A New Year’s message from the bishop

As you receive this edition of “The Catholic Commentator” I suppose we are all well into our New Year’s resolutions. Changes are tricky things because we often have a strong beginning, but in the end give up because we realize how hard it is to change. We give in to the old ways because we were not perfect in our resolve. And yet the Gospel messages call us to conversion and change as a means of reshaping our lives ultimately in the image and likeness of Jesus Christ. We are continually trying, and should be trying, to conform our lives with the teaching of the church as it reflects what it means to love and to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. If this is so central to our Christian faith, how can we be more successful in shaping our lives, as St. Paul says, so that we might “take on the mind of Christ?”

I have a few suggestions that might guide our decisions based on a few passages of Scripture.

In the Gospel we hear, “so be perfect just as your heavenly father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). While this passage may seem to put the achievement bar fairly high, okay, impossibly high, it is a good place to start. The truth is, and we know this deep in our hearts, that we will never be perfect as God is perfect. But that doesn’t mean that the perfect goal is wrong or that we should not

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From the Bishop
Bishop Michael G. Duca

Windows of Faith

Creation and redemption depicted in stained glass

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Step through the chapel doors of the new Our Lady of the Lake Children’s Hospital and through the striking, colorful imagery of stained-glass windows, the archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael sweep you up and place you before an altar window vividly depicting the story of creation and redemption. The chapel is expected to open to the public later this year.

“Angels on missions from God most often bring fear when they meet humans. The Bible speaks of classes of angels, some with wings, eyes and fire with ceaseless praising voices, others with flaming swords or lances, other simply voices from heaven, or in bright heavenly host choirs. Some are just man-like clothed in white. In every encounter there’s no doubt we of earth are hearing from almighty God our creator,” said artist Steve Wilson, creator of the glass window images.

St. Michael, who guards the chapel door, is the first angel visitors encounter.

“Michael, whose medal many in our military wear, through legend and Scripture is the leader of the heavenly host and receiver of departed souls. His name means ‘the one who resembles God,’ ” said Wilson, who used the face of his departed son, Van, a Navy Seal, as his visage.

In the next window is St. Gabriel, whose name means “man of God” and made some of the most important announcements to human beings.

“I like the idea that he also helps us understand the impossible, accept the miraculous,” said Wilson. “He was the messenger to Zacharias and Mary of births to come. He is also the cherubim stationed at the east of Eden with the whirring, flashing sword to guard the way back to the tree of life.

“Gabriel is often depicted with a scroll and here (the window) it is rolling down from heaven and the disc of the sun, which I placed behind his head as a halo. I’ve used the face of my second son Blake, a former Marine, as his visage.”

The next angel is St. Raphael, meaning “God heals.” Wilson noted that in St. John’s Gospel a man who had been crippled for 38 years laid by the Sheep Pool at Bethesda, where the sick, blind, lame and paralyzed gathered hoping to be in the pool first when an angel, whom they believed was St. Raphael, “troubled the waters” and healed them.

Jesus himself healed the crippled man, commanding him to “rise, take up your mats and walk.”

“With his right hand pointed toward heaven as if to

SEE OLOL PAGE 16
Clear vision for the New Year

By Dina Dow

Happy New Year and new decade! The number ‘2020’ at times denotes clear vision rather than a calendar year. The American Optometric Association states, “20/20 vision does not necessarily mean you have perfect vision. It only indicates the sharpness or clarity of vision at a distance.” In terms of our faith in God, how sharp is my vision? Is my vision guided by the perfect lens of God? What is clear to me? What needs refinement? Do I have tunnel-vision? Is the peripheral view seeing that which surrounds me?

The liturgical focus during the final days of the Christmas season points to the Epiphany of the Lord, followed a week later by the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Both celebrations help establish foundations of our faith’s “visual acuity” on this pilgrimage journey. Light from light

The brighter the light, the sharper the vision. The sharper the vision, the clearer the path. Light is necessary when walking a dark path. Where do we desire increasing light to overcome the darkness? Have I taken a wrong turn in the darkness? Am I making my way along the path illuminated by the light of Christ? What gifts am I placing at the feet of Jesus in order to serve him and those he places on the path? Am I publicly giving God special honor and respect as a living witness of Christ by regularly worshipping in Mass, performing works of mercy, learning the faith, living the Ten Commandments and praying?

Baptism: Visual acuity

There are no details of Jesus’ life between his presentation in the temple and his baptism. The ordinary years were seemingly typical as a Jewish family of the time. His extraordinary mission was happening but had yet to be revealed until, at the age of 30, when he asked John to baptize him. John hesitated since he recognized Jesus as the Messiah and one without sin. Yet, Jesus asked for the allowance. Once plunged into the waters of baptism, we have had the same experience. We also noticed a new light shining in our soul and growing increasingly brighter. It is a desire to live a fully Christian life. (St. Jose’ Maria Escriva, Christ is Passing By, 32) By this encounter we are radically transformed into the life of Christ.

What star is guiding my path? How is God calling me in my ordinary life to meet him? Where do I desire increasing light to overcome the obstacles? Have I taken a wrong turn in the darkness? Am I making my way along the path illuminated by the light of Christ? What gifts am I placing at the feet of Jesus in order to serve him and those he places on the path? Am I publicly giving God special honor and respect as a living witness of Christ by regularly worshipping in Mass, performing works of mercy, learning the faith, living the Ten Commandments and praying?

DID YOU KNOW

Come let us adore him

We know the story of the three wise men following a bright star to see the baby Jesus. There’s even a Christmas carol that is quite popular during Mass on the feast of the Epiphany, “We Three Kings.” So, who were these guys, exactly, and what is their role in the birth of Jesus, the manifestation of God among us? According to Scripture, Matthew Chapter 2:1, “magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem.” According to catholicastraightanswers.com, in the days of King Herod, magi were part of a priestly caste from Persia where astrology was prominent. The Magi explained they were in search of “the newborn king of the Jews” and saw his star, following it to pay him homage (Mt 2:2).

The news disturbed King Herod, who asked the Magi to return with news of the baby’s location, in order also “do him homage” (Mt 2:8). But that is not how it played out. The Magi followed the star to where it stopped, “and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh” (Mt 2:11). According to catholiceducation.org, the Magi, identified in the seventh century as Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar, fulfilled the prophetic and theological meaning of the Old Testament when Balaam prophesied about the coming Messiah marked by a star. Matthew draws upon the Old Testament story of Balaam, who had prophesied, “I see him, though not now; I behold him, though not near: A star shall advance from Jacob,” (Nm 24:17). Isaiah also references gifts from afar, “Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the Lord” (Is 60:6).

The image of the Magi as kings might also come from Psalm 72, “A Prayer for the King,” speaks of the Gentiles paying homage to the Messiah, “May the kings of Tarshish and the islands bring tribute, the kings of Arabia and Seba offer gifts. May all kings bow before him, all nations serve him” (Ps 72:10-11), according to catholiceducation.org. The website also noted that, “St. Matthew recorded that the Magi brought three gifts, each also having a prophetic meaning: gold, the gift for a king; frankincense, the gift for a priest; and myrrh – a burial ointment, a gift for one who would die.”

While we cannot bring such lavish gifts to the infant Jesus, we can continue to adore him through the feast of Epiphany with our prayers and good works.
At year’s end, humanitarian aid for migrants moves across border

WASHINGTON (CNS) – Over the last year, Catholic dioceses on the U.S. side of the border with Mexico, in places such as El Paso and Brownsville, Texas, scrambled to accommodate the growing number of children, men and women crossing the border, seeking asylum and entering the U.S.

Donations, volunteers and financial help flowed into shelters, such as the Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley’s respite center in McAllen, Texas, to help clothe, feed and provide other temporary help to the migrants.

But the introduction of the Migrant Protection Protocols, also called MPP and popularly known as the “Remain in Mexico” policy, rolled out by the Trump administration in early 2019, greatly slowed the flow of migrants into the U.S. in the last part of the year. Yet, it didn’t slow the exodus, nor the conditions of violence, climate change and poverty that have sent tens of thousands fleeing from Central America, seeking safety or better economic conditions to the north.

Many still are fleeing, and as 2019 came to an end, Catholic dioceses remained on alert to help the migrants – but this time, on the other side of the border.

“It was a difficult year,” said Bishop Eugenio Lira Rugarcia, Auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese of Matamoros, Mexico, during a joint event Dec. 13 with Brownsville’s Bishop Daniel E. Flores and Auxiliary Bishop Mario Aviles, as they welcomed humanitarian aid from the Knights of Columbus destined for a shelter for migrants in Matamoros, Mexico. There, thousands of men, women and children who normally would have been able to enter the U.S. as applicants for asylum, before MPP, now are stranded.

“Remain in Mexico” dictated that anyone seeking asylum in the U.S. had to stay on the other side of the border until their case could be heard by a U.S. immigration court. Since January, more than 55,000 trying to enter the U.S. to ask for asylum at various ports of entry have been forced to stay in Mexico and some in dangerous territories controlled by drug cartels.

Dioceses, such as the one in Matamoros, have stepped in to help but can only do so with the help of their sister dioceses across the border.

Sister Norma Pimentel, became the face of those in the church providing help.

The Rio Grande’s Catholic Charities shelter, which she runs, was seeing up to 1,000 people a day at the height of the wave of incoming migrants in 2019, said Sister Pimentel in a Nov. 10, 2019, interview with Catholic News Service in Baltimore.

At year’s end, that number had dropped to just 10 to 20 migrants a day in McAllen, but that didn’t mean the problem was over, said Sister Pimentel, a member of the Missionaries of Jesus.

Like the Knights of Columbus, Sister Pimentel took her mission across the border into Mexico to help. But unlike the amenities to be found at the shelter Catholic Charities provided in McAllen, there is nowhere in the camps for the migrants to sleep, eat, bathe or seek basic shelter from the elements while they wait. She posted video on Facebook of a windstorm ripping through the area, kicking up dust as migrants took shelter in small tents.

“This situation has become more complicated,” Sister Pimentel told CNS.

“Weather is changing. There are winds coming, the cold. These families are exposed to multiple dangers and there’s a complete disarray.”

About 2,000 families have camped out on the Mexico side of a bridge in Matamoros while they wait to be called for their asylum cases, she said. But it’s not a place where hygienic or safety conditions exist, noted Sister Pimentel, who worries particularly about what it could mean for the health of children and families.

Some groups, including Catholic organizations, are looking for short-term solutions, such as organizing cleaning crews, taking food and clothes and tents to provide minimum protection, medical help, but for now “families are suffering tremendously,” Sister Pimentel said. “All we want is that they be cared for with dignity.”

Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Texas, shares a smile with a Honduran girl named Césia as he walks and prays with a group of migrants at the Laredo International Bridge in El Paso June 27. Over the last year, Catholic dioceses on the U.S. side of the border with Mexico, in places such as El Paso and Brownsville, Texas, scrambled to accommodate the growing number of children, men and women crossing the border, seeking asylum and entering the U.S. Photo provided by OGS
Pope lifts secrecy obligation for those who report having been abused

VATICAN CITY (CNS)— Pope Francis has abolished the obligation of secrecy for those who report having been sexually abused by a priest and for those who testify in a church trial or process having to do with clerical sexual abuse.

“The person who files the report, the person who alleges to have been harmed and the witnesses shall not be bound by any obligation of silence with regard to matters involving the case,” the pope ordered in a new “Instruction On the Confidentiality of Legal Proceedings,” published Dec. 17.

In an accompanying note, Bishop Juan Ignacio Arrieta, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, said the change regarding the “pontifical secret” has nothing to do with the seal of the sacrament of confession.

“The absolute obligation to observe the sacramental seal,” he said, “is an obligation imposed on the priest by reason of the position he holds in administering the sacrament of confession and not even the penitent can free him of it.”

The instruction was published by the Vatican along with changes to the already-updated “Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela” (“Safeguarding the Sanctity of the Sacraments”), the 2001 document issued by St. John Paul II outlining procedures for the investigation and trial of any member of the clergy accused of sexually abusing a child or vulnerable adult or accused of acquiring, possessing or distributing child pornography.

In the first of the amendments, Pope Francis changed the definition of child pornography. Previously the subject was a person under the age of 14. The new description of the crime says, “The acquisition, possession or distribution by a cleric of pornographic images of minors under the age of 18, for purposes of sexual gratification, by whatever means or using whatever technology.”

In describing the procedural norms for how the tribunal of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is to be composed and conducted, Pope Francis has removed the requirement that the legal representative of the accused be a priest. The law now reads: “The role of advocate or procurator is carried out by a member of the faithful possessing a doctorate in canon law, who is approved by the presiding judge of the college.”

But the abolition of the pontifical secret over the entire Vatican process is the greatest change made. And, not only are victims and witnesses free to discuss the case, the amended law specifies that the still-in-effect obligation of Vatican officials to maintain confidentiality “shall not prevent the fulfillment of the obligations laid down in all places by civil laws, including any reporting obligations, and the execution of enforceable requests of civil judicial authorities.”

Archbishop Charles Scicluna, adjunct secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Vatican’s chief abuse investigator, told America Magazine the new law makes clear that “anybody who discloses misconduct or a crime and anybody who is impacted by the misconduct or the crime, and the witnesses, should never be subject to a vow or a promise of silence on the fact that they have reported.”

The new law, he said, explicitly states people’s “moral duty” to cooperate with civil authorities in reporting and investigating the crime of abuse. “Moreover, there is an obligation not to bind people who disclose misconduct or crimes by any promise or vow of silence,” he explained.

In a separate interview with Vatican News, Archbishop Scicluna described as an “epochal change” the pope’s decision to drop the “pontifical secret” – the highest level of confidentiality. “That means, of course, the question of transparency now is being implemented at the highest level,” he said.

The new rules do not mean that documents from Vatican abuse investigations and trials will be made public, he said, but “they are available for authorities, or people who are interested parties, and authorities who have a statutory jurisdiction over the matter.”

In the past, when a government or court asked the Vatican for information on a case, the response usually was that the material was covered by “pontifical secret.” Now, Archbishop Scicluna said, once “all the formalities of international law” are fulfilled, communication with other authorities “and the sharing of information and documentation are facilitated.”

In September 2017, members of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors asked Pope Francis to reconsider Vatican norms maintaining the imposition of “pontifical secret” in the church’s judicial handling of clerical sex abuse and other grave crimes.

The secret ensures cases are dealt with in strict confidentiality. Vatican experts have said it was designed to protect the dignity of everyone involved, including the victim, the accused, their families and their communities.

But when Pope Francis called the presidents of the world’s bishops’ conferences to the Vatican for a summit on the abuse crisis in February, victims and experts alike urged a revision of the policy.

Linda Ghisoni, a canon lawyer and undersecretary for laity at the Diocese for Laity, the Family and Life, told the summit removing the pontifical secret from abuse cases would reverse a situation or the impression of a situation where secrecy “is used to hide problems rather than protect the values at stake,” including the confidentiality of the victims and the right of an accused to a fair trial.

Cardinal Reinhard Marx of Munich and Freising, Germany, told the summit that removing the pontifical secret would promote transparency in a scandal where the lack of transparency has meant “the rights of victims were effectively trampled underfoot and left to the whims of individuals.”

In his commentary, Bishop Arrie ta noted that already in May with the publication of “Vos Estis Lux Mundi” (“You are the light of the world”) on procedures for handling allegations of abuse or of the cover-up of abuse, Pope Francis already banned imposing confidentiality agreements on victims.

The bishop also took pains to note that the abolition of absolute secrecy – the “pontifical secret,” which is invoked with an oath – was not the same thing as removing all obligations for confidentiality.

The “secrecy of the office” still applies to Vatican officials and others involved in an investigation or trial of a cleric accused of abuse or of a bishop or religious superior accused of cover-up. Except for sharing information with civil authorities, the basic professional secrecy serves, as the new law says, to protect “the good name, image and privacy of all persons involved.”
FOCUS founder to visit Baton Rouge

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Dr. Edward Sri, theologian, co-founder of FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students) and developer of Bible studies utilized by many church parishes in the Diocese of Baton Rouge, will visit the diocese Jan. 29–30. His visit is sponsored by the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Several years ago Janice Newton, director of religious education at St. Ann Church in Morganza, attended a national Bible conference in Pennsylvania in which Sri spoke. She asked Sri if he would speak at St. Ann.

“He said if FOCUS (a Catholic outreach whose missionaries evangelize college students) was brought to LSU, he would be happy to do it,” said Newton.

After FOCUS came to LSU in 2017, Newton put in a speaker’s engagement request for Sri. She then received confirmation that Sri would come to St. Ann.

Newton also reached out to Dina Dow, director of the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis for the Diocese of Baton Rouge, and Sr’s visit was expanded to incorporate the diocese.

His schedule will be: Wednesday, Jan. 29, 6:30 p.m., “Who Am I to Judge?: Responding to Relativism with Logic and Love” and “No Greater Love: A Biblical Walk Through Christ’s Passion,” St. Ann Church, 182 Church Road, Morganza; Thursday, Jan. 30, 9 – 11:30 a.m., “In the Dust of the Rabbi,” Bishop Robert E. Tracy Center, 1800 S. Acadian Thwy., Baton Rouge, with Mass at 8:30 a.m. in the St. Joseph Chapel (optional); Theology on Tap presentation for young adults, Thursday, Jan. 30, 4 p.m., Tin Roof Brewery, 624 Wyoming St., Baton Rouge; and Jan. 30, 7 – 9 p.m., “Men, Women and the Mystery of Love: Living Theology of the Body,” Christ the King Church and Catholic Center at LSU.

To RSVP a lecture, visit learn.evangelisation.org/rsvp/.

Redemptorist receives literacy grant

Special to The Catholic Commentator

Capital Area United Way celebrated the holidays with third- and fourth-graders at Redemptorist St. Gerard School in Baton Rouge who have been participating in Vello, a one-on-one online tutoring program that helps local children improve their reading skills.

United Way awarded the school with a mini-grant of $1,000 to help buy new literacy materials for the classrooms, which will help the children to learn to read at their grade level.

“Vello is the best way to have a direct impact on a child’s life,” said Melanie Henderson, Community Impact Manager/Volunteer Initiatives. “With the assistance of tutors from various companies and community members, children are learning to be successful in and out of the classroom by practicing their reading skills and building upon what they know. All of us at United Way are happy to partner with Redemptorist St. Gerard in order to help advance children’s reading skills.”

Since the start of the school year, 300 tutoring sessions have been held with Redemptorist St. Gerard students. In addition to literacy materials, the grant will allow the school to purchase updated teacher guides and resource books for their curriculum and a new printer.

If you are interested in volunteering with these students, visit cauw.org/vello for more information or contact Melanie Henderson at melanieh@cauw.org or 225-382-3382.
Saints and self-flagellation

Q When is violating one's body through self-flagellation permitted to get “more points” for going to heaven? In a book I’m reading about Padre Pio, there is a mention of friars whipping themselves to the point of bleeding. Is this what God expects of us, or are these fanatic people who go to the extreme to be like Christ? (Beaverton, Oregon)

A No, I don’t think that self-flagellation is what “God expects of us.” Corporal mortification has been part of the Christian life for centuries, but in contemporary society it is more often exemplified by such practices as dietary discipline. The portrayal in “The Da Vinci Code” of monks undergoing bloody self-beatings is clearly an exaggeration.

The website of the Catholic group Opus Dei says that some of its members do self-flagellate for one or two minutes a week but use a woven cotton string that causes some discomfort but does not draw blood. The purpose of the practice is to imitate Christ by sharing in his suffering. (St. Dominic prayed with arms outstretched for lengthy periods as Jesus did on the cross.)

In a 2010 article, reacting to a report that St. John Paul II kept a disciplinary belt in his closet, Father (now Bishop) Robert E. Barron explained that the instrument was likely a rope with a few small knots in it and that the actual physical pain was probably minimal.

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.

Gospel ▼
From page 2

the Jordan River, Jesus opened the eternal pathway for us into his life. As he drew breath above the waters the Holy Spirit descended “like a dove” as the voice of God clearly identified his son (Mt 3:16-17).

Baptism is “the gateway to life in the Spirit and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the church and made sharers in her mission: Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word. Having received in baptism the word, the true light that enlightens every man, the person baptized who has been enlightened, he becomes a son of light, indeed, he becomes light himself…” (Catechism #1213-1216)

Baptism is the visual acuity of life in Christ. Commanded by Jesus, (Mt 28:19) baptism configures our faith to a sharp 20/20 vision. It establishes the foundation by which we see with the eyes of Jesus and respond by that same clarity in what we think, do and say. The clarity remains strong as we become filled with endless rays incoming to know God through intentional catechesis. Consequently, this radiance beams into missionary service and care for others.

A clear vision for 2020 begins with a simple eye exam. Look through the lens of faith with the eyes of Jesus Christ. What needs clarity? What is my mission this year? What knowledge can I grow from? What challenges am I facing because of my faith? Can I defend the faith when challenged by others? How about my prayer life? Am I talking and listening to God? Do I have time to kneel before Jesus, fully present in the Blessed Sacrament? What area churches have adoration chapels? Do I have a smudge on my lens? Is it time to make a good confession? When are confessions heard at my church to ask for forgiveness for my sins and respond by that same clarity in what we think, do and say. The clarity remains strong as we become filled with endless rays incoming to know God through intention.
A new observance – Word of God Sunday

By Barry Schoedel
Special to
The Catholic Commentator

This year, on the liturgical memorial of St. Jerome, Pope Francis announced that the third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Jan. 26, “is to be devoted to the celebration, study and dissemination of the Word of God.” Similar to Catechetical Sunday, this will be a yearly observance.

In the Apostolic Letter “Aeppul Illis: Instituting the Sunday of the Word of God,” the Holy Father writes:

“The relationship between the risen Lord, the community of believers and sacred Scripture is essential to our identity as Christians. Without the Lord who opens our minds to them, it is impossible to understand the Scriptures in depth. Yet the contrary is equally true: without the Scriptures, the events of the mission of Jesus, and of his church, in this world would remain incomprehensible. Hence, St. Jerome could rightly claim: ‘Ignorance of Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.’ ”

It was at the end of the Year of Mercy that Pope Francis initially proposed setting aside a Sunday where the church would focus on the word of God. He hoped it would be an occasion for the church to grow in understanding of the “dialogue between the Lord and his people.”

The letter also mentions both “Dei Verbum,” from the Second Vatican Council, and “Verbum Domini,” by Pope Benedict XVI, as relevant sources of church teaching on the word of God. Understood this way, this observance is a practical fruit of the Second Vatican Council’s renewed emphasis on the centrality of the sacred Scriptures to the life of every Christian. It should be evidence of and an opportunity for deepening our commitment as a church to that very renewal.

Some suggestions that Pope Francis makes in terms of how to observe Word of God Sunday are:

- Enthronement of the sacred text during the eucharistic celebration.
- Highlight the importance of the proclamation of the word of God by emphasizing in the homily the honor that it is due.
- Bishops could celebrate the Rite of Installation of Lectors or similar commissioning of readers.
- Renewed efforts at training members of the faithful to be compelling proclaimers of the word.
- Pastors could give away Bibles or a book of the Bible to the entire assembly combined with emphasizing how to read and pray with the word of God.

The Holy Father emphasized that catechists, who assist people to grow in their faith, ought to feel an urgent need for personal renewal through familiarity with and study of the sacred Scriptures.

In closing, let us turn to that document of the Second Vatican Council that was so much a part of the renewal of devotion to the Scriptures. It encouraged that, “... through the reading and study of the sacred books, the word of God may spread rapidly and be glorified” (2 Thes 3:1) and the treasure of revelation, entrusted to the church, may more and more fill the hearts of men. Just as the life of the church is strengthened through more frequent celebration of the eucharistic mystery, similarly we may hope for a new stimulus for the life of the Spirit from a growing reverence for the word of God, which “lasts forever” (Is. 40:8; see 1 Peter 1:23-25; “Dei Verbum,” 26).

May the Scriptures be ever-more our wisdom and our peace!

Schoedel is associate director of the office of Evangelization & Catechesis for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

(A version of this article originally appeared on Nov. 13, 2019, on the blog for the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis at evangcatbr.org.)
Do you hear what I hear...

St. John Interparochial School | Plaquemine
St. Thomas More School | Baton Rouge
Holy Ghost School | Hammond
Mater Dolorosa School | Independence
Sacred Heart of Jesus School | Baton Rouge
St. Joseph's Academy/Catholic High School | Baton Rouge
St. George School | Baton Rouge
Holy Family School | Port Allen
TOY DRIVE – Fourth-graders at Holy Ghost School in Hammond collected toys to donate to the Pediatric Unit at North Oaks Hospital. The students’ annual generosity helps the hospital provide needed toys and supplies for their patients. Photo provided by Cindy Wagner | Holy Ghost School

SWEATER WEATHER – Students at St. Michael the Archangel High School in Baton Rouge have fun on Tacky Sweater Day, Dec. 6. Photo provided by Kaye Self | St. Michael High School

TOP TECH – At St. Peter Chanel School in Paulina, students are learning how to create low-voltage paper circuits with card stock, LEDs, copper tape and coin batteries in technology classes. Third-graders made Rudolf magnets to display on their lockers. Pictured, from left, are Daegan Louque, Sage LeBlanc, Rylan Donadieu, Lillie Gravois, Ava Veillon, Mia Forsyth; back row, Leah Johnson, Brennan Armand, Laynie LeBlanc, Evan Babin and Aydin Loque. Photo provided by Paula Poche | St. Peter Chanel School

TOY DRIVE – Pre-kindergarten students at St. Aloysius School in Baton Rouge collected toys for children for the Christmas season. Photo provided by Edie Boudreaux | St. Aloysius School

Catholic Schools Week

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

Deadline for this section is Jan. 7, 2020.

Call Wanda Koch at 225-387-0983 or email wkoch@diobr.org.
Dark Waters
Focus
Fact-based drama about poisoned water, similar to 2000’s “Erin Brockovich,” has a single crusading lawyer (Mark Ruffalo) taking on a powerful company – in this case, DuPont – that’s been dumping industrial waste from the manufacture of Teflon around Parkersburg, West Virginia, the loyal company town where the coating is made. The ambitious attorney, who used to represent chemical companies, becomes involved in the situation at the urging of a stubborn local farmer (Bill Camp) who knows his grandmother (Marcia Dandridge). Director Todd Haynes and screenwriters Mario Correa and Matthew Michael Carnahan limn a rural landscape where the sun seems never to shine.

The Two Popes
Netflix
Glossy but highly speculative account of a visit to the Vatican by Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio (Jonathan Pryce), the future Pope Francis, shortly before the resignation of his predecessor, Benedict XVI (Anthony Hopkins). Screenwriter Anthony McCarten and director Fernando Meirelles ill-advisedly try to extol Francis by trashing Benedict, presenting the latter as doddering and detached from the realities of modern life. They counterbalance this somewhat with an extended sequence of flashbacks showing Jesus’ father Bergoglio’s quasi-collaborationist approach to the brutal military regime that came to power in Argentina following a 1976 coup d’etat, a sub-ject about which they seem to imagine that they have acquired a clarity and certainty that has evaded many others. But when it comes to the two pontificates, their bias is more than apparent.

Uncut Gems
A24
Relentlessly grating character study of a low-life jewelry merchant (Adam Sandler) in New York’s Diamond District as he juggles his wife (Idina Menzel), the employee who doubles as his mistress (Julia Fox), the basketball gambling addiction that has left him in debt to his loan shark brother-in-law (Eric Bogosian) and his fraught relationship with hoops star Kevin Garnett (playing himself). Although the abrasive tone is deliberate, the effect is that of a skillfully composed sonata for fingernails on a blackboard. Directors and brothers Josh and Benny Safdie, who co-wrote the script with Ronald Bronstein, also hold out the protagonist’s affair as a potential source of happiness. Gunplay and physical violence, some gore, benignly viewed adultery, strong sexual content including implied lesbian activity, voyeurism and rear nudity, frequent profanities, pervasive rough and crude language, an obscene gesture. O; R
We finished the waiting time of Advent. I hope with joy and thanksgiving for the loving and merciful God who chose to share our lives at Christmas. Now we are recuperating from New Year’s celebrating and wondering if we really want to keep the resolutions we made or should still make for the coming year. I would like to suggest a few resolutions for 2020 that I think are timely and practical.

First, set a daily time for prayer and do just that in whatever way best suits you. We have always a need to pray, but the chaos we are now experiencing in our city, our country and our world calls for prayer in an urgent way. Just this morning, while thinking about what I should write for my first column of 2020, I glanced at our daily Advocate newspaper and saw that three of the four stories on the front page dealt with five killings in and around Baton Rouge, and pages 2 and 3 added six killed at a New Jersey Jewish market, pages 4 and 5 added six killed in Niger, West Africa, and finally, two killed plus a suicide bomber at a U.S. base in Afghanistan. Human life in our time is cheap and getting cheaper.

We need to find a way to peace and an end to violence. But nothing we do seems to work. Like the psalmist in Psalm 44, we can feel helpless and wonder if God has forgotten us. But we have to keep faith and hope alive, realizing that what we cannot do alone, God can help us find a way to achieve.

With the psalmist we must pray, “Arise, cast us not off forever! Arise, help us! Redeem us for your kindnesses’ sake.” While Scripture is a good source of prayer, we can pray in our own words and with the Catholic prayers we learned growing up. I came across a short column in Commonwealth Magazine published in New York City by Catholic laypeople. One of their staff, a woman named B. D. McClay, wrote about “Small Graces,” how big cities can breed indifference and how prayer helps us resist it. As she notes, “In most of America’s cities you can’t walk a block or two without meeting someone who is in a state of serious destitution... Meanwhile ambulances scream past you; people weep on the bus.” You feel helpless, and the proximity of so much suffering and chaos can breed indifference.

As she walks through the city, she tries to remember to pray; nothing fancy, “just Hail Marys and Our Fathers... And it is one action I can take to prevent the hardening of my heart in a city where that often seems like the only way to live as I pass from one extreme to another with every step — wealth to poverty, highbrow to lowbrow, and then back again.”

Second, get on board with Pope Francis’ Encyclical “Laudato Si’” and fight climate change. Did you know that this past July was the hottest month worldwide in recorded human history? California was on fire and the Greenland ice sheet was melting to billions of tons of water causing the sea level to rise around the world. America has pulled out of the Paris Climate Agreement but quite a few individual states including California and New York have set net-zero goals for fossil-fuel emissions. And there are alternative technologies to help meet those goals. I saw windmills in Alaska this past September. There is also solar energy being produced now in Louisiana on homes and larger buildings.

You may ask, “How religious is a resolution doing whatever I can to fight climate change?” Pope Francis reminds us that, as intelligent beings capable of scientific and moral action, we have been given by our creator the duty of caring for our global home. Besides, it is our poor and homeless brothers and sisters who suffer most from dangerous changes in our climate. We know what Jesus said about seeing him in the poor and the vulnerable.

Third, all of us who are of voting age should make a resolution to vote in every election. The creators of our national Constitution launched an experiment in democratic self-government based on the political rule of the people. This is achieved through the right of every citizen to vote. As the Constitutional Convention ended, Benjamin Franklin was asked if the framers had created a monarchy or a republic. He answered, “A republic, if you can keep it.” The first and most important step in keeping our democracy is voting.

Why should we make this one of our resolutions? Because most of us are not voting. According to figures on election results reported in the New York Times and on eligible voter-population estimates from the United States Election Project, in the last U.S. Senate race, Louisiana was dead last of all 50 states with less than 34 percent of our eligible voters voting. We probably did better in the gubernatorial race. However, important elections are coming up in 2020. We all need to make a resolution to do our civic duty and vote our conscience in every one of them.

Along with that free advice, I wish you all a Happy New Year!

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 johnnycarville@gmail.com.
Another meaning of Christmas

Some years ago at a religious conference a man approached the microphone and after apologizing for what he felt would be an inappropriate question, asked this: “I love my dog. When he dies will he go to heaven? Do animals have eternal life?”

The answer to that might come as a surprise to many of us, but, looked at through the eyes of Christian faith, yes, his dog can go to heaven. It’s one of the meanings of Christmas.

As St. James says, our “perseverance should be perfect.” We must put our emphasis not on being perfect, but on the grace of God. So each day as we examine how we are doing, we should accept that each day it is not about how perfect we are in achieving our goals, but how perfectly we continue to begin over and over again to seek the mind and the heart of Christ in our lives and call upon the grace of God to help us.

In the end it is more about faithfulness than perfection. And so if you have begun your New Year’s resolution and you have already blown it – smoked a cigarette, had too much drink or cheated on your diet – the answer is not to give up and say, “Well, I blew it yesterday, so I won’t have to start again until next year,” but rather to simply say, “I blew it yesterday, but today I begin again.” It is that faithful decision each day to pick up our cross and to follow Christ that causes us to grow in virtue.

My last humble insight is that we should take small changes except where serious sin is involved. If our spiritual need is to change our behavior and avoid serious sin, then we must make a complete break no matter how big the commitment is and depend on the mercy and love of God who will provide what we need. In other areas of our lives we should take really small steps. One of the things we often try to do is change our whole life at once. To change our lives means to change more than one little behavior. A small commitment done faithfully will often have the effect of making big changes in our lives and lead us to deep spiritual insights.

It is my prayer that this New Year will be a time of conversion and holy change in your life. May we say next year that this was a good year, a year of grace and conversion.

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.

A prayer to keep god first this New Year

Dear God,

Thank you that you make all things new. Thank you for all that you’ve allowed into our lives this past year, the good along with the hard things, which have reminded us how much we need you and rely on your presence filling us every single day.

We pray for your Spirit to lead us each step of this New Year. We ask that you will guide our decisions and turn our hearts to deeply desire you above all else. We ask that you will open doors needing to be opened and close the ones needing to be shut tight. We ask that you would help us release our grip on the things which you’ve said “no,” “not yet,” or “wait.” We ask for help to pursue you first, above every dream and desire you’ve put within our hearts.

Amen

Source: crosswalk.com.

Cross Wise Meeting – Anne Harmon Brett will speak at a Cross Wise Ministry meeting, Wednesday, Jan. 15, 10 a.m., at St. Patrick Church, 12424 Brogdon Lane, Baton Rouge. For more information, call Pam Fosse at 225-753-5750.

Men’s Road to Emmaus Retreat – Rosaryville Spirit Life Center, 39003 Rosaryville Road, Ponchatoula, will host a Men’s Road to Emmaus Retreat Friday, Jan. 24 – Sunday, Jan. 26. For more information and to register, visit catholicroadtoremaus.org or call 225-294-5930.

Louisiana Life March – Louisiana Life March will take place Saturday, Jan. 25, 10 a.m. – noon. The route will begin at the grassy area outside the Louisiana State Capitol, and proceed down Fourth Street to Galvez Plaza, where a program will take place. For more information, visit prolifelouisiana.org/louisiana-life-march-south. Prior to the march, Bishop Michael G. Duca will celebrate a Respect Life Mass at 8:30 a.m. at St. Joseph Cathedral, Fourth and Main streets, Baton Rouge. For more information about the Mass, call Danielle Van Haute at 225-242-0164 or email dvanhaute@diobr.org.

Secular Franciscan Meeting – The monthly meeting of the Secular Franciscan Order will be held Sunday, Jan. 26, in the Chapel of St. Francis of Assisi at Maryville Convent, 4200 Essen Lane, Baton Rouge, beginning at 1 p.m. with the recitation of the Franciscan Crown. For further information, email Ruth Powers OPS at rpowers_1bellsouth.net or call 601-807-4153.

Discalced Carmelites – The Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites will meet Sunday, Jan. 12, 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.

Divorced/Separated Program – Registration is being taken for Journey of Hope, a program addressing the concerns of divorced/separated Catholics, that will meet Sundays, beginning Feb. 9, 2:30 – 5 p.m., at St. Aloysius Church, 2025 Stuart Ave., Baton Rouge. Fee is $40, due with registration and scholarships are available. For more information email afalgoust@staloyiusparish.com or call Angela Falgoust at 225-343-6637.
ERIE, Pa. (CNS) – Three years ago, Betty Koscinski, 75, lost her son to suicide. She now spends most of her time and energy spreading hope and educating others about mental illness.

“Not many people at my age start out on a new path,” said Koscinski, a member of Notre Dame Parish in Hermitage, Pennsylvania.

Before her son Joe’s death in 2016 at age 41, she already had been working for 10 years as a behavioral specialist consultant, a mobile therapist and a program integrity consultant. She gave presentations on stress management, eating disorders, depression and suicide prevention.

Earlier, she taught theology and physical education for 19 years at Kennedy Catholic High School in Hermitage.

Nothing in her professional background prepared her for the shock of losing her own son. But it did, however, provide the resources and skills necessary to begin sharing her grief journey in new ways.

Since Joe’s death, she developed a 90-minute seminar, titled “Stop the Stigma.” She weaves together her son’s day-to-day struggles up to his tragic death. She also discusses the myths and misunderstandings about mental illness, as well as important information about suicide prevention.

“My hope is to save lives through education,” she told Faith magazine of the Diocese of Erie.

Additionally, Koscinski is a speaker for Crisis Intervention Team training for law enforcement. The weeklong program is designed to guide interactions between police officers and those living with mental illness.

In November, she spoke for the second time at the Crisis Intervention Association of Pennsylvania’s state conference in Nemacolin Woodlands Resort in Farmington, Pennsylvania.

She also is a trained facilitator for a program called “Talk Saves Lives,” endorsed by the American Foundation of Suicide Prevention. She discusses suicide, especially as it pertains to youth.

Additionally, she has given related presentations to several public high schools in two Pennsylvania counties, and at Kennedy Catholic. She’s hoping to offer her expertise and personal insight to other Catholic schools.

“I want people to understand that those who suffer from mental illness are not crazy. They are just people like you and me who got dealt a very unfair card in life, a chemical imbalance in their brain which affects their thinking, their behaviors and the choices they make,” Koscinski said. “I want to educate people about the signs to look for when a loved one might be contemplating suicide.”

According to statistics from the World Health Organization; Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, or SAVE; and the Centers for Disease Control:

- Nearly 800,000 people die by suicide in the world each year, which is roughly one death every 40 seconds.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among individuals between ages 10 and 34. It is the fourth leading cause of death among individuals between ages of 35 and 54.
- Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide. The highest suicide rates in the U.S. are among whites, American Indians and Alaska Natives.

At one of her presentations to law enforcement, a burly police officer came up to Koscinski and gave her a huge hug.

“He held me in his arms and thanked me,” Koscinski said. “He said he would never look at someone with mental illness in the same way again.”

Her three years of grief, she said, have turned to light.

“My life has meaning and purpose again,” she said. “It’s so gratifying for me at the age of 75 to know that I am making a difference, giving people a better understanding of mental illness, and offering hope to those who are struggling.”
say, ‘It is God who heals,’ this (window) depiction of Raphael with his feet and other hand troubling the waters has the face of my friend Dr. Richard Carter, a retired physician who loved his patients and is still generous with his time, money and talents for other Christian causes,” Wilson said.

The altar window is inspired by the Genesis creation story, according to Wilson.

“The Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters, then he said ‘Let there be light,’” said Wilson.

“We know that in the first chapter of St. John, all things were spoken into existence through the Word, Jesus, the light and life of men,” he added.

“But in many places in Scripture, especially the Psalms, God’s hands, especially his right hand, saves, sustains, gives victory, gives times/seasons, holds our hands and upholds us. That is why I’ve placed his hands above and below creation,” Wilson said.

Wilson portrayed the darkened, crucified Christ between creation and two crippled children, one helped by a Franciscan sister.

The signature depiction of Louisiana wildlife throughout the hospital is seen in the chapel as well.

Swimming in the waters of the windows are fish which were designed and painted by Warren Simmons, who restored all the St. Francis windows in the children’s garden at the hospital.

“He is the master craftsman who took my watercolor designs and with the help of Colt Hurst, Sarah Lasavio and Ellen Ogden, produced and installed these (chapel) windows,” said Wilson.

An LSU graduate with a master’s degree in fine arts, Wilson said the hallmark of anyone who studied under LSU professor Paul Dufor is “their exuberant use of color.”

“In these windows I’ve tried to use the whole spectrum. I’ve also tried to color them as if a child’s coloring book, staying bright at the top, lowering the value (darkening) toward the water,” said Wilson.

The method creating the stained-glass windows involves fusing the materials in a kiln.

“It’s been that way for a couple thousand of years,” said Wilson, who noted that “stained glass is the medium of the church.”

Stating that the chapel definitely has a Catholic presence, Wilson hopes the messages of heavenly accompaniment, protection, healing and comfort will speak to everyone.

“May all who use this chapel for prayer, song or receiving Holy Communion feel their joy, the presence of strong superhero like angels and especially the presence of the Lord for ‘it is he that has made us’ and loves us,” Wilson said.

St. Gabriel the Archangel, the great communicator and bearer of the most important messages in human history, is present in the chapel through stained glass medium.

In 2020, Give the Best Gift of All – Yourself!

Every day there are people who are praying for a miracle – just an everyday miracle – like a hot meal, a prescription filled, a warm bed or a decent pair of shoes. You can help.

Volunteer Opportunities:

- **Manna Givers** - We need individuals or groups who can bring in a purchased or prepared supper once a month for our homeless guests.
- **Dining Room Volunteers** - Help with our meal service at the St. Vincent de Paul Dining Room.
- **Pharmacy Volunteers** - We have a volunteer job for you helping us with our Fill A Prescription for the Needy effort.
- **Book and Collectible Volunteers** - Help us sort and organize donated books and antiques. In addition, we need help organizing clothing/shoe donations for needy families at St. Vincent de Paul Stores throughout our community!
- **Many Other Volunteer Opportunities – Waiting Just for YOU** - Visit us at svdpbr.org and sign-up for one of many heavenly volunteer experiences at St. Vincent de Paul; Visit us on Facebook at Society of St. Vincent de Paul of Greater Baton Rouge.

You can have a life with purpose by sharing the Gospel – Get involved with St. Vincent de Paul!