they draw upon our deep longing to be part of something bigger than ourselves and to share the experience with other people. These cultural liturgies don’t provide communion with God in the Eucharist, but they hint at a desire for some kind of communion.

The cinema has been helpful in giving us a common culture with stories about good and evil or suffering and redemption. However, those stories are not always rooted in the truth of the Gospel and what the church teaches. They are pure fantasy. If what young people are rejecting is fantasy, then their desire for something real may be experiencing a new awakening.

This is the blessing and curse of the social media age. Smartphones and Instagram feeds dominate the daily habits of young people, which means that the influence of Hollywood producers is waning. Young people are searching for something different, something more personal and real. They are searching for a better sense of themselves.

The movie “Jaws” is considered the first blockbuster. It was a fantasy starring a mechanical shark that terrorized a beach full of actors. Today, kids are more likely to follow the real story of shark attack survivor Paige Winter in North Carolina, a 17-year-old girl who has inspired her peers on social media with her fighting spirit and zeal for life. Posts about Paige on social media have exploded and reached “blockbuster” status.

Our pressing task is to remind young people that their experience on the internet need not be an empty fantasy full of dreams and desires about being the next Instagram star or gaining a thousand new followers.

That’s a movie mindset and the movie industry is dying because young people want to be exposed to the real world and their place in it. The church, not the cinema, has always been the best place to start that search.

Brett Robinson is director of communications and Catholic media studies at the University of Notre Dame McGrath Institute for Church Life.
Day of Recollection — The Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites will host a day of recollection Saturday, Aug. 10, at St. George Church, 7908 St. George Dr., Baton Rouge. Registration will begin at 8:30 a.m. Father Eric Gyan, pastor of St. Theresa Church in Gonzales, will speak at the conference and celebrate Mass at 11:30 a.m. Bring a brown bag and drinks will be provided. Donation is $10. Closing is at 1:45 p.m. The public is invited to attend. For more information and to register, call 225-687-4621.

Rosaryville Event — Rosaryville Spirit Life Center, 39003 Rosaryville Road, Ponchatoula, will host the following events: Saturday, Aug. 10, Rosaryville Nun Run and cook off, with one-mile fun run at 8:30 a.m. and a 5k at 9 a.m.; Thursday, Aug. 22 — Sunday, Aug. 25, women’s Ignatian preached silent retreat by Becky Eldredge and Stephanie Cloutere Davis. For more information, call 225-294-5039, email scallais@opppeace.org or visit catholicrocketreatcenter.org.

St. Agnes Masses — St. Agnes Church, 749 East Blvd., Baton Rouge, will host the following Masses: Tuesday, Aug. 13, 5:30 p.m., pro-life Mass; Thursday, Aug. 22, 6 p.m., St. Charbel Healing Mass. For more information, call 225-385-4127.

New Orleans Retreat — Father Richard Buhler, SJ will present a preached silent retreat, “Jesus is Interested in Me,” Wednesday, Aug. 14 — Saturday, Aug. 17, at the Archdiocese of New Orleans Retreat Center, 3500 St. Mary St., Metairie. For registration and cost information, visit neworleansaretreats.org or call 1-866-937-9170.

Father Paul Counce Anniversary Celebration — Father Paul Counce, pastor of St. Joseph Cathedral in Baton Rouge, corner of Fourth and Main streets in Baton Rouge, will celebrate his 40th anniversary to the priesthood on Friday, Aug. 16, 7 p.m., at the cathedral. A reception will be held at the parish hall. For more information, call 225-387-5928.

African-American Sainthood Day of Reflection — A day of reflection, “African-Americans on the Path to Sainthood,” will be held Saturday, Aug. 17, 8 a.m. – 4 p.m., at Holy Rosary Church, 44450 Hwy. 429, St. Amant. For more information and to register online at learn, evangcatbr.org/african-american-sainthood.

Come Lord Jesus Anniversary Mass — To mark the 50th anniversary year of the “Come Lord Jesus” program, founder Father Conley Bertrand of the Diocese of Lafayette will celebrate a Mass for the Baton Rouge 

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friends of first responders; dignitaries and community leaders. He then recalled the events that unfolded the morning of that first Blue Mass in 2016 and the importance of continuing to gather in their honor and to honor “the law enforcement officers who help us everyday and to pray for their safety and well-being.”

Englade also introduced six-year-old Levi Russell, an honorary police officer who raises money to buy bulletproof vests for police officers.

The procession for the Mass included the families of fallen officers Jackson, Gerald, Garafola and Terry Melancon, who was killed in the line of duty in 2005.

Father Tat Hoang CSsR welcomed everyone and referred to the Scripture readings of “welcoming, inviting one another, even to serve one another” in honoring the first responders. He said they would always be welcomed at St. Gerard.

Father Hoang, who has only been pastor at St. Gerard for three weeks, drew laughs when he started his homily saying he was nervous. He noted that the care and service offered by Abraham and Sarah to three strangers in the first Scripture reading was similar to the care and service offered by first responders.

“What a privilege and honor that we all are here in St. Gerard Church to care for one another; to share our pain and glory together; and, to honor and pray for one another that God will constantly bless us to create peace, unity and kindness,” said Father Hoang. “You are so kind. You’re kind for being here, to remember and to pray for the first responders, living and deceased.”

Father Hoang noted that “the word of God invites us to be kind to one another, no matter who we are, no matter where we come from.”

He explained that his own family migrated to the U.S. 26 years ago as political refugees from Vietnam and thanked Americans for welcoming them and other immigrants – just as Abraham and Sarah welcomed their foreign guests.

“Kindness matters,” said Father Hoang. “Kindness produces more kindness.”

He then recounted the time he and another priest were late for a wedding and were stopped by two officers for speeding. Father Hoang said after they handed over the requested paperwork and explained where they were headed, the first officer asked his partner if he should issue a ticket, to which the partner replied, “Do you want to go to hell?” The officers sent the priests on their way with a warning to slow down and a penance of praying for the officers.

“I’ll never forget those two officers and their kindness and sense of humor which helped me to appreciate their duty and their patience even more,” said Father Hoang. “How hard and dangerous it is to work in the situations that our first responders work in daily. Some left for work but never came back. Some left for work and never came back the same. They sacrifice their whole lives and their loved ones for the sake of the common good. So, thank you, again.”

He then asked all first responders to stand up and be recognized. After Communion, former BRPD Chief Carl Dabadie, who was police chief when the shootings occurred, spoke about the lasting effects of that day in 2016 on families and officers who continue to struggle emotionally. According to Dabadie, 68 officers have been killed in the line of duty so far this year nationally and 106 suicides.

“That really concerns me,” said Dabadie. “It concerns me about their health, the wellness of our law enforcement officers. Things must be very traumatic in their lives for them to do that. We have to watch out for our brothers and sisters. When we see something, we have to say something.”

Dabadie stated most residents in the community “don’t see what we see everyday – what we relive everyday before we get home.” He stressed the importance of having administrative support for officers and first responders and thanked dignitaries and elected officials for attending the Mass.

“You presence means a lot,” he said. “It will mean more than you will ever know.”

“I’m learning how (the Blue Mass) came about, and I’m very impressed because it seems to have answered something that the community believed is fulfilling a heartfelt need,” said Father Gil Enderle CSsR, of St. Gerard Church, who con-celebrated the Mass.

Braley Garafola, the daughter of Deputy Brad Garafola, sang “On Eagle’s Wings” before Father Hoang asked all first responders to come to the altar for a special blessing.

Afterward, all were invited to the parish hall for lunch; however, a heavy downpour of rain kept most of the crowd inside though they didn’t seem to mind. It just gave everyone a little more time to visit and show their love and support for one another no matter the storm.

area on Wednesday, Aug. 21, 8:30 a.m., at St. Aloysius Church, 2025 Stuart Ave., Baton Rouge. Email marv_carlin_1@hotmail.com or cindy.ristroph@outlook.com.

**Catechists Convocation** – The office of Evangelization and Catechesis of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, will hold a catechist convocation, “Enlisting Witnesses for Jesus/Stay With Us,” Thursday, Aug. 29, 8:30 a.m. – 1 p.m., at the Catholic Life Center, 1800 St. Acadian Thw., Baton Rouge. The event is open to all priests, deacons, religious, religious education directors, coordinators, youth ministers, parish and Catholic school religion teachers, home school parents and those who serve in various areas of faith formation and sacramental prep. For information, email Dina Dow at ddow@diobr.org.

**Retrouvaille Weekend** – Couples experiencing difficulties in their marriage are invited to attend a Retrouvaille weekend Friday, Sept. 6 – Sunday, Sept. 8 at the Bishop Robert E. Tracy Center, 1800 S. Acadian Thw., Baton Rouge. For more information and to register, visit HelpOurMarriage.org or call 985-232-5963.

**Printing some 40,000 copies every other week for the Diocese of Baton Rouge**
Valentine, who was an educator for 30 years, started her first year as principal at St. Rose Elementary School in St. Rose in 2005, the year Hurricane Katrina pummeled the Gulf Coast.

“We were very fortunate that our school did not have significant damage, and we welcomed families and wanted them to feel like they were a part of us,” Valentine said.

Feeling victorious that first year, Valentine thought, “I am up for any challenge ... until August 17 (2007) showed me who is boss.”

She was greeting new families during a school event when she experienced pain in her side.

She visited a doctor on a Tuesday who scheduled her to see a specialist that Friday. But on that Tuesday night she experienced pain again and asked her daughter to bring her to the hospital.

A kidney stone had blocked Valentine’s kidneys and she was undergoing multiple organ failure. After being transferred to four different hospitals, she was put in a medically induced coma. Doctors told her she had a 10 percent chance of living.

“Do you understand the process you will be undergoing and do you need someone to talk to?”

“I told him, ‘I’ve already talked to the one person I need to talk to,’” said Valentine. “And God said this is all going to work for my good. I’m good. I want to move on to the next phase in my life, to the next journey and I’m ready.’”

With the physical therapist’s approval she could do it as long as it did not cause medical issues, Valentine pushed six months of therapy into six weeks to return to the school as principal.

Valentine helped the students understand the changes she had experienced. "Without the cross, without Christ, we probably would not have made it through or not have made it through in the way that we did."

Pam Folse
Pastoral associate for Cross Wise

So many school children like Savannah, Wyatt, Frankie and Kaylee need your help! For low-income families, the top priorities are food and housing, and too often, there’s nothing left to spend on school uniforms.

For homeless families in our shelter who have lost everything, these uniforms are even more critical. Education is the only way out of poverty, and with your help, these children can start the school year with confidence and pride in their appearance.

The uniforms we give to each needy child cost only $24.00—a small price to pay for a child’s self-esteem. With your support, they can go to school properly dressed, without fear of ridicule or embarrassment.

Our Uniforms for Kids effort will help needy children in 12 parishes. This summer, St. Vincent de Paul asks you to consider how you can give hope to the most vulnerable children in our community.

Join us in helping needy children like Savannah, Wyatt, Frankie and Kaylee by sending a financial gift using the form below or by giving online at svdpbr.org. How many children can you help?

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A Child’s Smile – Priceless

Join the Cross Wise meet-ups to hear inspiring stories of how the cross has guided us through life’s challenges. Father Folse……. East Feliciana

Meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 10 a.m. in the St. Patrick Parish Activity Center and are open to all.

The next meeting will be held in September. For more information, call Folse at 225-753-5750 or email pfolse@stpatrikbr.org.

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