Empty fonts do not parch waters of faith

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

By habit many people enter a Catholic Church and immediately head for the holy water font to dip their fingers and make the sign of the cross.

Today, the fonts are dry.

Because of health concerns created by the coronavirus pandemic, holy water fonts have been emptied. But an empty holy water font creates an opportunity for Catholics to plunge more deeply into the waters of their faith, according to priests of the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

“Holy water is a sacramental, defined as a sacred sign that bears resemblance to the sacraments,” said Father Matthew Lorrain, pastor of St. John the Baptist Church in Brusly.

The Books of Blessings points out that “holy water reminds the faithful of Christ, who is given to us as the supreme divine blessing, who called himself the living water, and who in water established baptism for our sake as the sacramental sign of the blessing that brings salvation.”

And for Catholics, “everything starts at baptism,” according to Father Brent Maher, pastor of St. Ann Church in Morganza.

“It’s the gateway by which we become members of the mystical body of Christ, the church and gain access to the infinite riches that are the right of every Catholic: the sacraments, knowledge of the faith, membership in the community and much more,” said Father Maher.

He emphasized Catholics were reminded in a recent Sunday reading of St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans that baptized Christian Catholics have died to a life of sinfulness and are supposed to live for God.

“In that sense, holy water is like a miniature flood that destroys sin and produces the green plants of virtue. This is one of the great things about holy water: because it is actually blessed, it has power to open souls to receiving the grace of God. The faithful know this inherently, and this is why holy water is so vital for our expression of faith,” said Father Maher.

Father Lorrain said Catholics “use holy water as a reminder and renewal of our baptism. Thus, Catholics of all ages, from elders to toddlers, bless themselves with holy water when entering and exiting a church. The blessing helps to remind us that we are entering...”

SEE WATER PAGE 15

Schools planning for unusual year

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge are scheduled to open in early August, with principals using the month of July to tweak protocols, according to Dr. Melanie Palmisano, Superintendent of Catholic Schools.

Palmisano emphasized protocols will be tailored to each school’s individual needs, but the health and safety of all students and faculty remain the top priority.

“One size fits none,” she said. “To make one policy that would affect all 30 schools would not be useful.”

Schools must follow guidelines set by the Louisiana Department of Education. In the current Phase 2 of the state’s reopening, the maximum amount of people in a classroom is 25, including students, teachers and teacher aids. Some schools have already removed bookcases, reading corners and other furniture from their classrooms, creating additional square footage for proper social distancing.

“Schools are looking at different options,” Palmisano said. “They must look at the size of the room and where it is located. Also, could be classes broken up into smaller groups. Each group has to look at it.”

She said school officials have been budging with consultants from Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center who are visiting each school and offering recommendations on a myriad of issues, including configurations of classrooms, how to address recess and lunch and best practices for students walking the hallway between classes.

“(The consultants) are helping the school figure out how to prevent as much as possible infections,”
The ‘greater’
St. James

By Dina Dow

The Mass readings during the 16th and 17th Sundays in Ordinary Time reveal the goodness of the Lord, as we seek the kingdom of heaven during our earthly life.

To be just

In the Book of Wisdom, we read of the great might of God, as perfect, just and lenient. He is the source of all creation who guides his people with justice and mercy that surpasses human comprehension but is possible to adhere. God teaches us to be just and kind, sowing seeds of hope, recognizing our own sinfulness and repenting for our sins. As the psalmist writes, “Lord, you are good and forgiving” (Ps 86:8). We are called to be good and forgiving, just and merciful.

To understand

The power of God is above our understanding, yet the Holy Spirit can aid in our growth of understanding. The greatest king of Israel desired such a treasure. When asked by God, “Ask something of me and I will give it to you,” King Solomon responded, “Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong” (1 Kgs 3:9). Do we ask for the ability to understand, to distinguish between the good and the wrong? Do we seek to be understood, rather than to understand, as we pray in the Serenity Prayer? Do we desire an understanding heart? Why does Solomon ask for understanding rather than riches, power or a long life?

A just king will truly desire to understand the people entrusted to the king’s leadership. A king is to promote peace in the land, to acquire allies instead of enemies and to promote a thriving community of solidarity. Solomon embraced his position as a servant leader, desiring what was best for the people whom God had placed under his lead. This was a true call and powerful mission. We are also called to be “kings,” that is, servant leaders to those in our homes and wider community. In order to accomplish and, at times, lead, we embrace our call, follow God’s will and serving others, all of which bears good fruit.

Like the mustard seed, the smallest act done according to the will of God results in building the kingdom of heaven on earth. Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to yeast used as leaven. We are called to be leaven, rising to build heaven on earth. And like discovering a buried treasure in a field or the finding of a perfect pearl, once we understand the joy of mission, known as discipleship, we “sell” all we have and “buy” it. We place discipleship as a top priority and invest all we have in order to understand the will of God, to work to build heaven on earth, and to continue to seek that which is good for the glory of God and betterment of those on earth.

Then at the end of time, when the net of God is “thrown into the sea,” may we be among the good catch, set aside for eternal life in heaven, and “will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father,” our kind and merciful king. Amen.

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

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Father Frank Uter set to retire

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Father Frank Uter sees his upcoming retirement as moving forward into another ministry in which he can better serve the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

“I could have retired seven years ago (according to diocesan policy), but I enjoyed what I was doing, and I was happy to keep going,” said Father Uter, pastor at Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs.

“Then it dawned on me it was a Catch 22 because I enjoyed it, if I didn’t do something the transition into retirement would be more difficult.”

Father Uter attended a pre-retirement workshop for priests at St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology at St. Meinrad, Indiana. The workshop informed priests about moving into other ministries once they retire.

“From years of serving on the priest personnel board I knew that the diocese needed a priest who could take the place of priests while they were sick, away, or on sabbatical,” said Father Uter. “For me this was the ideal situation. I can be there as long as necessary and do what I like most, administering the sacraments and pastoral ministry.

“After 51 years serving in the diocese I know the diocese rather well. I am looking forward to that.”

Originally scheduled to retire July 1, Bishop Michael G. Duca asked Father Uter if he could stay a little longer, which he has been happy to do. He said the delay has also been part of making the transition easier.

Father Uter has traveled the diocese in his 51 years of priesthood. Many well wishers packed ICC in May 2019 when Father Uter and several fellow priests celebrated his 50th anniversary Mass.

Father Uter has served as pastor of St. Mary of False River Church in New Roads, St. Joseph Cathedral in Baton Rouge, the cluster parishes of St. Michael the Archangel in Convent, St. Joseph in Paulina and Most Sacred Heart of Jesus in Gramercy, as well as parochial vicar at St. Isidore Church in Baker and St. Thomas More Church in Baton Rouge.

Several of the parishes were approaching milestone anniversaries at the time of his assignment.

When Father Uter was assigned to St. Mary of False River in 1976, he helped plan the 250th anniversary celebration of the founding of the Catholic Church in Pointe Coupee Civil Parish at the Post de la Pointe Coupee by French missionaries in 1728.

Likewise, when he was assigned to St. Joseph Cathedral in 1984, he helped plan the bicentennial celebration of the cathedral and the Catholic Church in Baton Rouge.

Father Uter has ministered to some families for several generations through baptisms, weddings and funerals. He mused that with one family he taught the grandfather eighth-grade religion, married him and his wife, baptized and married their children and is now getting ready to baptize one of their grandchil- dren.

“It’s like in some ways I am a great grandpa,” laughed Father Uter. “For 46 years I have journeyed with that family.”

He added, “I have been with the people for 51 years, who have made a difference in my life and whom I care about.”

Father Uter will be on hand to “pass the torch” to Father Matthew Graham when he assumes the assignment of pastor at ICC on Aug. 10.

Father Graham served at ICC in the summer of 2012 when he was a seminarian at Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans.

“I am very excited about him here with us,” said Father Uter.

Meanwhile, as he reflects on his upcoming retirement, Father Uter said, “I don’t see retirement as ‘turning out the light’ as much as shining the light on the things that you haven’t had a chance to see and do.”

And to continue shining the light of faith to the entire diocese.

Father Uter holds “Little Frankie,” a baby goat named after him that was born at the petting zoo at the 2013 Parish Fair at Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs. Photo provided by Father Frank Uter

Bishop Robert E. Tracy ordained Father Frank Uter on March 1, 1969 at St. Joseph Cathedral in Baton Rouge. Photo provided by the Archives Department of the Diocese of Baton Rouge
Pro-life leaders react to court’s pro-life ruling

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

The U.S. Supreme Court’s decision striking down Louisiana’s abortion law holds doctors who perform abortions to a lower standard of health care than that of their peers, Danielle Van Haute, Respect Life Coordinator for the Diocese of Baton Rouge, said.

In a 5-4 decision released June 20, the Supreme Court, in a decision that was surprising to many pro-life advocates, ruled Louisiana’s 2014 Unsafe Protection Act unconstitutional. The law would have required doctors who perform abortions have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals.

“It was definitely disappointing because ultimately what it is saying is that physicians who only treat women, because they are the only ones who can have abortions, are not being held to the same standards as other physicians,” Van Haute said. “Many (pro-abortion) people are trying to present it as a good thing because it will not cause ‘undue burden’ to women but regardless of how people stand, pro-choice or pro-life, I don’t understand how we can be okay holding these physicians to a lower standard to other outpatient surgical centers. Physicians who are performing abortions will continue to be held less accountable for their competency and their actions than other physicians.

“It’s almost a different bar when looking at (these) cases with the Supreme Court relating to abortion.”

Writing for the majority in June Medical Services v. Russo, Justice Stephen Breyer said the law presented what he called a “substantial obstacle” for women seeking abortions. In his opinion the law provided “no significant health-related benefits.”

Chief Justice John Roberts also sided with the majority, surprising many because four years ago he voted in favor of upholding a Texas law that was generally perceived as quite similar to Louisiana’s. That law was also struck down by the Supreme Court.

He wrote in his opinion that the Louisiana law “imposes a burden on access to abortion just as severe as that imposed by the Texas law. Therefore, Louisiana’s law cannot stand under our precedents.”

Van Haute attributed Roberts’ decision to strike down Louisiana’s law to the precedent that has been set previously by the Texas law decision.

“I really tried not to speculate on how (Roberts) was going to vote,” she said. “I think the tide is going to be very slow to turn even when we are looking at cases like this that are not directly related to the legality of abortion itself.”

Justice Clarence Thomas, in his dissent opinion, said the court should revisit Roe v. Wade, which in 1973 legalized abortion. He said Roe is “grievously wrong for many reasons.”

Van Haute admitted difficulty to speculating when Roe v. Wade might be overturned, or how it’s going to happen or even what justices will be involved.

“Van Haute said Catholics “are not just trying to overturn Roe v. Wade but affect change within our entire culture regarding the dignity of human life.”

“Abortion is absolutely fundamental to right to life. But regardless of the life issues we are talking about, the establishment of valuing the dignity of life will not come just from a law.”

She said a significant connection exists between legality and morality but believes there are times when people can overlook the affect they can have on a daily basis in conversation with others and having actual dialogue.

Benjamin Clapper, director of Louisiana Right to Life, said he was disappointed in the court’s decision.

Although disappointing, Van Haute said the decision is not demoralizing. She said the fact that the law passed with so much bipartisan support in the Legislature “speaks volumes.”

She also noted that Catholics work for eternity and that “our hope as people ultimately does not rest in the Supreme Court or a political party or anything else of this world. Our hope is in Christ. That’s where we need to start and end every day.”

She said her office is planning for 40 Days of Life, scheduled Sept. 23–Nov. 1, although some plans are in flex because of the uncertainty created by the coronavirus pandemic.

RCIA CELEBRATION – Our Lady of Mercy Church in Baton Rouge welcomed its RCIA candidates and catechumens into full communion with the church on June 23. Receiving the sacrament of confirmation from OLOM pastor Father Cleo Milano is Lydia Roberts, accompanied by her sponsor, Adele Dalmau. Photo provided by Christy Haldane
Deacon candidate to bring faith to Hispanic community

(Six new permanent deacons are scheduled to be ordained Aug. 8 at St. Joseph Cathedral in Baton Rouge. This is the fifth of a series on each of the deacon candidates.)

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Sensing a need for spiritual direction in the Hispanic community, Gabriel Rico looked to his own Catholic faith to serve the people he so dearly loves.

Rico, who arrived in Baton Rouge six years ago via his native Colombia and Pasadena, California, said after much prayer the message in his heart was that he can be most effective ministering to the Latino community as a deacon. So five years ago he made the decision to enter the diaconate program for the Diocese of Baton Rouge and is one of six deacon candidates scheduled to be ordained Aug. 8 by Bishop Michael G. Duca at St. Joseph Cathedral in Baton Rouge.

The candidates are the first class to be ordained through the formation program at Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University.

“I really saw a calling in the Hispanic community, especially in Louisiana,” Rico, who is a Spanish instructor at Louisiana State University, said. “There are not too many Spanish speaking priests, and I could not find any Spanish speaking deacons.”

“I see the need to get into the (diaconate) program, not only for myself, not only for my wife, but also for the future of the Hispanic community in Baton Rouge and for the future of the Catholic Church in Baton Rouge,” he added.

Rico’s initial calling to the diaconate came while living in Pasadena, where he moved from Colombia in 1990 when he was 22 years old. He and his wife Arlene, a Los Angeles native, were worldwide Marriage Encounter presenters and hosts at their parish church, where they were also eucharistic ministers.

“That is the place where I found my calling,” he said.

But at the time, the Ricos were raising their young son and daughter, who are now 32 and 25, respectively. So Rico was advised to delay entering the diaconate program until his daughter was at least 18 years old.

Six years ago, he accepted his current job at LSU and the couple joined Christ the King Church and Catholic Center in Baton Rouge. They immediately immersed themselves into the Hispanic community, including launching Spanish Marriage Encounter presentations, which have proven to be popular. Rico also became active in the Hispanic Apostolate and two years ago was assigned to St. Therese of Avila Church in Gonzales to minister to the growing Hispanic community in that area.

Rico, who will be assigned as a deacon assistant at St. Therese after ordination, and his wife will continue to support the Spanish speaking prayer group and are exploring new ways to more spiritual enriching opportunities, such as a Hispanic rosary group.

As he became more involved in the community, Rico once again experienced the calling of becoming a deacon and discussed the possibility with then-Church pastor Father Robert Stine. Rico said Father Stine was encouraging and even recommended him to Father Jamin David, director of the Office of Diaconate Formation.

Rico said Father Stine and Father David continually provided spiritual guidance and encouragement to complete the program.

“The first obstacle was the language,” Rico said of the five-year formation program. “The classes were in English and I was kind of scared, but Father Stine, Father David and (FranU adviser) David Whidden said they did not see why I would not succeed.”

Rico, who recently began working toward his PhD, is grateful for the support and help of St. Therese pastor Father Eric Gyan and deacon assistant Jodi Moscena.

Rico said one of his goals is to encourage Hispanic men to consider becoming deacons. In his native Latin America, Rico said since there are fewer deacons than in the United States because of the abundance of priests, so many Hispanics identify a male in vestments as being a priest.

“They think I am a priest,” he joked. “My goal is to tell the Hispanic community that married people can be a deacon in the church. The calling is for married men.”

He also has a strong desire to provide assistance to so many Hispanics who are afraid to express themselves because of the language barrier.

“Once they identify me as Latino there is better communication and a better way to serve them,” he said. “There is a lot of need.”

No matter his ministerial course, what is certain is Arlene will be by Rico’s side.

“We are a team; she is my partner, my support, my everything,” Rico said. “The message to Catholics that being married (to a deacon) does not mean we have to be separated. We can tell them you can be together and work together in ministry. We tend to be together always.

“I’m really lucky she is willing to help.”

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Forgiveness of ‘many’ or ‘all’?/ Divorce, remarriage and Communion

Q During Mass, at the consecration of the wine, the priest says, “for the forgiveness of many.” Why not “for the forgiveness of all”? (Northampton, Pennsylvania)

A I should start by saying that it is clearly the teaching of the church that Jesus suffered and died for all men and women. That is attested to in several different scriptural passages (Jn 11:52; 2 Cor 5:14-15; Ti 2:11; 1 Jn 2:2).

In the official English-language edition of the Order of the Mass (in use since 1973), the priest, while consecrating the wine, had said, “which will be shed for you and for all.”

But in 2006, in a letter from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, the Vatican explained that a more accurate translation of the Latin words “pro multis” would be “for many” and directed that subsequent translations should reflect that newer wording.

So when the current English version of the Roman Missal was published in 2011, that change was made. This language is not meant to denote any narrowing of the saving action of Christ.

Instead, it repeats more faithfully the wording used in the Last Supper narratives in the Gospels of Matthew (26:28) and Mark (14:24) and, as the 2006 Vatican letter explains, reflects the fact that the salvation won by Jesus is not automatically applied to everyone.

As the letter says, “This salvation is not brought about in some mechanistic way, without one’s own willing or participation; rather, the believer is invited to accept in faith the gift that is being offered and to receive the supernatural life that is given to those who participate in this mystery, living it out in their lives as well so as to be numbered in the ‘many’ to whom the text refers.”

Q My brother was married in the Catholic Church but got divorced many years ago. Since then, he has not received holy Communion, although he goes to Mass every week. He also got remarried (not, of course, in the Catholic Church—he hadn’t had his first marriage annulled), but he and his second wife are no longer living together.

My question is this: Since he is no longer living as a married person, couldn’t he just go to confession and then be able to receive the Eucharist? (Miami)

A Your brother was correct in not receiving holy Communion; the fact of his second marriage outside the Catholic Church did make him ineligible to take the Eucharist.

The divorce by itself did not take away the chance for Communion. A fair number of people think — unfortunately — that a divorce itself has that effect; that is untrue in fact, sometimes a divorce can occur with little, or even no, responsibility on the part of one of the spouses; and even a spouse who bears major responsibility for the breakup of a marriage can go to confession and be absolved.

But a marriage outside the church does remove the chance of receiving holy Communion; the reception of the Eucharist implies that a person recognizes and accepts what the church teaches, including the church’s guidelines on marriage.

So what can your brother do now, since he is no longer living with his second wife? Well, if that second marital relationship is really over, you are right he can, and should, see a priest for confession.

He should explain to the priest his circumstances (the fact of the second marriage), ask forgiveness and be absolved. Then he would be ready to return to the nourishing presence of Christ in holy Communion.

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 go to Columbia Circle Dr., Albany, NY 12203.
Reduced music ministries continue to strike spiritual chord

**By Debbie Shelley**  
The Catholic Commentator

During a time when COVID-19 would have people live quietly in despair, church parish music ministry programs in the Diocese of Baton Rouge are striving to bring back worship, hope and life.

“Overnight our whole parish music program ceased to exist because making music in choir and ensembles has been deemed highly risky behavior for spreading the virus,” said Ken Thevenet, director of worship at St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge. “Since the (diocese) has asked choirs not to sing for the liturgy, we have discontinued our choir programs for the time being. Everything is very uncertain so I have not made plans for how we would resume our choirs.”

There is one cantor and an accompanist to sing during the Masses.

As with other churches, music has been greatly limited at St. Aloysius because parishes have been asked to remove hymnals and not distribute any paper handouts.

Thevenet is in favor of using projection screens, but the church is cautious about spending the money to install a video system. He said he been selecting upbeat music and is even learning about contemporary Christian music.

While some church parishes resumed Masses on the weekend of May 16-17, St. Aloysius resumed with the weekday Masses the following Monday. Particularly because the churches did not have Easter Masses, Thevenet was touched by the sound of music and people singing at that Mass.

“After being away from Mass for weeks, it was beautiful,” said Thevenet.

He noted that in past tragedies, such as floods and hurricanes, people were able to gather to “get through it.”

“But this we couldn’t gather and sing and praise God. Some people still can’t,” said Thevenet.

A virtual National Pastoral Musician Convention was held the week of July 12. Thevenet planned to “tune in” to some sessions and hoped to gain some insights in resuming the music program.

Cheryl Brothers, director of music at St. Margaret Queen of Scotland Church in Albany and Holy Ghost Church in Hammond, said as music progressively returns to Mass, the congregation will hum to reduce the risk of spreading the virus.

She said choir members are like family and “want to come up and hug you.” But they understand the importance of social distancing, especially since a faithful elderly choir member died from the virus after being admitted to a nursing home.

“It made everyone perk up and realize how dangerous this is,” said Brothers.

The combined music program at St. Francis Xavier and Immaculate Conception churches, both in Baton Rouge, have already suffered the loss of its organist and contemporary and male choirs director Keith Thierry to COVID-19 on May 4, according to Nina Gray, music director. To deal with the tragedy and all of the current sufferings, the churches turn to music.

“I plan seasonally most of the time. Especially with the style of music we do, it depends on where the Holy Spirit moves us,” said Gray, whose choirs provide exuberant sounds and are anxiously waiting to get together again.

Currently, Gray may play the piano or organ while one of the choir leaders sings at Mass or she may play and sing at the same time.

“We try to encourage and inspire people,” Gray said. “Some of the community is mourning a loss, so we try to comfort each other. It’s also for the musicians because we’re trying to get the same spiritual food as the people we are ministering to.”

She said the absence of full choirs has been particularly tough for its senior members.

“I know it’s something very challenging and detrimental to them because they were dedicated to choir and that was their (social) outlet,” Gray said.

The musicians continue to provide music for the live-streamed Masses on social media and people respond positively on the churches’ websites.

In light of SFX’s experience during the past few months, choir members, musicians and other parishioners have learned “time is precious. You have to savor every moment of being together,” said Gray.

Before the pandemic, Celeste Veillon, director of music at St. John the Baptist Church in Brusly, planned the music prior to the liturgical seasons. Now she plans month by month.

She noted that the Vatican II’s Constitution on the Liturgy, “Sacrosanctum Concilium,” stated the chant was to be given “pride of place.”

“The Mass the words and the music – if you go back to the beginning, the early Christians were singing songs from their early Jewish roots and it developed from there. Music makes it much more meaningful,” said Rossano.

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Being there is why I’m here.
Bishop Michael G. Duca, upon consultation with and the recommendation of the Clergy Personnel Board, announced several pastoral changes July 5.

The appointments include: Father Joshua Johnson, Vocations Director for the Diocese of Baton Rouge, effective Aug. 1; Father Jamin David, Vicar for Strategic Planning, effective Aug. 1; Father Tomi Thomas IMS, administrator of St. Jules Church in Belle Rose and St. Elizabeth in Paincourtville, effective Aug. 10; Father Joseph Vu, parochial vicar of Holy Rosary Church in St. Amant, effective July 29; Father Matthew Graham, pastor at Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Denham Springs and Mission Chapel of the Sacred Heart in Livingston, effective Aug. 10; Father Andrew Merrick, Director of Seminarians, effective Aug. 1; Father Paul Gros, Co-Director of Formation/Office of Diaconate Formation; Deacon Danny Roussel, deacon intern at St. Mary of False River in New Roads, effective July 13.

Father Johnson, who was ordained May 31, 2014 at Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Baton Rouge by Bishop-Emeritus Bishop Robert W. Muench, will remain as pastor at Holy Rosary Church. He has been a member of the Presbyteral Council since 2018 and has served as parochial vicar at St. Aloysius Church and Christ the King Church and Catholic Center, both in Baton Rouge.

Father Jamin David will remain as pastor at St. Margaret Queen of Scotland Church in Albany and St. Thomas the Apostle Mission Church in Springfield, where he has served since 2012. A member of the Presbyteral Council since 2014, Father David has also served as administrator at Holy Rosary, Mater Dolorosa Church in Independence, parochial vicar at St. Aloysius in Baton Rouge, St. Philomena Church in Labadieville, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Pla...
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The furtive world of Miami-based activists working either on behalf of or against the Castro regime in Cuba in the 1990s is lazily recreated in this undisciplined drama. In telling his fact-based tale, adapted from Fernando Morales’ 2015 book “The Last Soldiers of the Cold War,” writer-director Olivier Assayas would have done well to focus more determinately on the personal toll exacted when a Havana pilot (Edgar Ramirez) defects to face life as a fellow aviator who also fled the island (Wagner Moura), becomes entangled in the array of organizations opposing the Marxist government, some legitimate charities, others dedicated to drug smuggling or acts of violence, the proceedings become as murky as the milieu. The evils of repression and terrorism are even-handedly indicted, and the story showcases martial fidelity in the teeth of unusually challenging circumstances. But the moviemaking is weak. Scenes of gunplay and explosions, semi-graphic marital lovemaking with upper female nudity, a narcotics theme, about a half-dozen mild oaths, occasional rough and crude language. A-III; Not rated by the Motion Picture Association.

The Outpost
Screen Media

A commendable sensitivity to both the inanities and the unrelenting raw horror of combat as well as careful attention to the emotional lives and steadfast valor of soldiers make this drama a contender for the status of a classic war film. Working from a screenplay adapted by Paul Tamasy and Eric Johnson from the 2012 book by CNN correspondent Jake Tapper, director Rod Lurie is particularly adept at limning tiny, telling non-sequitur conversations in this account of the Battle of Kamdesh in Afghanistan on Oct. 3, 2009, when 300 Taliban fighters overran the remote Combat Outpost Keating, at which 53 Americans were based. Though the verisimilitude here extends to language, making this unit viewable for youngsters, the focus remains on the interdependence that has all the imperiled (most prominently Scott Eastwood, Caleb Landry Jones and Orlando Bloom) looking after one another like brothers. Their camaraderie provides an elegant form of inspiration that doesn’t require speeches or flag-waving. Combat violence with some gore, a discussion of suicide, occasional sexual banter, fleeting profanities, pervasive rough and crass language. A-III; R

Greyhound
Apple+

Taut World War II drama follows the captain of a U.S. destroyer (Tom Hanks, who also wrote the screenplay) as, during a period of five days, the convoy of troop transports and supply ships his vessel is helping to protect passes across the area of the North Atlantic beyond the reach of Allied air support. The skipper’s Christian faith is prominent in Hanks’ script, adapted from C.S. Forester’s 1955 novel “The Good Shepherd.” So, too, are his humane values and ability to endure in the face of overwhelming challenges. Shelly Johnson’s atmospheric cinematography contributes to the success of director Aaron Schneider’s engrossing film which, rooted as it is in real events, provides viewers with an educational retrospective as well as a rousing adventure. Probably acceptable for older teens. Much stylized combat violence with minimal gore, a couple of mild oaths, occasional rough and crude language. A-III; PG-13

Flannery O’Connor documentary opening at virtual theaters

WASHINGTON (CNS) – “Flannery,” a documentary about the life and writings of Catholic writer Flannery O’Connor, opens in select virtual cinemas nationwide July 17.

Previously, the movie, which won the Library of Congress Lavine/Ken Burns Prize for Film in 2019, has only been shown in film festivals and college campuses.

The movie screenings have always been followed by discussions with the film’s directors, not only about the movie itself, but about issues raised in it by O’Connor’s writings on race, sexism and faith. The on-line viewings, listed at flanneryfilm.com/calendar, will follow a similar pattern, of sorts, this year with four live, virtual discussions on Facebook with filmmakers, a guest moderator and panelists focusing on O’Connor themes.

The discussions at facebook.com/flanneryfilm/events will focus specifically on race, faith, the craft of writing and O’Connor’s disability. She died in 1964 at age 39 from Lupus complications.

The first discussion July 20 is particularly timely, looking at O’Connor’s complicated relationship with race, from her characters and settings to her personal writings and positions during the civil rights movement.

“Flannery” was an eight-year project of codirectors Elizabeth Coffman and Kief Davidson, an associate professor of film and digital media at Loyola University Chicago, and Jesuit Father Mark Bosco, vice president for mission and ministry at Georgetown University.

It took a while, because as Father Bosco told Catholic News Service last year after the movie won the Ken Burns Prize, and its $200,000 finishing grant, he and Coffman both had day jobs.

But it was a labor of love for both of them. The 96-minute film tells O’Connor’s story from interviews with contemporary writers and artists influenced by her such as actor Tommy Lee Jones and Alice Walker, author of “The Color Purple,” as well as motion graphic animations of pieces of her work and archival footage of an interview with the Georgia author.

O’Connor, described as a Southern Gothic writer, wrote two novels and 32 short stories known for their portrayals of the South and also for their dark and sometimes comical imagery that revealed people’s true, and not always flattering, sides. She also frequently wrote together Catholic themes of grace and redemption.

The animated discussions after the screenings only reinforced the directors’ views that O’Connor still has something to say to readers and audiences right now.

“People respond with passion,” Coffman told CNS in between movie screenings at film festivals last fall.

Father Bosco, an O’Connor expert, said he wanted the movie to give equal time to the writer’s Catholic faith, her white privilege and her sense of being a Southern person and someone with a disability.

The initial idea for the documentary stemmed from a collection of archival interviews about O’Connor that Father Bosco received and intended to show at a conference. The priest, who was then an associate professor of English and theology at Loyola University Chicago, felt he should do more with this material, especially knowing that Coffman, his colleague at Loyola and a documentarian, “knew how to do this in spades.”

They were both intrigued by the idea, but they faced some immediate challenges. For starters, they only had one film interview with O’Connor, and one short piece of her as a child teaching a chicken to walk backward and not many photos. Also, the Flannery O’Connor Trust would not allow dramatic re-enactments of O’Connor’s work. In the end they settled on motion graphics to tell the stories of her works, which also pay tribute to O’Connor’s early work as a cartoonist. The directors also were able to recruit actress Mary Steenburgen to read some of O’Connor’s writings for the film.

Father Bosco had already been keeping tabs on anyone who spoke about O’Connor’s influence in interviews, including several authors, Conan O’Brien and Bruce Springsteen.

“She says very boldly: ‘I write because I’m a Catholic,’” he added, saying she focused more on the brokenness of society, especially in America, and even more particularly, in the South.

Movie poster art for “Flannery,” a documentary about the life and writings of Catholic writer Flannery O’Connor. Image provided by OCS
Candidato a diácono para traer fe a la comunidad hispana

Por Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Viendo la necesidad de una dirección espiritual en la comunidad hispana, Gabriel Rico recurrió a su propia fe católica para servir a las personas que realmente ama.

Rico, quien nació en Colombia, vivió en California y arribó a Baton Rouge hace seis años, dice que después de mucha oración el mensaje en su corazón es el de servir a la comunidad latina como diácono. Hace cinco años él tomó la decisión de entrar a programa del diaconado de la Diócesis de Baton Rouge y es uno de los seis candidatos al diaconado programados para ser ordenados el 8 de agosto por el Obispo Miguel Duca en la Catedral de San José de Baton Rouge.

Los candidatos serán los primeros en ser ordenados a través de la formación del programa de Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University.

“Realmente vi el llamado en la comunidad hispana, especialmente en Louisiana,” dice Rico, quien es un español Instructor en Louisiana State University. “No hay muchos sacerdotes que hablen español, y no se encuentra un diácono que hable español.”

“Ve la necesidad de entrar en el programa de diaconado, no sólo por mí y mi esposa, sino también por el futuro de la comunidad hispana de Baton Rouge, y por el futuro de la Iglesia Católica de Baton Rouge,” él agregó.

El llamado inicial de Rico al Diaconado llegó cuando su hija tuviera por lo menos 18 años de edad. “Fue ahí en la parroquia y centro católico de Christ the King de Baton Rouge, y por el futuro de la Iglesia Católica de Baton Rouge,” él tomó la decisión de entrar al programa del diaconado.

El llamado inicial de Rico a Baton Rouge tuvo lugar hace seis años, dice que “ve a un hombre vestido con sotana piensan que es un sacerdote,” él dice bromeando. “mi meta es decirle a la gente que podrán hacer las cosas juntos en un ministerio.”

Rico, quien será asignado como Diácono Asistente en Santa Teresa después de su ordenación, y su esposa, continuarán ayudando en el grupo de oración y explorarán nuevas formas de enriquecimiento espiritual en la comunidad, como en el Grupo Hispano del Rosario.

A medida que él se fue involucrando más y más en la comunidad, Rico una vez más experimentó la llamada para ser diácono y habló con el Padre Robert Stine, el Párroco de Christ the King, sobre esa posibilidad. Rico dijo que el Padre Stine lo motivó y además lo recomendó con el Padre Jamin David, director de la Oficina de Formación Diaconal.

Rico dijo que el Padre Stine y el Padre David, continuamente lo ayudaron espiritualmente y lo motivaron para que completara el programa.

“El primer obstáculo fue el lenguaje”, dijo Rico con respecto a los cinco años de formación. “Las clases eran en inglés y yo estaba un poco asustado, pero el Padre Stine, el Padre David y el (director académico de FranU) David Whidden, dijeron que no veían por qué yo no iba a tener éxito.”

Rico, quien recientemente comenzó sus estudios para su PhD, está agradecido por el apoyo y la ayuda del pastor de Santa Teresa, el Padre Eric Gyan y con el diácono asistente Jodi Moscena.

Rico dice que una de sus metas es la de motivar a los hombres hispanos para que sean diáconos. En Latinoamérica, Rico dijo, hay pocos diáconos y muchos sacerdotes, por lo que los latinos cuando ven a un hombre vestido con sotana piensan que es un sacerdote. “Muchos piensan que soy un sacerdote,” él dice bromeando. “mi meta es decirle a la comunidad latina que un hombre casado puede llegar a ser diácono.” Él también tiene el gran deseo de ayudar a los latinos que tienen miedo de expresarse por la barrera del idioma. “Una vez que me identifiquen como latino, habrá una mejor comunicación y les podré servir mejor,” él dice, “hay mucha necesidad.”

Sin importar cuál sea el curso de su ministerio, lo cierto es que Arlene estará al lado de Rico. “Somos un equipo; ella es mi compañero, mi apoyo y mi todo,” dice Rico. “El mensaje para los católicos es que estar casada con un diácono, no quiere decir que van a trabajar separados. Les podemos decir que podrán hacer las cosas juntos en un ministerio. "tratamos de estar siempre juntos. Soy muy afortunado de que ella esté dispuesta a ayudar”
Avoiding the trap of money

For most of us money can be a trap. When income tax time rolls around, as it did this year even though it was delayed to July 15 because of the coronavirus pandemic, it is a rather blunt reminder of how much of our personal world is controlled by money. We tally up our tax bill and moan about how little of our salaries we get to keep. We wonder if we should not have given more to charity, helping others while taking more deductions. We look at how much we spent and ask ourselves if we really needed all the stuff we bought. But, as we begin to feel guilty about all that “stuff,” we console ourselves with the thought that at least we contributed to the rise of the Consumer Confidence Index and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

I remember my father exploding one month as he totaled the family gasoline bills. He was answered by one of his daughters, who recently had gotten her driver’s license, with a smile, said, “just working for ESSO.” He was one of their attorneys at the Baton Rouge refinery.

Pope Francis has written on the global economy in his exhortations and encyclicals, especially his first, “Evangelii Gaudium,” on the Joy of the Gospel, and his more recent, “Laudato Si,” on the care of our planet. He has received criticism, particularly for his call for a regulated economy that aims at benefiting the poor and not simply enriching the better off among us. However, Pope Francis is well within the social and economic tradition of former popes.

Almost 40 years ago, St. John Paul II wrote his first encyclical, “Redemptor hominis” (Man’s Redeemer), in which he contrasted Christian values with consumerist ideology. He warned against the danger of our own humanity becoming “subject to manipulation in many ways ... through the production system and through pressure from the means of social communication.”

The economy often strikes me as a Catch 22, an inescapable dilemma. We want people to have jobs, which demands a production system which rumbles along ideally at a slow but steady increase. We don’t want cutbacks and layoffs that leave workers losing their jobs and feeling like expendable parts. So, some more production is good. But as St. John Paul II says, “the means of social communication” (translate advertising) are always pushing for much more consumerism, which requires much more production and provides more jobs.

The Super Bowl ads are the classic examples of the advertising industry. Some are so well done they approach art forms. One of my favorites was a super suave exuberant dater who doused his girlfriend with Budweiser after his victory dance in her kitchen. But whether it’s trying to make champagne out of beer or get us all to own Subarus, the message is still buy, buy, buy. And true to the pope’s prediction, we are being manipulated.

The late Father John Kavanaugh SJ started me thinking about consumerism a long while ago with a Christmas column in America Magazine. He recalled a Christmas ad for a new credit card. It asked, “What gives?” and answered, “MasterCard.” A student, showing him the ad, commented on the “impoveryishment of the personal world in capitalism’s Xmas.” Along with St. John Paul II, that student feared consumerism was getting a stranglehold on our moral lives. The tail was wagging the dog. We were becoming controlled by our things.

Capitalism seems to be the only workable system, but we humans must continuously struggle not to be controlled by its mandates. In that America Magazine article, Father Kavanaugh listed some books by secular writers that echoed St. John Paul’s theme of weakened religion and diminished humanity being the result of excessive consumerism.

Thomas Frank’s “One Market under God” debunked the rituals of market-worship and its high priests, “Happiness in Market Democracies” by Robert Lane portrayed the systemic loneliness and lack of mutual trust endemic in a system devoted to the endless accumulation of products. Finally, Robert Frank wrote “Luxury Fever: Why Money Fails to Satisfy in an Era of Excess.” In a rising market we easily succumb to greed which can override relationships and religious beliefs.

Sometimes it takes the horror of a pandemic or a couple of strong hurricanes or earthquakes to remind us that we can be submerged or buried under an abundance of things. Christ must remain our center, for through him we find God and our true humanity as well. As we pray for victims of disease or natural catastrophes, let us remember the relationships of Christian community that no money can buy.

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.

FATHER CARVILLE
Racial Harmony Commission statement

(The Racial Harmony Commission of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, a bi-racial commission, which consists of 12 members and includes clergy, religious and laity of the diocese, continues to meet at the direction of Bishop Michael G. Duca to explore ways to better understand the effects of racism on our society and to build community around the need for racial harmony.

The commission issued the following statement in response to the death of George Floyd and to commemorate the fourth anniversaries of the deaths of Alton Sterling and law enforcement officers Montrell Jackson, Brad Garafola and Matthew Gerald).

Over the last month, protesters and marches have become frequent occurrences in our country. The public, brutal killing of George Floyd by police has shaken our nation, and we mourn his death.

The deaths of Mr. Floyd and so many other African Americans and Hispanics – Breonna Taylor, Ahmad Arbery, Rayshard Brooks, Elijah McClain, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Botham Jean, Tamar Rice and Baton Rouge’s Alton Sterling on July 5, 2016 – serve as constant reminders that in far too many cases the law is enforced differently depending upon the color of one’s skin.

In the aftermath of Mr. Sterling’s death, Baton Rouge bore witness to waves of painful emotions such as anger, horror, helplessness and grief. These feelings were amplified 12 days later by the murder of three local law enforcement officers – Montrell Jackson, Brad Garafola and Matthew Gerald – creating further anger, shock and division.

The tragic events of 2016 bear witness to the truth of the statement that violence breeds violence, and justice denied to anyone systematically will breed fear, contempt for the law, anger and division in our city, state and country. “If a house is divided against itself, it cannot stand” (Mark 3:25).

Similar to Mr. Floyd, the taking of Mr. Sterling’s life was senseless, and the manner of his death disturbed our hearts and souls. But it is not enough just to be disturbed. We need to face the truth: slavery is America’s original sin and is a sin against humanity. The damage that this sin has inflicted, and the systemic racial injustice that it has spawned, have affected every aspect of American life over the last four centuries. We must truthfully acknowledge and address this stain on our heritage, or our community and our nation will remain broken.

As we remember the events of four years ago in this extraordinary year of 2020, we unite ourselves with every family and community which have suffered loss through violence. We highly value the service of law enforcement officers who put themselves in harm’s way to protect and serve our community, and we honor the commitment of those who work for a just society. But we are too often reminded that our community and country are in need of continued healing and transformation.

Matters of race are woven into our history as a nation, which is one of the most diverse nations in the world. While our diversity has been essential to our greatness, it has also given us a legacy of tension and conflict. As a commission we renew our commitment to reforming unjust practices and policies that continue to accommodate some members in our society and hurt others, perpetuating inequality, inequity and injustice across the racial divide.

We further commit ourselves to reflect, pray and examine our consciences with respect to the sin of racism. We seek opportunities to dialogue with others whose faith is deep, lively and inclusive so that true listening can begin. We affirm this must include an identification and a rejection of systemic racial injustice in all of its forms. We believe that violence is never a just or acceptable response to any conflict, and that honest dialogue is the only pathway to promoting God’s peace, social justice and real change.

With God’s help, and by honestly acknowledging foundational problems and genuinely listening to one another, we believe real progress is possible. Black lives do matter. As Dr. Martin Luther King so wisely stated, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Deeper things under the surface

Imagine this. You are the dutiful daughter or son and your mother is widowed and living in an assisted living facility. You happen to be living close by while your sister is living across the country, thousands of miles away. So the weight falls on you to be the one to help take care of your mother. You dutifully visit her each day. Every afternoon, on route home from work, you stop and spend an hour with her as she has her early dinner. And you do this faithfully, five times a week, year after year.

As you spend this hour each day with your mother, year after year, how many times during the course of a year will you have a truly stimulating and deep conversation with your mother? Once? Twice? Never? What are you talking about each day? Trivial things: the weather, your favorite sports team, what your kids are doing, and your aches and pains, and the mundane details of your own life. Occasionally you might even doze off for a while as she eats her early dinner. In a good year, perhaps once or twice, the conversation will take on some depth and the two of you will share more deeply about something of importance; but, save for that rare occasion, you will simply be filling in the time each day with superficial conversation.

But, and this is the question, are those daily visits with your mother the best conversation, merely functionary because your conversations aren’t deep? Are you simply going through the motions of intimate relationship because of duty? Is anything deep happening? Well, compare this with your sister who is (conveniently) living across the country and comes home once a year to visit your mother. When she visits, both she and your mother are wonderfully animated, they embrace enthusiastically, shed some tears upon seeing each other, and seemingly talk about things beyond the weather, their favorite sports teams and their own tiredness. And you could kill them both! It seems that in this once-a-year meeting they have something that you, who visit daily, do not have. But is this true? Is what is happening between your sister and your mother in fact deeper than what is occurring each day when you visit your mother? Absolutely not. What they have is, no doubt, more emotional and more affective, but it is, at the end of the day, not particularly deep. When your mother dies, you will know your mother better than anyone else knows her and you will be much closer to her than your sister. Why? Because through all those days when you visited her and seemed to talk about nothing beyond the weather, some deeper things were happening under the surface.

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Your sister had with your mother is what novices experience in prayer and what couples experience on a honeymoon. What you had with your mother is what people experience in prayer and relationships when they are faithful over a long period of time. At a certain level of intimacy in all our relationships, including our relationship with God in prayer, the emotions and the affectivity (wonderful as they are) will become less and less important and simple presence, just being together, will become paramount. Previous to that, the important things were happening on the surface and emotions and affectivity were important; now deep bonding is happening beneath the surface and emotions and affectivity re-cede in importance. At a certain depth of relationship just being present to each other is what is important.

Too often, both popular psychology and popular spirituality do not really grasp this and consequently confuse the novice for the proficient, the honeymoon for the wedding, and the surface for the depth. In all of our relationships, we cannot make promises as to how we will always feel, but we can make promises to always be faithful, to show up, to be there, even if we are only talking about the weather, our favorite sports team, the latest television program, or our own tiredness. And it is okay occasionally to fall asleep while there because as Therese of Lisieux once said: a little child is equally pleasing to its parents, awake or asleep, probably more asleep! That also holds true for prayer. God does not mind us occasionally napping while at prayer because we are there and that is enough. The great Spanish doctor of the soul, John of the Cross tells us that as we travel deeper into any relationship, be it with God in prayer, with each other in intimacy, or with the community at large in service, eventually the surface will be less emotive and less affective and the deeper things will begin to happen under the surface.

In Exile

Father Ron Rolheiser

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.
CLEVELAND (CNS) – Nearly every bishop responding to a survey said the coronavirus pandemic has seriously affected the celebration of the sacraments and rites and sacramental preparation programs in their dioceses.

Confirmations, first Communions, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and other sacramental preparation were the ministries most often cited by the bishops as being affected, according to the survey conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University.

In addition, six out of 10 bishops said that since March when restrictions on ministry and Mass attendance were put in place, the morale of priests, lay ecclesial ministers, deacons and chancery staff has been at least somewhat affected, according to the findings released July 9.

Titled “Ministry in the Midst of Pandemic,” the survey asked bishops about six areas of concern that have arisen in dioceses since the pandemic caused public Masses to be suspended and the celebration of sacraments to be restricted or postponed.

The questions focused on the pandemic’s effect on dioceses; special pastoral provisions issued by dioceses; financial concerns raised by the pandemic; actions to address a diocese’s financial health; the pandemic’s effect on parish assessments; and diocesan technological assistance to schools and parishes.

CARA staff members mailed the survey to bishops in 177 archdioceses and dioceses and 20 eparchies May 18 and followed up with a mailing June 8 to those who did not respond. Overall, 116 bishops, 59%, had responded by the release of the report. About 60% of diocesan bishops responded and about 50% of eparchial bishops responded, the report’s authors said.

CARA officials said the results of the survey were likely affected by whether a bishop responded while his diocese or eparchy was in total lockdown or as restrictions began to be lifted.

When it came to specific sacraments, 99% of bishops said confirmation had been very much or somewhat affected; 99% said that about first Communion; 92%, about the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults process; and 94%, about other sacramental preparation programs.

Similar numbers of respondents said the celebration of marriages (98%), baptisms (91%) and funerals (93%) also had been at least somewhat affected.

In addition, the survey found the morale of church staff members has been very much or somewhat affected. Sixty percent of bishops said their morale had been affected. Higher numbers of respondents said the morale of lay ecclesial ministers (71%), priests (68%), chancery staff (67%) and deacons (62%) had been affected.

Meanwhile, 54% of bishops said the ability of Catholic Charities to serve people in need had been impacted as well.

Jonathan Wiggins, director of parish surveys at CARA, told Catholic News Service the survey offers an early look at how the pandemic is affecting church life.

“What really strikes me is that this is so much a work in progress because parishes are not back up to any kind of normalcy in terms of Mass attendance, sacraments, giving or anything that would characterize regular Catholic life,” Wiggins said.

“This is just a couple months in and we don’t know what the long-term effects will be on dioceses and parishes,” he added. A similar survey of parish pastors by CARA officials said the results of the survey offers an early look at how the pandemic is affecting church life.

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For Mary Rosenbloom, director of music at St. Gerard Majella Church in Baton Rouge, the congregation’s cheerful response in such a time of trial and suffering struck up music in her heart. “It’s a happy place to be,” said Rosenbloom. “When we re-opened, all you could see (besides masks) were their eyes, and they were shining, smiling eyes.”

During Mass, the St. Gerard congregation will hear several styles of music, from classical hymns to contemporary Christian music they might hear on the radio. Rosenbloom said she “pulls them all in” to find messages that bring out the beauty of the church. “As we continue this journey through COVID, I try to help people appreciate the different styles of music of the church, and it’s all dignified,” said Rosenbloom.

For some, it may seem that we are journeying through the season of Lent all over again, according to Father Jerry Martin, pastor of St. John the Evangelist Church in Prairieville. “During Lent some parishes will leave their holy water fonts dry to evoke the sense of the dryness of the 40 days of Jesus going into the desert and to make us desire more deeply the words of baptism,” said Father Martin. “We can use this time of COVID dryness in the same way we use the dryness of Lent. Hopefully, absence will make the heart grow fonder.”

Bishops said their diocese had helped parishes apply for federal or state assistance programs, such as the Paycheck Protection Program. Other steps taken by dioceses include encouraging parishioners to consider electronic giving for parish collections (87%); closing Catholic elementary schools (26%) or high schools (14%); laying off diocesan staff (17%); furloughing diocesan staff (16%); eliminating diocesan programs (15%); closing parishes (3%).

Bishops expect the diocese to realize long-term economic consequences, especially if annual collections to support various ministries are not taken. One bishop wrote that “we might have to let employees go. Won’t be able to carry out the vision of the new evangelization and catechesis including faith formation programs.”

The financial solvency of Catholic schools was also on the minds of bishops. Some respondents said they feared that high unemployment would result in parents who could no longer be able to afford school tuition, causing enrollment to drop and leading to school closings. Such closings already are occurring, according to the National Catholic Educational Association, with more than 100 schools having announced they have closed since the end of the academic year in the spring.

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SURVEY ▼
From page 14

CARA researchers is underway, Wiggins added.

The survey of bishops offered them the opportunity to provide brief written answers to questions about pastoral provisions they may have implemented, such as the dispensation to attend weekly Mass, instructions on the celebration of the sacraments such as baptism and marriage and directives to comply with state and local government orders.

Those responses were not quantified in the CARA report. But it included comments from bishops describing the steps they took as the pandemic led to massive church, school and business lockdowns in March and then eased in May and June.

Some bishops said they offered updates as often as weekly with regard to liturgies, finances, how parishioners can contribute to their parish during closures, and how parishes could reopen for public Masses and reception of the sacraments.

Responding bishops said they instructed parish offices to follow state guidelines when public Masses resumed and stressed the importance of practicing social distancing and celebrating Mass in open spaces such as parking lots.

Regarding finances, bishops said they were concerned that the loss of income from Sunday collections would have a devastating impact on parishes. They also said they worried about the effect of increased unemployment on parishioners and the impact on family life.

The new directory has all of the current listings and information on churches, clergy, schools, diocesan departments and personnel of the diocese, religious, retreat centers, deaneries, institutions and organizations and more!

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Palmisano said. “How to handle the day to day that we did not have to think about before COVID-19.”

Palmisano said start and end times will be determined by each school, with an attempt to keep those times “as normal as possible.” But she added the possibility exists that no public school bus service will be available because of the coronavirus pandemic.

“If that is the case, schools may have to stagger intake times to help parents with carpool traffic,” Palmisano said. “They will make sure students have a quality school day.”

Protocols for students entering the building will vary but Palmisano stressed all schools will have a method verifying each student is entering a healthy space.

Parents might have to log into the school’s app in the morning and answer a series of health-related questions.

Some schools could possibly have daily temperature checks of all students.

Recess will also have a different look as students will not be allowed to play on the equipment or engage in any contact sports.

Lunch is also certain to have a far different look. Lunches will either be delivered to the classroom so students can eat at their desk or lunches will be grab and go, with students either returning to the class to eat or perhaps eating outside in a picnic style, depending on the weather.

Palmisano said practice for fall sports at the elementary schools, which typically begin shortly after school opens, have been delayed until after Labor Day and “then we are going to see.”

The annual football jamboree has been cancelled and while hopeful games will be played, Palmisano said guidance from the state and health professionals will ultimately guide that decision.

Palmisano acknowledged some Louisiana public school systems are offering online class options but the diocese, in a statement released June 30, said, “Catholic schools in our diocese partner directly with parents on such requests. It is important for students to have social interaction at school for their holistic development, so the ideal is for students to return to classrooms and develop relationships with teachers and their peers.

“It is important for students to have social interaction at school for their holistic development, so the ideal is for students to return to classrooms and develop relationships with teachers and their peers.”

Dr. Melanie Palmisano
Superintendent of Catholic Schools

A Child’s Smile – Priceless

So many school children like Jaelyn, Harold, Aubree, Madison, and Arabella need your help! It’s impossible for a child to fully understand the COVID-19 pandemic, but they understand only too well its impact on their families. During this time of layoffs, record unemployment numbers, and economic uncertainty, needy families are struggling just to survive and keep food on the table, so 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 attend school with confidence and pride in their appearance. The two uniforms we give to each needy child cost only $24.00 – a small price to pay for a child’s self-esteem.

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Join us in helping children like Jaelyn, Harold, Aubree, Madison, and Arabella by sending a financial gift using the form below or by giving online at svdpbr.org. How many children can you help?

Yes, I would like to help clothe needy school children.

Please find enclosed my gift of $__________.

Please mark the parish where you would like to direct your help.

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The coronavirus pandemic has certainly challenged all of us since March 13 when the state of Louisiana ordered that everyone stay home to help control the spread of disease. Schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge continued to provide online learning support from the first day buildings were closed and finished the school year strong, maintaining rigorous learning standards and providing remote support and encouragement to families. We are so proud of our teachers and principals for their great work!

At the end of the school year, students, parents, faculty members, and administrators provided anecdotal stories about the experience of continuing to learn from home. Videos of these testimonies are posted on school websites and on the Catholic Schools Office website csobr.org. The recurring theme for the videos is “Catholic Schools ... Always Learning and Learning In All Ways!”

Even though students were not on campus, they felt connected to their schools and supported by their teachers as they utilized technology for lessons. Connections were made through the livestreaming of teacher presentations, coaching via email, collaboration through Google classrooms and communication through old fashioned phone calls. Catholic school educators demonstrated great resolve in continuing their ministry, astonishing flexibility in delivering lessons online and steadfast resilience to accomplish the mission of completing the school year with integrity.

As we approach the beginning of the 2020-21 school year, we are mindful of the need to return in a way that connects students to each other and to their teachers. Schools currently face the challenge of reopening buildings within health and safety guidelines. Principals did not get much of a summer break this year because they were constantly monitoring updates about COVID-19 in their areas, and committees at each school site met virtually to discuss details about reopening. Each school was afforded the opportunity to consult with a team from the Diocese of Baton Rouge to identify best practices to safeguard students, faculty and staff as the new school year begins.

What we know to be true is that students miss going to school, seeing their friends, and connecting with faculty members who provide relational support for learning. Catholic schools educate the whole child — Evangelizing Hearts Educating Minds and Encouraging Talent. Now we know that we can fulfill that mission in a variety of ways in addition to traditional attendance at school. Catholic schools help students learn in all ways!

**From the Superintendent**

Dr. Melanie Palmisano

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**Diocese of Baton Rouge Catholic Schools**

**STATEMENT OF POLICY**

The schools of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, admit students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all programs or activities administered programs.

Additionally, in compliance with Title IX of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, no person in the schools of the Diocese shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, or be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity except as permitted under said Title IX.

Finally, the schools of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, have adopted and will implement the imperatives of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act as amended, and will inform parents and students of their rights under this amendment to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The above stated policy applies to the following schools and institutions of the Diocese:

- Ascension Diocesan Regional School
- Blessed Margaret of Castello
- REACH Program
- Special Education Program
- Catholic High School (Baton Rouge)
- Catholic of Pointe Coupee
- Cristo Rey Baton Rouge
- Francisican High School
- Holy Family School
- Holy Ghost School
- Mater Dolorosa School
- Most Blessed Sacrament School
- Our Lady of Mercy School
- Redemptorist St. Gerard School
- Sacred Heart of Jesus School
- St. Aloysius School
- St. Alphonsus School
- St. John Primary & St. Theresa Middle School – EA/El Partnership
- St. Elizabeth Interparochial School
- St. Francis Xavier School
- St. George School
- St. Jean Vianney School
- St. John Interparochial School
- St. Joseph School
- St. Joseph’s Academy
- St. Jude the Apostle School
- St. Michael the Archangel Diocesan Regional High School
- St. Peter Chanel Interparochial School
- St. Thomas Aquinas Diocesan Regional High School
- St. Thomas More School

*Signed:* Melanie Palmisano, Superintendent
After a thorough search process for a new principal, Holy Family Church in Port Allen pastor Father David Allen said the most qualified candidate was already in place.

Father Allen said interim principal Alise Ashford was appointed principal for the 2020-21 school year.

“I am pleased to announce that (Ashford) has been chosen to lead Holy Family Catholic School as principal for our 71st year,” Father Allen said, adding that the Catholic Schools Office of the Diocese of Baton Rouge provided valuable assistance during the search.

He said the school was fortunate to have a number of applicants, and after vetting the applications for strength, a committee chose three for interviews.

“The committee very carefully reviewed each candidate’s qualifications within the criteria and standards of the diocese and our own school,” Father Allen said. “At the end of the interview process, and after full discussion the committee made a unanimous recommendation (Ashford) be selected to be our principal with the title of interim removed.”

He said the committee was impressed by Ashford’s communications style, her commitment to Catholic education and the way her Catholic faith guides her life and decision making. Her references and evaluations from the staff at Holy Family were notable, especially the desire of current teachers and staff for her to return, Father Allen said.

“(Ashford) presented ideas for the continued development of Holy Family School and its staff in forming the whole child in the educational process,” Father Allen said. “She also gave insights into more long-range planning and financial vision for Holy Family School in the coming years.”

Zachary Fields, principal at Mater Dolorosa School in Independence, has extensive educational experience and a deep faith that has prepared him for his leadership role.

Fields earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in elementary school education and master's degrees in curriculum and instruction and educational leadership from the University of New Orleans. Additionally, he has a non-public teacher certification through the Louisiana Department of Education for grades 1-8 as a reading specialist and in educational leadership.

During the past 22 years, Fields has served at various schools as a teacher and as an administrator.

“This has prepared him for a deep understanding of the teacher and learning process that is central to educational ministry,” said Father Ruben Dykes, pastor at Mater Dolorosa Church in Independence.

Fields has served as an English language arts teacher at Madisonville Junior High School in Madisonville, as teacher, department co-chair and junior high assistant principal at Brother Martin High School in New Orleans and as fifth-grade teacher at St. Mary Magdalen School in Metairie. Most recently he was upper elementary assistant principal at St. Catherine of Siena School in Metairie.

“(Fields) believes that educational leadership is truly a ministry rooted in tradition and, at the same time, one that should be spread using modern technology as a tool for communication,” said Father Dykes. “He is looking forward to joining the Mater Dolorosa School Family and connecting stakeholders in the common vision and mission of educating God’s precious children.”
Dr. Andrew Kling Jr., incoming principal at St. Elizabeth School in Paincourtville, will lead the school’s staff in their commitment to loving their students, ensuring their safety, walking with them, growing them in their faith and expanding their knowledge.

Kling is a graduate of East Ascension High School in Gonzales. He earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in education from Louisiana State University and earned his educational doctorate from the University of Louisiana in Lafayette.

He’s been in education for 20 years, teaching fourth-grade math and science, sixth-grade math, STEM and PE.

“I have had a chance to speak with staff and parents, and it is obvious St. Elizabeth School is rich in history and tradition,” Kling said. “I expect this to continue. Personally I am thrilled to have the privilege to participate in the education of children while intertwining our Catholic values throughout the process.

He added, “Although the academic growth of a child is extremely important, building up the whole child spiritually, emotionally as well as academically is a much greater cause, one that I am proud to accept.”

Kling and his wife, Jody, have been married 19 years and have two boys, Parker, 15, and Paxton, 11.

Kling said he is an educator because “that is where God has led me.

“I chose athletic training as a career but did not realize until later that this was God’s way of connecting me to teaching. After teaching a few years, my principal encouraged me to consider a leadership path, which is ultimately what I did.”

After six years of practicing as a certified athletic trainer, Kling gave it up and began graduate school.

“I am blessed to call education my profession. I have always had a desire to serve others, and my passion for teaching children and being a small part of their growth is beyond anything I ever imagined it could be,” said Kling.

He spends his free time with family and friends, cooking “because he likes to eat,” and sometimes dabbles in woodworking.

“I’ve lived in Geismar since I was 13, on land that once belonged to my great-grandfather,” Kling, who is planning to commute to Paincourtville, said.
New structure at Catholic of Pointe Coupee

Catholic of Pointe Coupee School need only look internally to lead the school in its new administrative leadership structure.

Jason Chauvin, who served as principal of Catholic Elementary School of Pointe Coupee, was appointed principal of grades K-12. St. Mary of False River Church in New Roads pastor Father Pat Broussard said Chauvin's appointment brings "our campus under one principal, consistent with other schools in (the Diocese of Baton Rouge)."

Chauvin will work with an administrative team consisting of assistant principal Fran Olinde and dean of students Lauren Doucet. Father Broussard said the three administrators will provide leadership and service in a fresh, new way to better meet the educational goals of the school's ministry.

Chauvin earned his Master's of Education in Educational Leadership from LSU and has served Catholic of Pointe Coupee as a high school teacher and coach as well as an elementary school administrator.

Because of his experience, Chauvin "offers a unique perspective on the bridge between the program in service to families," Father Broussard said. "With the new administrative structure, the school will more clearly fulfill that vision and continue to provide a religious, academic and disciplined Catholic education whereby students develop their talents in service to school, church and society."

Olinde has extensive experience in education and has served as assistant principal at Catholic High of Pointe Coupee since 2013 until he became the elementary school principal in 2019. Father Broussard said Olinde is well-versed in aspects of school management to ensure the requirements of the school are met.

Father Broussard noted that Chauvin's focus has always been on his commitment to helping students reach their full potential in the classroom, in the field and within their community.

How to prepare kids to go back to school

The end of summer can be a bittersweet time for students. While many students look forward to seeing their friends, few want to say goodbye to the relaxing days of summer.

Parents know that getting their children back in the school day swing of things can be a challenge. The following are some ways to make that transition go smoothly.

• Introduce more structure as summer vacation winds down. The chance to unwind in a structure-free setting can benefit students at the onset of summer vacation. Many parents grapple with the notion that their children's lives are overscheduled, and the Cleveland Clinic notes that limiting organized activities clears up down time for kids to play and relax and spend time with their families. So it's important that parents afford their children this down time during summer vacation, only gradually
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Sacred Heart’s theme: Love One Another

Sacred Heart of Jesus School in Baton Rouge has selected “Love One Another as I Have Loved You” as its theme for the 2020-21 school year.

The theme is beautifully illustrated in original art that depicts Sacred Heart students playing on the playground in front of the school. The artwork is by retired Sacred Heart of Jesus School art teacher Dorothy Calandro.

According to principal Cecilia Methvin, the artwork actually inspired the theme.

“Dorothy’s work truly embodies the spirit of Sacred Heart,” noted Methvin. “You can feel the love on the playground!”

The school will also incorporate the following prayer into the school year as an extension of the theme: “Turn the world, Spirit of Peace, until reconciliation is on the wind. We are your witnesses. Transform our hearts, Spirit of Life, until love is in each breath. We long for your restoration. Remain with us, Spirit of Liberation, until justice burns like a refining fire.”

“We are blessed with an incredible student body, one diverse in so many ways, yet united in Christ,” Methvin said.

The school theme is displayed in all classrooms and offices of the school and is printed on the school’s spirit T-shirts.

“We go to a school that every single day teaches the very things Jesus taught us . . . to love, to respect, to forgive, to see the value in all life, to stand up for injustice, to have conversations with our kids about how to be better and do better,” said Sacred Heart parent Julie Massey.

Sacred Heart of Jesus School takes great pride in the diversity of its student body, its physical abilities, race, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomics and neighborhoods. “One of the big reasons I chose SHS was because it was more diverse than the other private schools,” said Amanda Graves, a Sacred Heart parent. “And I was not disappointed. I believe it gave my girls real life experiences, as well as a great education, with knowledge how to interact with people of different backgrounds. It’s the best decision I ever made.”

Parents can make sure youngsters’ brains stay sharp and are ready to learn once the school year begins.

• Focus on the positive. Even kids who love school may be apprehensive about returning to the classroom. After all, summer vacation is fun. Parents can confront that apprehension by focusing on the positives of returning to school. Emphasize the chance to see friends every day or participate in a beloved extracurricular activity, like sports, band or a favorite academic club.

• Let kids do some of their own back-to-school shopping. The items that constitute back to school supplies may have changed since parents were in school. But many parents still take their children on back-to-school excursions.

Parents can take various steps to make the transition back to school a successful one for their young students.

PREPARE ▼

From page 58

introducing more structure as the school year draws closer. In the weeks before the school year is slated to begin, start waking kids up a little earlier and reintroducing bedtimes for younger children who may have been staying up later over the last couple of months. This can be an effective way to begin slowly preparing youngsters for the structure of the school year.

• Encourage children to read throughout the summer. A report from the education publishing company Scholastic found that 47% of parents are unaware of the “summer slide,” which refers to the loss of academic skills that occurs when school is not in session. Scholastic notes that the slide is largely attributed to a lack of reading when school is not in session. By encouraging kids to read during their summer vacations, parents can make sure youngsters' brains stay sharp and are ready to learn once the school year begins.

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Parents can take various steps to make the transition back to school a successful one for their young students.
With schools across Louisiana closed during the last quarter of the academic year by the coronavirus pandemic, St. Joseph’s Academy in Baton Rouge found unique ways to celebrate its 2020 graduates.

Seniors prepared for the end of their high school careers with several time-honored traditions held virtually. Ten seniors participated in the May Crowning ceremony from their homes, and members of the class of 2020 presented their Senior Poem and Farewell Skit online.

The class of 2020 received a beautiful and poignant message from Father Michael Alelo, whom they had chosen to preside over their Senior Mass, which was cancelled.

The seniors provided pictures of themselves with their college acceptance letters, wearing T-shirts or other apparel from their schools of choice. These images were featured on SJA’s social media pages, as were detailed spotlights of each member of the class, including their portraits, biographical information and special memories from their time at St. Joseph’s.

SJA celebrated the class of 2020 with the 54th annual Honors Convocation, pre-recorded by the leadership team on May 12 and shown on its originally scheduled date of May 15 on the school’s Facebook page and YouTube channel.

Determined to host a graduation ceremony of some description, principal Stacia Andricain and her team spent countless hours devising a way to safely bring the class to campus.

“Many of the seniors would say they didn’t know on that Friday afternoon of March 13 that they would not return to their campus they so dearly love,” she said. “We knew that had to be our goal for graduation: to give them another moment on campus that would allow SJA to congratulate them on their accomplishments and for the seniors to say goodbye.”

On May 17, the 262 members of the class of 2020 experienced a unique graduation ceremony. Observing social-distancing and crowd-size restrictions, the graduates came to campus with their parents/step-parents in groups of 16 or 17 in 30-minute intervals to receive their diplomas.

Following a tightly choreographed schedule, the first group of families arrived at 9 a.m. Remaining in their vehicles, they were arranged in alphabetical order; received earned medals, cords, stoles and certificates; then moved to an on-campus parking lot with
St. George maintains tradition with a new twist

Most Catholic elementary/middle schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge have a rich tradition of events that mark the end of students’ eighth-grade year. St. George School in Baton Rouge is no exception.

For several years, the eighth-grade classes have celebrated the end of their time at St. George with a field trip to New Orleans, a final Spirit Day, eighth-grade dinner and more. However, this past school year would prove to be much different.

The scheduled day of the last pep rally for the year was March 13. No one could have guessed that this would also become the last time students would be together during the 2019-20 school year.

Eighth-grade faculty member Shannon Landry said, “The end of the year was just surreal. We went from cheering at a Friday afternoon pep rally to packing up lockers at the end of the day. I don’t think any of us thought that would be our last day of school on campus.”

Keenly aware that every eighth grader looks forward to the end-of-year activities as they approach graduation, the St. George faculty and administration jumped into action, striving to make the most of a difficult situation as these students missed the traditional activities because of the COVID-19 quarantine. Creative and innovative celebrations began to come to fruition from a “Congrats Class of 2020” yard sign each student picked up during a drive-thru opportunity to another drive-by celebration as each student leaned out the window to take a picture with the famous Victor the Dragon mascot while proceeding to drive to the gym to pick up their graduation gown and special memory books.

Faculty member and eighth-grade parent Emily Dirks said, “As disappointing as it was that school couldn’t end in the normal way gathered together as a community, St. George did a great job taking this celebration and making it last as long as possible. I felt like every time we went to school to pick up signs, gowns, memory books, take a picture with Victor or graduation day, we got to celebrate our children in our own way.”

In the past, after prayer and the meal at the annual dinner, the eighth graders would sit on the floor and watch a special video which included their baby pictures and pictures from school events all the way back to kindergarten. Typically, chatter and laughter ensued as the students tried to figure out which student is in each baby picture.

This celebration normally includes a special skit performed by eighth-grade teacher, Mr. Malady. The eighth-grade video and a video of the skit were emailed to all families. The Dirks family chose to invite two families over to their house so the boys could watch the videos together. Other families chose similar at home activities or took their graduates out to dinner. Whether at home or in a restaurant, many students sat together and watched the videos.

Historically, on the last day of school for eighth grade, the sidewalks are lined with second graders, the little buddies of the eighth-grade students. Unfortunately, this memorable moment was not able to take place, but eighth-grader Jack Dirks did receive a special visit from his little buddy, Bennett Knight, at home.

Graduation has always been such a special celebration at St. George so it was important to the administration to make sure the students would have an in-person celebration. The eighth-grade closing ceremony was held on May 28 in St. George Church, with only the students and faculty in attendance. Parents sat in their cars in the parking lot and watched the ceremony via the St. George Church YouTube channel. In advance of each student receiving their diploma, along with any other awards or scholarships, students’ parents lined up in alphabetical order outside of the church. Just prior to students being called to the altar, their parents entered the back of church to see that magical moment, snap a picture or shed a tear and return to their vehicle to finish watching the closing ceremony.

“Even though the kids were spaced out in church, they were all happy to be together in some capacity. For those of us who had been to a St. George graduation before with Mr. (Jack) Nelson and this administration, we were at first very disappointed at the thought of our kids not having that experience of hearing him speak about the class and seeing all the kids we have seen grow up together not make this big step together. Although this year’s ceremony was very different, it was still a memorable one for the parents but more importantly for the kids. Doing it virtually allowed the parents to see it all.
STM continued to ‘inspire and serve’ during pandemic

For the past year, members of St. Thomas More Church in Baton Rouge ministries have used the expression “Be More” as a simple reminder of their need to continue developing additional means “to guide, to inspire and to serve” members of the STM community.

When the St. Thomas More School campus was closed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, STM faculty and staff members immediately applied an action plan that was in the making at least a month ahead of the school closure, and the school quickly mobilized its program of teacher supported online learning.

At the same time, STM teachers were not satisfied that they were doing everything that they could to address the needs of school families during such a challenging time. They began to consider methods of outreach to continue to build the school community, even during a time of campus closure. They asked themselves, “How can we ‘Be More’ for our students and their families?”

Their responses were creative, effective, loving and caring.

Morning Assembly: STM faculty members realized that much of their students’ lives were different as a result of their “stay at home” requirements. According to STM vice principal Ashley McDaniel, “In order to promote some sense of normalcy, each school day STM administrators led a ‘morning assembly’ that closely modeled the daily school-wide assembly that occurred when students were on campus.”

Including prayer, the Pledge of Allegiance, birthday recognitions and special announcements, the morning assembly, posted on Facebook and YouTube, provided a structure for the rest of each school day’s learning activities.

“The three administrators took turns leading assembly, and we each took a slightly different approach in our efforts to stay connected with our students,” McDaniel said.

Bedtime stories: One of the most popular STM initiatives was the evening “bedtime stories” that were delivered by faculty and staff members, frequently who were dressed in their nighttime attire. Librarian Sara Wisdom explained, “Our students are used to hearing their teachers read to them. This offered a nice way for our teachers to stay connected with their students through our YouTube channel and our Facebook page.”

Many STM parents have said their children would watch these stories repeatedly and at different times of the day because they enjoyed them so much.

Teacher Variety Show: Because STM typically hosts a student talent show, and that was not possible during “stay at home time,” teacher Kristin Baldridge developed the idea for a teacher variety show. “We had a great response from our STM team with 33 faculty and staff members participating in the variety show for the entertainment of the STM community,” Baldridge explained.

These faculty and staff performances, including a stirring rendition of “Sister Act,” drew rave reviews along with much appreciation from students and their parents.

Spirit Week: In order to keep school spirit alive, PE teacher Ashley Llaneza and her enrichment teaching colleagues developed a Spirit Week during the last week of classes.

“We had Pajama Day Monday, Talent Tuesday, Wacky Hair Wednesday, America Strong (red, white and blue) Thursday and Dash Into Summer Friday (a family walk or run) for us to stay connected with our students and their families during this difficult time,” Llaneza said.

Enthusiastic participation led directly to STM’s closing activity for the school year.

End-of-the-Year Parade: Typically STM and other schools conduct some type of year-end activity to provide closure for a school year. Because the traditional gathering was not possible, music teacher Ruth Linder led an STM-hosted parade. All faculty and staff members lined up around the blocks surrounding the school so that they could express their love and appreciation.

SEE STM PAGE 11B
appreciation for their students and wish them well until they all gather again for the start of next school year.

“Cars were decorated. Students were throwing treats to their teacher; one even threw face masks. Many teachers were dressed in costumes and set up tailgates in college football game style. Joy was our theme this year, and we certainly experienced great joy during this closing activity,” Linder said.

At St. Thomas More School, “Be More” is not just a catchy play on words using the school’s name; it is a call to action for all members of the STM community, and a call to which faculty and staff members responded exceedingly well during a difficult time.

CLOSING CEREMONIES – SJV School kindergarten and pre-k closing ceremonies looked a little different this year. Families drove through the school’s parking lot and teachers handed them their certificates. Many families decorated their cars to celebrate the occasion. Photos provided by St. Jean Vianney School

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STM ▼
From page 10B

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CULTivating Scholars with Pride and Passion
MBS ready for new school year

Ready or not, the 2020-2021 school year is upon us, and the Most Blessed Sacrament School in Baton Rouge's faculty and staff have been busy getting ready.

Like Helen Oxenbury’s well-loved children’s book, “We’re Going on a Bear Hunt” says, “You can’t go over it. You can’t go under it. You gotta go through it.” COVID-19 or not, we will get through this year.

Last year, a master plan was created in consultation with MBS stakeholders. During this planning process, the importance of our school environment reflecting the mission of the school was discussed, and many changes were put into place that are now coming to fruition.

Pre-Kindergarten through first grade have increased the number of homerooms to allow for smaller class sizes and more individualized instruction. The middle school, consisting of grades sixth through eighth, will now have four temporary classrooms, one of which is in the new science lab. The Accelerated Math program has also been expanded to include fifth- and sixth-grade students. The school, as a whole, will now be utilizing the FACTS web system for admissions, enrollment, grading and everything in between.

Our usual summer practices are taking place as well. New faculty members have been hired and will soon participate in the new teacher mentoring program, Pelican Pals.

Current teachers are participating in professional development focused on the use of technology both in the classroom and remotely. Student ambassadors are being chosen and trained to help with school functions.

Schedules have been created, furniture and supplies are being delivered daily and retreats and religious programs are being planned. Perhaps most important this year, classrooms and facilities are being deep cleaned in an effort to improve health and safety practices.

MBS is fortunate to be supported by a loyal community of families, many of whom are alumni. While some things will look a little different in the fall, we will go over, under it and through it together.

We will continue to honor our promise to serve our church, families and community by nurturing Gospel values, academic excellence and a lifetime of prayer and service.

TRANSITION

From page 28

• School hours change, often requiring students to wake up earlier.
• A new school may mean students are funneling in from different feeder schools. Long-time friends may be separated depending on where they ultimately choose to go to high school.
• A 2016 survey from the Pew Research Center found that 70% of teens say anxiety and depression are a “major problem” among their peers.

To help make high school a positive experience and less likely to induce anxiety, students and their parents can employ these tips.
• Establish a consistent routine. The education resource CollegeVine advises students to build good study habits, create a calm and organized homework environment and focus on studies while keeping distractions at bay.
• Encourage extracurricular activities. Activities outside of the classroom are a great way for students to make friends and involve themselves socially with their peers. Such extracurriculars can lead to strong friendships that flourish throughout high school and beyond.
• Buddy up. Just as they might have done upon entering kindergarten, students on the cusp of starting high school can find someone who will be attending the same school and go over schedules and potential meet-up times. They can make plans to sit together at lunch as they both get acclimated to their new environments.
• Attend open houses. Families can tour the campus to get a feel for the layout of their children’s school. Ask for a map of the school grounds so students can get an idea of where their schedules will require them to be throughout the course of the day.

The transition to high school is a significant one in the life of a teenager. Families can employ various strategies to make that transition go smoothly.
There, each young woman, accompanied by her parents, was announced by longtime SJA faculty member Jill Abadie and the student received her diploma from Andricain. Each graduate then received a red rose, courtesy of the SJA Alumnae Association, from SJA President Jan Breen. Graduates then posed for a family picture and received a miniature bundt cake, courtesy of their little sisters from the class of 2023, and five copies of the keepsake graduation program.

Families returned to their vehicles to exit the parking lot, making room for the next group’s arrival. The last group of graduates received their diplomas at 5 p.m.

A video of the commencement exercises was produced by the SJJC Communications Department. It featured the conferring of diplomas, the salutatory address by Mary Catherine Daniels, the valedictory address by Shreya Reshamwala, the sending forth by Breen and the singing of the alma mater by Annie Blanchard. The video was shared on several media platforms on Sunday, May 31.

While the spring of 2020 will never be forgotten, Andricain said SJJC will continue to come together as a school community to ensure a successful start to the 2020-2021 academic year. The leadership team worked diligently during the summer to create best strategies for teaching and learning while keeping all members of the school community safe.

“We continue to develop the lessons we learned, both the successes and the challenges, and move forward,” Andricain said. “The fall semester will look unlike any that has come before it, but we will forge ahead to educate our young women in the spirit and charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph.”

In the midst of planning for the opening of the 2020-21 school year, Our Lady of Mercy School in Baton Rouge has adjusted its leadership team.

“With Kristy Monsour leaving to become the administrator of the REACH program (Diocese of Baton Rouge Special Education Program), it was a perfect time to put together a new leadership team,” said principal Chris Porche.

The new team has been assembled by changing the roles of some current employees, as well as, bringing on a new director of early childhood education. Allyson LaBorde, current Upper School Assistant Principal, will have the new title of Academic Assistant Principal. Her new role will have her working with teachers in the upper and lower schools.

Duane LeBlanc, current Dean of Students and band teacher, will now be Assistant Principal of Student Life.

The newest addition to the leadership team is Belinda Baker, Director of Early Childhood Education. Baker began her teaching career in 1981 in the Archdiocese of New Orleans as a second-grade teacher. She also spent many years in the classroom as both a kindergarten and prekindergarten teacher.

At Holy Cross Primary School in New Orleans, Baker had the experience of opening a school for boys in Pre-K through fourth grades. She spent her first year at Holy Cross choosing curriculum, furnishings, working on admissions and hiring the faculty and staff. When the school opened, she served as the director of the Lower School.

A long portion of her career has been spent at Ursuline Academy in New Orleans, first as a teacher and then the early childhood director. She had the unique opportunity to help with the development of the Early Learning Center at Ursuline and to manage the instructional program for the toddler 1 through kindergartener classes.

“I am excited about our new team. (LaBorde), (LeBlanc) and (Baker) bring a wealth of experience and knowledge to our team. I feel this team will be instrumental in providing leadership to help bring our school into the future,” said Porche.
Internet safety tips for students

The classrooms of yesteryear are distant memories. Gone are chalkboards, which have made way for smartboards. Even textbooks are slowly being phased out in deference to online curriculums. Modern classrooms are outfitted with digital devices that connect students to the internet.

A 2017 report from Common Sense Media said that children up to age eight spend an average of two hours and 19 minutes every day on screen media. Children between the ages of eight and 12 spend an average of four hours and 36 minutes on screens. Much of that time is spent online.

While the internet can be a useful tool for students, it can also puts students at risk of falling victim to online predators. The internet also keeps students in constant contact with their peers, which can be troublesome for students who want to get away when they get home at night.

These reasons and more are motivation enough to practice good digital citizenship and follow these safety tips.

• Exercise caution with photos and videos posted online. These images, even when posted harmlessly, can weigh on a student’s reputation. They may even impact acceptance to schools or career opportunities in the future. Always think before posting, as content remains in cyberspace indefinitely. And remember, many schools screen for inappropriate content. Sending harassing or inappropriate material to others may result in disciplinary action.

• Recognize the threat posed by online predators. The Crimes Against Children Research Center says one in five teenagers in the United States who regularly uses the internet has received unwanted sexual solicitations through the web. In addition, 25 percent have been exposed to unwanted pornographic material online. Students need to be aware that not everyone on the internet is an upstanding citizen.

• Keep personal information private at all times. The service eMarketer says that 75 percent of children are willing to share personal information online about themselves and their families in exchange for goods and services. Students need to be better educated about protecting their passwords, ages, addresses and other personal information.

• Stop cyberbullying before it starts. Students can be educated about the correct way to use the internet and how to report cyberbullying. Students also can take pledges to never make others feel uncomfortable online.

Online safety is a growing concern for students, but there are ways to keep kids safe.
Tips for effective remote learning

An increased reliance on virtual home instruction has many students rethinking their organizational strategies and daily school schedules. Learning at home is different from being in a traditional classroom environment, but with some effective strategies, students can persevere without missing a beat.

Stick to a schedule

Many students are successful because they follow a schedule. The Center for Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning says that routines and schedules are important because they influence a child’s emotional and cognitive development. Children feel secure with schedules, which may help them recognize what’s expected of them.

When learning at home, students should strive to maintain as consistent a schedule as possible, including bedtimes, wake times, hours devoted to learning, and time to get outside or engage in downtime activities.

Connect live if possible

There are many free tools and resources available that enable teachers to provide live video lessons or to record them so students can watch them later. Similarly, social networking apps and virtual meeting programs enable students to connect digitally. This can be helpful for collaborative learning assignments or just to see a familiar face.

Stick to tools that work

Once students find apps or systems that work, they should stick with them, offers Khan Academy, an educational tutoring resource. There are many factors outside of one’s control during virtual instruction, but maintaining consistency with tools and schedules is one way to feel more confident and secure.

Check student accounts frequently

Just like students, teachers may be learning as they go in regard to remote learning strategies. Students should be sure to check school email accounts or other places where teachers post assignments a few times per day so that they stay on top of all assignments and are aware of due dates.

Reach out to instructors

Allegory College suggests students contact their teachers if they are unsure of how to participate in remote learning environments. Ask questions about assignments, get clarification on key topics and be sure to tune into any remote chats or virtual "office hours."

Tips for a successful homework area

High school students have a lot on their plates. Today’s parents often lament that kids’ schedules are far more hectic than their own schedules were when they were teenagers. But for many high school students, a familiar foe for their parents have no doubt encountered is proving, a considerable source of stress.

Homework has long been the bane of high schoolers’ existence. Studies regarding just how much homework is being assigned to teenagers are somewhat outdated, which makes it difficult to determine just how much work kids are being asked to do after school lets out. A survey in 2014 from the University of Phoenix found that high school teachers assign, on average, 3.5 hours of homework per week. Multiply that figure by five, which is the number of different teachers many high school students have in a typical school day, and the survey concluded that high school students may be expected to complete as much as 17.5 hours of homework per week.

Though the study, which is the only one of its kind to be conducted in recent years, is older, there’s little reason to suspect today’s high school students are being asked to do any less than their predecessors were in 2014. While parents might not be able to do much to lessen their children’s homework workload, they can take steps to ensure their homes are as homework-friendly as possible. The following are ways to do just that.

1. Create a communal homework table.

The Harvard Graduate School of Education notes that youngsters who seem reluctant to do their homework may benefit from doing their afterschool work at a communal table. With parents nearby, such students may feel less lonely and may be less likely to procrastinate if they know mom or dad are nearby. Students who are not reluctant to do their homework may benefit from working quietly in their bedrooms.

2. Clear the area of distractions.

Distractions like televisions, devices that are not necessary to complete assignments and even younger siblings can make it hard for teenagers to concentrate on their work. Designate a time each day for homework, ensuring that the television is off and that devices have been placed on “Do Not Disturb.” In addition, high school students with younger siblings can expect

SEE TIPS PAGE 16B

FEDERAL ELIGIBILITY INCOME CHART FOR SCHOOL YEAR 2020-21

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Each additional person +$8,288 +$691 +$346 +$319 +$160

On behalf of the Diocese of Baton Rouge Child Nutrition Program, I am excited to welcome you and your children to the 2019-2020 school year. I feel both honored and privileged to continue to be your Child Nutrition Program Director and to work with highly qualified and dedicated staff, students, and all of the supportive parents and community members that make our schools great. We are committed to serving your children the highest quality, nutritious and great-tasting meals that support their achievements in school and promote healthy lifestyles.

Healthy for Life is our commitment to create healthier environments and communities, by providing comprehensive nutrition and wellness education. This year we will continue to expand the program with more freshly prepared meals to better serve our students and their families; and this year as part of this expansion, we have updated the program design to better reflect the sophisticated tastes of today’s students.

For your students, we offer a variety of meal choices with one goal in mind: to provide outstanding service and high quality “child-friendly” meals that meet or exceed the latest federal and state requirements. Our School menus are designed to ensure that students receive a balanced meal, consisting of foods from all major food groups in the right proportions to meet calorie and other nutrient needs. The products and the cooking methods we use conserve food quality and nutrients, while limiting the addition of fats. So although you may see popular items like hamburgers, pizza and chicken smackers on our menus, be assured that your child’s school meal selections contain healthy grains and are lower in fat and salt than what you find in grocery stores or restaurants.

We will also be offering some different foods that your child may not have tried before: Mini Meat Muffins, Cheesy Beef Pasta and Cajun Chicken Stew just to name a few, so please encourage your child to taste these items. They just might become a new favorite! Also, we invite you to have lunch with your child so you can try these tasty new menu items too.

We appreciate your support and we are proud to serve you. For more information about our menus and programs, please visit www.cnbr.org; to learn more about healthy school meals visit http://www.fns.usda.gov or www.myhealthylife.com.

We hope that you and your child have a great year! Please feel free to call us at 225-387-6421 with any questions or comments.

Sincerely,
Ms. Lynda Carville
CNP Director

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.
Manage hectic school mornings

If a typical school morning sees your family rushing around and out the door with nary a moment to spare, only to be left feeling like you ran a marathon by 9 a.m., a new approach to your routine might be necessary.

Mornings, especially in households in which parents who work outside of the home and have one or two kids requiring drop-off at their respective schools, can often be hectic. Starting off the morning feeling harried and stressed can carry over into the mood of the day, affecting productivity as a result.

According to Dr. David Anderson, PhD, senior director of the ADHD and Disruptive Behavior Disorders Center at the Child Mind Institute, busy mornings can be the most stressful moments of the day. Homework hour and getting prepared for bed are other typically stressful times of the day for families.

If less stressful mornings are a goal for your family, try these strategies.

Start the night before

Doing as much preparatory work the evening before can make quite a difference in taming hectic mornings. Things that can be done in advance include checking and stocking backpacks, signing paperwork, making lunches, setting out clothing, showering and having breakfast foods ready to go.

Establish a ‘launch pad’

Ann Dolin, a Virginia-based education specialist, suggests having a launch pad, or a place where all school-related items are prepped and stored. It can be a basket, box or another container big enough to contain school items. Children can drop and pick up the items as needed.

Make the routine the boss

Positive Parenting Solutions founder Amy McCready says families can implement a “when-then” routine that sets the tone for the morning. “When everyone is dressed, hair combed, breakfast eaten, and school supplies packed, then you can watch 10 minutes of an educational cartoon.” This puts the routine in control rather than making the parents the bad guys.

Make kids responsible

Too often parents add more stress to their plates by showing up at school with forgotten lunch boxes or band instruments. Instead, parents can stop rescuing their children and help train them to be more responsible—an essential trait.

Chart wake-up times

It may seem like micromanaging, but scheduling wake-up and bathroom times can help everyone know where they should be and when they should be there. It also helps avoid bottleneck situations in the bathroom or kitchen.

Keep morning madness to a minimum with some simple strategies.

TIPS

From page 15B

1. Expect their brothers and sisters to be finished with their homework first. Make sure youngers recognize the importance of staying quiet until everyone has finished their homework. Encourage younger siblings to leave the homework area and play quietly or read elsewhere in the home.

2. Include a break between school and homework time. Much like parents may like a few minutes to unwind when getting home from work at night, kids likely won’t want to dive right into their homework after getting home from school. A break between the school day and homework time can help kids clear their heads so they’re more capable of concentrating when they sit down to do their work.

3. A good work environment at home can help kids live up to their academic potential.