By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

At the noon Mass at St. George Church in Baton Rouge on Thursday, June 4, four young communicants sat quietly with their families on the front row of each of the four pew sections of the church.

Large bows and banners marked the pews, indicating the seats were reserved for special guests. Dressed beautifully in white dresses for the girls and khakis and dress shirts for the boys, the masks covering the faces of the children, siblings, parents and extended family members served as both a safety measure and a reminder that these are unprecedented times, even when it comes to receiving the sacraments.

St. George pastor Father Paul Yi said as time marched on with the coronavirus quarantine, some events had to be canceled, including confirmation, which was scheduled for early May.

Going too far into the summer months seemed unrealistic for the students who would begin the busiest year of their high school career with senior activities.

In order to accommodate the 100 confirmation candidates, Father Yi said two large Masses were celebrated June 1-2 that were limited to the students, their sponsors and their parents.

So when we were deciding on first Communion we thought about doing it the way we did confirmation, with two parents and each child and that would be the capacity of the church," said Father Yi. “But with first Communion, what was a lot more important was not only having the parents but also the siblings, the grandparents, godparents and so we would have a lot more extended family members.”

Amanda Noel, whose son Lucas was receiving first Communion, said this arrangement was much more of a family affair for her family. She said besides her husband Matt and two other sons, Ethan, 13, and Hayes, 10, her parents, her husband’s parents and her brother were able to sit together and truly be a part of the event.

“It was really special,” said Noel. “I think we were all sad that Lucas wasn’t able to celebrate it with all of his classmates. But having gone through it two other times, it can be a very stressful exercise.

Families celebrate the Eucharist

Lucas Noel receives first Communion from Father Paul Gros, parochial vicar of St. George Church in Baton Rouge, during weekday Mass, June 4. Photo by Bonny Van | The Catholic Commentator

Bishop prays for safety during hurricane season

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

A beautiful June day in Louisiana belied the trouble brewing to the south in the Gulf of Mexico as forecasters and government leaders kept an eye on Tropical Storm Cristobal. Inside St. Joseph Cathedral in Baton Rouge on June 5, people gathered to pray for those affected by the storm and other potential during the 2020 hurricane season.

For 15 years, since Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast, the seven dioceses in the state of Louisiana, under the Archdiocese of New Orleans, have celebrated a Hurricane Mass at the cathedral.

“My brothers and sisters, this day we come together to pray in a particular way for protection in times of storm and for us particularly in Louisiana hurricanes, one that’s headed our way,” said Bishop Michael G. Duca.

The Gospel reading for the Mass came from St. Mark and referenced the time Jesus and the Apostles were in the boat crossing the sea when a violent storm arose while Jesus was asleep. Jesus woke up and calmed the wind and the sea. “Then he asked them, ‘Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?’ They were filled with great awe and said to one another, ‘Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?’” (Mk 4:35-41)
Sacred Heart

On June 19, Catholics will converge at the scene of a divine fire, where Christ’s physical heart represents his burning love for humanity during the popular Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The Feast of the Sacred Heart falls 19 days after Pentecost and the Friday after the feast of Corpus Christi, which is also called the “Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ.”

According to Catholic Encyclopedia, during the earliest days of the church, “Christ’s open and the mystery of blood and water were mediated upon, and the church was beheld issuing from the side of Jesus, as Eve came forth from the side of Adam. It is in the 11th and 12th centuries that we find the first unmistakable indications of devotion to the Sacred Heart. Through the wound in the side, the wound in the heart was gradually reached, and the wound in the heart symbolized the wound of love.”

The general devotion arose in Benedictine monasteries but became popular when French Visitations Nun Sr. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690) was praying before the Blessed Sacrament and Jesus appeared to her. She wrote, “He disclosed to me the marvells of his love and the inexplicable secrets of his Sacred Heart.” She said Christ emphasized to her his love – and his woundedness caused by man’s indifference to this love.

In the Sacred Heart image, Christ is portrayed with a flaming heart shining with divine light, pierced by the lance wound, encircled by the crown of thorns, surmounted by a cross and bleeding. Sometimes, the image is shown shining within the bosom of Christ with his wounded hands pointing at the heart.

Jesus made 12 promises to St. Margaret Mary for those who consecrate themselves and make reparations to his Sacred Heart:
- He will give them all the graces necessary in their state of life.
- He will establish peace in their homes.
- He will comfort them in all their afflictions.
- He will be their secure refuge during life and, above all, in death.
- He will bestow abundant blessings upon all their undertakings.
- Sinners will find in his heart the source and infinite ocean of mercy.
- Lukewarm souls shall become fervent.
- Fervent souls shall quickly mount to high perfection.
- He will bless every place in which an image of his heart is exposed and honored.
- He will give to priests the gift of touching the most hardened hearts.
- Those who shall promote this devotion shall have their names written in his heart.
- In the excessive mercy of his heart that his all-powerful love will grant to all those who receive holy Communion on the first Fridays in nine consecutive months the grace of final perseverance; they shall not die in his disgrace, nor without receiving their sacraments. His divine heart shall be their safe refuge in this last moment.

The devotion became popular after St. Margaret Mary’s death in 1690. However it was not established as an official feast for all of France until 1765. On May 8, 1873, Pope Pius IX formally approved the devotion to the Sacred Heart. In 1899 Pope Leo XIII recommended the feast be observed throughout the world.

In connecting Jesus with the Blessed Mother, the Saturday following the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

The devoteion refers to the interior life of Mary, her joys and sorrows, her virtues and hidden perfection and her virginal love for God the father, her maternal love for Jesus and all persons. There is a first Saturday devotion, also called the Act of Reparation, to the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In the 1976 encyclical “Haurietis aquas,” Pope Pius XII encouraged joint devotion to the two hearts. In the 1979 encyclical “Redemptor hominis” St. John Paul II wrote about the unity of Mary’s Immaculate Heart with the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He later coined the term “The alliance of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary.”

Spirit of truth

By Dina Dow

“The spirit of truth will testify to me, says the Lord; and you also will testify” (Jn 15:26-27).

The solemnities of the Most Holy Trinity and the Body & Blood of Christ early in June remind us, as we step into the liturgical season of Ordinary Time, that our life as living missionary disciples is anchored by the Spirit of truth. It is the truth of Jesus Christ we respond to in prayer, word and deed by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. The 12th and 13th Sundays in Ordinary Time reveal the power of God’s kindness and mercy given to those who testify to the truth.

The truth of a prophet

We hear the testimony of the prophet Jeremiah as he faces persecution from those whom God called him to serve. He hears the “whispers” of a planned entrapment in order to stop his preaching. Why do they want to silence Jeremiah’s preaching? Called by God, there rises from the depths of Jeremiah the mission to proclaim the truth: the king, the people and all of Judah are called to repent, to put aside sinful lives and turn back to God with their entire being. Otherwise of defying the mission may face the consequences of their ungodly ways. Naturally they did not want to hear this since they could not see with their hearts the error of their ways. So God, who is goodness, kindness and mercy, sends Jeremiah to warn the leaders as well as the people. Their response: rejection, ignorance, mockery, revenge, “silence this one.”

Jesus is the fullness of truth, the message of the prophets, to return to God. If we are called to be missionary disciples, we then answer the call to be a prophet, a living witness of truth. Our prayer, words and deeds are to manifest the truth of Jesus Christ, even if this means facing persecution; even if it means stepping out of our comfort zone; even if we think we are not equipped. St. John writes “the Spirit of truth will testify to me says the Lord; and you also will testify” (Jn 15:26-27). By the grace of the Holy Spirit we are able to grow in a deeper awareness of truth through the gifts of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, fortitude, piety and fear (amazement) of the Lord which help us proclaim the truth with humility, confidence and peace.

Ultimately, these gifts bear fruit which fortify the witness of truth. Paragraph 1832 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains, “The fruits of the Spirit are the perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory. The tradition of the church lists 12 of them: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity. Calling upon the Spirit of truth, we acknowledge we rely solely upon the Holy Spirit in our role as prophet. The holy people of God share also in Christ’s prophetic office,” above all in the supernatural sense of faith that belongs to the whole people, lay and clergy, when it “unfailingly adheres to this faith … once for all delivered to the saints, and when it deepens its understanding and becomes Christ’s witness in the midst of this world” (Catechism Para. 735).

The courage to testify

Jesus said to the Twelve Apostles: “Fear no one” (Mt 10:26). Fear paralyzes, courage energizes. St. John Paul II during the opening homily of his pontificate said, “Brothers and sisters, do not be afraid to welcome Christ and accept his power. Help the pope and all those who wish to serve Christ and with Christ’s power to serve the human person and the whole of mankind. Be not afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ” (St. Peter’s Square, Sunday, Oct. 22, 1978). By welcoming the truth of Christ, we are empowered to be courageous witnesses of the living word of God, in sacraments, catechesis and mission. Prayer. Word. Deed. Thus, we are to courageously center our lives on Jesus Christ and open the doors of Christ to all.

A cup of cold water

The sacrament of baptism plunges us into the waters of the life and death of Jesus Christ, the door of salvation. St. Paul explains, “Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as...”

SEE GOSPEL PAGE 9
Nursing home volunteers miss their ‘family’

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Nursing home residents miss the smiles, hugs and talks with visitors as they continue to be isolated because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Volunteers in the nursing home ministries in the Diocese of Baton Rouge are just as eager to reunite with those residents and are looking for ways to let them know “You are not forgotten.”

“We miss them so much. Every time (the volunteers) talk to me, they ask, ‘When am I going to be able to go see them again?’” said Susan Sevario, nursing home ministry coordinator at St. Alphonsus Church in Greenwell Springs.

Ministry volunteers are at Flannery Oaks Guest House in Baton Rouge at least six times a month bringing residents to Masses and Communion services, attending monthly birthday celebrations and visiting them in their rooms.

“That’s a big chunk out of our schedule. They are our friends,” said Sevario. “We tell the activity director to tell them we miss them and love them.”

The St. Alphonsus volunteers recently gathered and filled 87 bags with cookies, socks, toiletry items, stuffed animals and other trinkets and delivered them to the nursing home.

Sylvia Hunt is a lifelong member of St. Alphonsus and was baptized in the “little bitty church,” St. Francis, the original wooden church built for the St. Alphonsus community. She joined the nursing home ministry after the flood of 2016.

Her home was destroyed, but she is grateful God helped her put her life back together.

“I said, ‘Lord, you’ve done so much for me, what can I do to give back?’” said Hunt.

Hunt said the residents give her much more than she gives them.

“You really get attached to them. I will walk in the door and they will be coming down the hallway. I’ll tell them, ‘You beat me.’” Hunt beamed. “They don’t (normally) have a lot of visitors, so it means a lot to them. I know it means a lot to me.”

Hunt was eager to assist when Sevario inquired about assembling the gift bags.

“It was fun, especially since we haven’t been together since the lockdown,” said Hunt. “We had a good time. We were writing on the bags (messages such as) ‘God loves you,’ Scripture passages and sticking little decals on them.”

Mildred Stroderd said, “I miss my people so much, oh my goodness.”

Having loved ones who had been in the nursing home, Stoddard saw the benefits for residents to receive visitors.

“It’s a lonely life, all of a sudden there are things that they are no longer capable of doing,” Stroderd said.

She enjoyed residents’ stories and learned a lot about them as she brought them to Mass or Communion services, which are attended by non-Catholics as well. Many residents come out when they hear the music start.

Stroderd and Hunt said some residents may be very sick, but when they hear the start of the Our Father, they perk up and pray.

“They remember their prayers,” said Stoddard, who brings Communion to the Catholics who are too sick to attend. She hopes the gift bags comfort residents in knowing someone is thinking about them.

When Anne Cifreo’s mother died a few years ago, she joined the nursing home ministry the following spring thinking, “I will do it for Lent.” She’s been with it ever since.

“We brought them joy, but they brought us joy,” Cifreo said.

She hopes the tokens the residents received will cheer them up and pray she will soon be walking back through the doors of “their home.”

“This is their last home before their eternal home,” said Cifreo.

Dianne Pizzalato said each time she visited the residents in their room they told her, “Come back and see me.”

One woman, now deceased, crocheted doilies from string. When she was running out of string, Pizzalato told her, “I see you’re getting low” and brought her more.

“She made me a couple (doilies) that I treasure,” said Pizzalato, who misses the staff as well as the residents.

“They’re like another member of the family,” she said.
Injustice of racism perpetuated by indifference

PHOENIX (CNS) – Just as the prodigal son cried out to his father for forgiveness, so too we cry out to God the Father for the sin of racism, said Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted of Phoenix at a special “Mass for Forgiveness of the Sin of Racism” June 8 at Sts. Simon and Jude Cathedral.

“Racism is not overcome by our own human determination. It is overcome by God, by his mercy. ... Only God can change minds and hearts. That’s why the sacraments of confession and the Eucharist play such vital roles in overcoming the sin of racism,” Bishop Olmsted said in his homily.

“The prodigal son, when he finally came to his senses and saw how his own selfishness had ruined his life,” he added. “He came to see how great was his need for God.”

The Mass was held in the wake of civil unrest throughout the country following the May 25 killing of George Floyd, an African American, in police custody.

In Arizona, protesters have gathered every night since that day to protest not only Floyd’s killing, but also that of local African American man Dion Johnson, who was shot and killed by an Arizona Department of Public Safety officer, also May 25.

When officers found Johnson, he had fallen asleep in his car parked in the gorge point where two local highways merge in Phoenix. Body camera footage is not available, and details are still emerging from the killing.

After one such protest led to millions of dollars in damages at an upscale shopping mall in Scottsdale, Arizona, May 30, Gov. Doug Ducey issued a nine-day statewide curfew at 8 p.m., with some exceptions.

“Racism is a sin against justice. It cannot be overcome by further acts against justice,” Bishop Olmsted said, adding that a Catholic student from Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff had shared with him that she’s worried that her father, a police officer, could be seriously hurt.

“We are gathered around the altar of sacrifice tonight to pray for forgiveness for the sin of racism in Arizona and wherever it occurs, especially in our own hearts,” the bishop said. Noting that 40% of the priests serving in the diocese are from other countries, he recalled prejudice experienced by them from Catholics in the diocese.

“On the day that I installed one of our finest pastors, protesters came to the parking lot and distributed flyers on car windows denouncing the bishop for replacing their beloved former pastor with ‘these Africans,’” Bishop Olmsted recounted.

“Another priest said that, when he arrived at his first assignment, a parishioner told him ‘they could not stand a black priest at the altar’.”

After the Mass, Father Robert Aliunzi, a popular pastor at St. Andrew the Apostle Parish in Chandler, Arizona, who is originally from Uganda, shared how parishioners from one of his previous assignments told a local newspaper that “we are very good and sweet, but we are not one of them.”

“I don’t know if it was resistance to change or it was racist, but I definitely didn’t feel good because I feel that I belonged,” added Father Aliunzi, a priest of the Apostles of Jesus religious community, who has now served in the Phoenix Diocese for 16 years.

“This is the right place to start,” he said, “because it is where true healing begins in the church in Christ.”

While racism is a sinful act that results in prejudice, injustice and lack of respect for human dignity brings about, Bishop Olmsted said, it also hides behind indifference.

“Racists may not get caught because they are doing nothing. But, in Jesus’ description of the last judgment” in Chapter 25 of the Gospel of Matthew, he said, “is depicted not as what people did but ‘what they failed to do.’”

Paul Welter, a white parishioner from Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Tempe, Arizona, acknowledged his own indifference to the issue before his wife challenged him to look more into the topic.

While other issues have been raised on social media since Floyd’s death, such as the disproportionate targeting of minorities by abortion providers, Welter said the topic at hand is police brutality and what that represents: “an attitude throughout this country that we can oppress people if we want, police or otherwise.”

“When that first happened, I was a little bit out of touch with what was going on. My reaction,” he said. [↩]

Sexual abuse policy in the Diocese of Baton Rouge

Churches, schools and youth organizations have an obligation to provide children and youth with a safe place to worship, study or participate in activities sponsored by the Catholic Church.

In its ongoing effort to ensure that this is being accomplished, the Diocese of Baton Rouge has established an office of Child and Youth Protection. With the establishment of this office, the diocese has also implemented a process for reporting alleged abuse of a minor.

The Diocese of Baton Rouge has trained professionals available to provide counseling and information about additional care if needed. Information about reporting an incident is printed here in the three languages that are most commonly used in this diocese: English, Vietnamese and Spanish.

**Issues related to the Protection of Children and Young People**

Mrs. Amy Cordon serves as Child and Youth Protection Officer of the Diocese of Baton Rouge. Her offices are at the Catholic Life Center, 1800 South Acadian Thruway, Baton Rouge. Her mailing address is P. O. Box 2028, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-2028; telephone 225-242-0202; fax 225-242-0233.

A special confidential “Sexual Abuse Victim Response Contact Line” to be used in reporting any instance of child sexual abuse by an employee of the Church or a volunteer in one of the Church’s programs has been set up: 225-242-0250.

Anyone victimized as a child or young person is urged to report this first to secular authorities (Louisiana State Police or State of Louisiana Department of Social Services) as well as to the special diocesan “Sexual Abuse Victim Response Contact Line” (telephone 225-242-0250) or to the diocesan counselors at Catholic Charities (telephone 225-336-8708).

Những Điều Cán Biết Về Bảo Vệ Trẻ Em và Người Trẻ


Một đường dây liên lạc đặc biệt và uy tín dành cho việc thông báo những trường hợp làm việc với giới trẻ có vấn đề là: 225-242-0250.

Những nhân nhân biết làm dụng trái luật cần phải báo cáo lên các cơ quan chính quyền (Cơ Quan Cảnh Sát Tiểu Bang— Louisiana State Police hoặc Văn Phòng Xã Hội Tiểu Bang—State of Louisiana Department of Social Services), và thông báo lên Giáo phận qua đường dây đặc biệt (225-242-0250) hoặc qua những người phụ trách ở sở (225-336-8708).

*En Relación a la Protección de Niños y Gente Joven*


Uno de los programas que la Iglesia ha establecido es la línea telefónica especial y confidencial de “Contacto para Respondere a la Victima del Abuso Sexual” cometido por empleados de la Iglesia o voluntarios: 225-242-0250.

Cualquier persona como un niño o un joven victimizado debe reportar el incidente primero a las autoridades como la (Polícia Estatal o al Departamento Estatal (Minis- terio) de Servicios Sociales así como también a la línea de “Contacto para Respondere a la Victim a del Abuso Sexual” (teléfono 225-242-0250) o a los consejeros de la Diócesis en las Caridades Católicas (teléfono 225-336-8708).
Messenger: ‘Ready to go to work’ as deacon

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

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Retirement ... time to travel the world, bask in “a job well done” and relax. But Billy Messenger said a life of ease is not for him.

“I’m ready to go to work,” said Messenger, who recently retired after spending many years working for the East Baton Rouge and Zachary school systems, adding that he is excited about his upcoming role as a permanent deacon of the Diocese of Baton Rouge. Bishop Michael G. Duca will ordain him Aug. 8 at St. Joseph Cathedral in Baton Rouge.

A member of Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs, Messenger was raised in a family of eight siblings in Baton Rouge. His family attended St. Thomas More Church in Baton Rouge and then St. Louis King of France Church, also in Baton Rouge, when it was established. He graduated from St. Thomas More School and Catholic High School in Baton Rouge.

“I was a Sunday Catholic,” Messenger acknowledged in an interview at St. Agnes Church in Baton Rouge following an early morning Mass. But he had a conversion experience in his mid-20s.

“(It happened right) here at St. Agnes,” said Messenger, who pointed out that two of his brothers were members of a Legion of Mary group that met at St. Agnes. He eventually joined the organization.

“We knocked on doors in the neighborhoods and talked to people about Jesus Christ and invited them to come to the Catholic Church and answered their questions about the faith,” said Messenger. “We met some really wonderful people who weren’t Catholic but loved the Lord ... that, and working with people in the Legion of Mary who loved Jesus, knew him and their faith was real, was when I said, ‘I want that.’ That’s when my faith moved to love of God and love of neighbor.”

Messenger became involved in various ministries at Immaculate Conception.

Messenger’s wife of 40 years, Melinda, asked him if he thought about becoming a deacon. He went through the discernment process in 2015.

“That first year I really struggled because it was such a huge time commitment,” said Messenger. “Somewhere in the second year, I told my spiritual director, ‘I feel this is what God is calling me to.’ I was going to rely on those involved in the formation process or my wife to tell me, ‘I don’t think this is what God is calling you to.’”

But he continually received positive feedback and encouragement.

Messenger will be part of the first class to graduate from the diaconate formation program since it was revamped and classes were offered at Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University in Baton Rouge.

“We were called ‘guinea pigs’ because we were going to be the first class to graduate,” grinned Messenger. He said the reality of becoming a deacon will most likely “sink in” at the ordination ceremony rehearsal.

Messenger will be vested by his brother Deacon Tim Messenger, deacon assistant at St. Margaret Queen of Scotland Church in Albany, and Deacon “Zeek” Nola, deacon assistant at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church in St. Francisville.

Billy Messenger worked alongside Deacon Nola at Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola as part of his assignment for the past year.

“He had no ulterior motive, he was speaking from his heart,” said Messenger.

It’s such opportunities to make a difference in people’s lives that motivates him to become a deacon.

“I don’t think there’s anything more joyful in life than serving the Lord,” Messenger said. “Instead of storing up treasures on Earth, I’m storing up treasure in heaven.”

RACISM ▼

From page 4

was, “Wait, but I’m not a racist. I’m not prejudice against people. I don’t relate to what you’re saying,” added Welter, who has been active in pro-life ministry with his family.

“After a lot of reading, listening, reflecting, I realized it’s not about me,” he said. “I totally agree all lives matter, I totally agree human lives, unborn lives matter, but right now, we have to focus on the message. We cannot be silent. We cannot be indifferent, because the opposite of love is not hate, it’s indifference.”

“We are standing up for Black Lives Matter right now, because that is the topic at hand,” added Welter’s wife Nellie. “If it were about immigration, we’d be standing up for immigrants. If it were about the unborn, we’d be standing up for the unborn. We stand up as our Catholic faith teaches us, to respect and honor the dignity of each human being.”

The Rev. Warren Stewart, senior pastor at the predominantly African American First Institutional Baptist Church of Phoenix, and his wife, the Rev. Karen Stewart, also a pastor at the church, attended the Mass as guests. The Stewarts have collaborated with the diocese in the past in promoting the U.S. Census, immigration advocacy and ecumenical efforts.

“The whole nation has been traumatized to see George Floyd be killed right in front of their eyes,” Rev. Warren Stewart said. “We believe God has given us a kairos moment, a watershed moment to change 400 years of systemic racism. We don’t want to waste this moment, and the bishop helped us tonight by this Mass.”

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THE CATHOLIC COMMENTATOR
SERVING THE DIOCESE OF BATON ROUGE SINCE 1963

June 19, 2020
Q I have enjoyed reading your column over the years. But I do have a question that has always bothered me, even though I have made more than 30 retreats at a Jesuit retreat center and have taught CCD (religious education). In the Apostles’ Creed, why does it say that Jesus descended into hell and rose on the third day? How could Jesus go to hell? He had no sins and the damned, but it could also denote the place where the righteous awaited redemption. Until Jesus had completed his death and resurrection, the just could not yet know the joys of being in God’s presence.

So the first act of Christ after his death on Calvary was to go and rescue the just who had already died and bring them with him into the glory of the Father. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “Jesus did not descend into hell to deliver the damned, nor to destroy the hell of damnation, but to free the just who had gone before him” (No. 633).

A My boyfriend and I are madly in love and have decided to get married. He is American (from New Hampshire), and I am from the South American country of Ecuador. We met four years ago, and our relationship has survived distance as well as differences in language and culture. Additionally, I am a Catholic and he is a Jew. We would like to have a wedding ceremony reflecting our two faiths. What is the process for having that recognized by the church?

We would like to have both a rabbi and a priest give us their blessings at the marriage. We have in mind a wedding about a year from now in Florida. I can’t, though, go right now to Florida to make these arrangements, since I am still in the middle of the visa process. What can we do to have this happen? (Ecuador)

A I have been involved in a number of interfaith wedding ceremonies such as you describe all with the blessing of the Catholic Church. It’s a little bit complicated for you and your fiancé because of the geographic distances, but it can certainly happen, and this is what I think you should do. First, you should telephone the Catholic diocese in the area of Florida where you would like to be married. (The Florida dioceses are: Miami, St. Augustine, St. Petersburg, Orlando, Pensacola-Destin-Navarre, Palm Beach and Venice.) When you call, ask for the marriage tribunal office, explain your situation and seek their advice. Ask them to put you in touch with a priest they think might be willing to accommodate you.

Then speak with that priest and, if he’s willing to be involved, ask him to suggest a local rabbi who might participate. Then call that rabbi and seek his or her assistance. At some point, you and your fiancé will need to fill out some paperwork with the church seeking the required permissions, as well as obtain a civil marriage license.

One question you’ll have to decide is whether you want the priest or the rabbi to be the one to receive your vows during the ceremony; it can work either way, but there’s a technical difference in the sort of permission/disposition you need to obtain. You have a year to work on this so it can certainly come together, but it would be best to start soon. Meanwhile, I will pray for the two of you and for God’s blessings on your marriage.

FATHER DOYLE is a retired priest in the Diocese of Albany, New York. Questions may be sent to Father Kenneth Doyle at askfatherdoyle@gmail.com and 30 Columbia Circle Dr., Albany, NY 12203.
Mother, daughter welcomed into the church

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Her broad smile veiled behind a mask, her emotions silentlyiostreaming with joy, Lisa Lee approached the altar at Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs, steps away from receiving the Eucharist for the first time.

Holding out her hand, pastor Father Frank Uter delivered the host to Lee, and it was then her Catholic journey that began in her infancy with the waters of baptism had come full circle.

Lee and her daughter, Madison Guylette, were welcomed into the church May 31, a ceremony originally scheduled for Easter Sunday but delayed by the coronavirus pandemic, as were welcoming services for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adult candidates throughout the Diocese of Baton Rouge. Churches are now scheduling those ceremonies to welcome their own RCIA candidates.

“Receiving the Eucharist for the first time was a very spiritually fulfilling and joyful experience,” Lee said. “Nothing could have taken away from the joy I felt in my heart.”

Originally baptized a Catholic, Lee, who is the associate director of Disaster Operations for Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, said attending church while growing up “was never a family thing.”

In junior high school she joined a Baptist church so she could hang out with her friends and in 2013 joined the Episcopal Church.

But the seeds of conversion were planted in the summer of 2019 when Guylette attended the Franciscan Experience retreat sponsored by Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University at the Bishop Robert E. Tracy Center in Baton Rouge.

The retreat included daily Mass and eucharistic adoration.

With her daughter away for the week, Lee said it was then the Lord put on her mind to tell Guylette that if she wanted to become Catholic “it was okay.”

It seems as if Lee was not the only heart being changed during that week. Guylette recalls sitting on the floor of the St. Joseph Chapel at the Tracy Center meditating about the “cool things” she had learned during the retreat. Suddenly her eyes were awash with tears, which was unusual.

“I had something telling me to become Catholic,” Guylette, who had spent several years volunteering at CCDBR and was also involved with the Immaculate Conception youth group, said. “So I was like ‘okay, but that is going on a limb, don’t you think?’”

“When I told (Lee) about what happened, I knew it was the right thing to do,” she added.

“It was a huge burden lifted off my shoulder,” Lee admitted.

But her daughter’s answer also came with the caveat that they could go through RCIA together.

“I had no plans on becoming Catholic,” Lee said with a laugh, “But I thought why not both of us convert?”

SEE CONVERSION PAGE 9

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EVERYONE NEEDS A WILL, TRUSTS AND POWERS OF ATTORNEY IN THE POST COVID-19 WORLD: ARE YOU READY FOR THE NEXT DISRUPTION?

Around the world and in Louisiana, the coronavirus pandemic has changed the way people live, work and learn on a massive scale. As we all continue to experience the physical, emotional and economic effects of the pandemic, did you know that only 4% of Americans fear the loss of their physical health because of this virus? The overwhelming fear is loss of income and hard-earned assets and not having what you need to provide for the health, education and support of your family...in sum, not having a legal estate plan in place.

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- Thursday, June 25th - 9:30am til 12noon
- Thursday, June 25th - 10am til 12:30pm
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Pro-life leader says pro-abortion lobby ‘terrified’

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

Abby Johnson’s name is synonymous with the anti-abortion movement but that hasn’t always been the case. For eight years, she worked at the Planned Parenthood Clinic in Bryan, Texas, eventually becoming director and counseling young women on their right to choose until October 2009 when she witnessed an abortion procedure. Since then, Johnson has used her voice to encourage young women to choose life.

She wrote about that experience in a book that was made into a movie of the same name, “Unplanned,” which was released this past year.

Now, Johnson said she is noticing more awareness among lawmakers about the horrors of abortion.

“I’ve been dealing with abortion on one side or the other for 20 years, and I can’t really think of a time where the abortion lobby has been in such a frenzy,” said Johnson during a phone interview from her Austin, Texas home that she shares with her husband Doug and eight children. “I think they are seeing how loose their grip is on abortion rights right now, and I think they’re terrified. They lost their battle in Texas, the governor banned abortion during the pandemic. I think they thought they were going to win that battle and lost, and the Supreme Court wouldn’t even pick it up.”

Johnson said she thinks pro-choice supporters are “realizing their favor is waning,” believing that is causing problems for the movement. She added that more people, including youth, are becoming more aware of the “reality of abortion.”

“We’ve got so much scientific evidence proving the humanity of the unborn,” Johnson said.

“They’ve even said the only way to defend abortion is by taking the stance that a child in the womb isn’t human and that goes against science but that’s the only way they can defend abortion. But it’s the argument they have to make because all the other arguments fail.”

In October, Johnson said she was contacted through her website by a single mother of a four-year-old who was in desperate need of assistance. Johnson said she placed an order through walmart.com for the woman to pick up groceries, but Johnson stayed in touch with the mother to help develop a plan to prevent further crisis situations.

More cries for help from similar circumstances led to “Love Line,” a 24-hour crisis line which had a 60% increase in calls after the nation went into lockdown because of the coronavirus pandemic. The hotline addresses needs for families “who fall out of the parameters for pregnancy centers” which assist moms until their babies reach two years old, according to Johnson.

“Our hotline helps really any family. So it could be single moms, it could be families who lost their jobs, which a lot of people are facing during this pandemic; maybe both parents have lost their jobs so they’re without income,” said Johnson.

“We’ve helped a lot of people who are fleeing domestic violence situations.”

Johnson, who converted to Catholicism with her husband and children in 2012, said the movie “Unplanned” continues to spread the message of the pro-life movement. It was released on Amazon Prime in April.

“It got a wider audience for sure. This really took away the financial barrier to see the film, now if you have Amazon Prime, you can see it, so there’s no excuse,” said Johnson.

“It’s really been God’s blessing because we originally believed that it wasn’t going to be shown on Amazon Prime for several months,” she added.

“The movie got the word that they were going to release it on Easter weekend on Prime. It was great because this was the perfect time because everybody was at home.”

GOSPEL ▼

From page 2

Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life” (Rom 3-4). Thus, we are together, one humanity, in the everyday journey to eternity. Each day we are called to holiness. If Jesus conquered sin and death for us, then we can conquer whatever we experience on this journey together. We receive the Lord, in baptism and Eucharist, then GO OUT and share his word in mission in order to form other disciples to follow Jesus and grow in holiness. Yes, even the simple act of giving a cup of cold water to another will refresh their physical thirst, as well as their soul (Mt 10:42). Be Christ to others. Be a courageous prophet for others. Be a witness of truth for others. Be present to others, that all may be one, as we are one in the body of Christ, the Spirit of truth.

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

CONVERSION ▼

From page 7

So in August, the mother and daughter stepped off on their journey.

Although Lee, who has been at CCDBR for 14 years, was well-acquainted with Catholic social teaching her knowledge of church teachings was limited. Upon entering RCIA, she began to pepper co-workers with questions, and, according to Lee, “everybody was open and understanding.”

“I really, really wanted to learn about church teaching,” Lee said. “They all answered me in a way that was loving and open.”

Through RCIA, Lee said several misconceptions she had been taught about the church by members of other denominations were debunked. She cited as examples that Catholics do not worship Mary as some claim but venerate the Blessed Virgin; people of all denominations go to heaven; and Catholics do read the Bible, specifically at every Mass.

“I learned a lot of church history and Christianity,” Lee said. “I did not know the church was the first church Jesus founded.”

Lee said going through the RCIA program was spiritually enriching and has resulted in her reading the Bible more frequently.

She has even created a prayer space at home.

“I had been to Mass a lot through Catholic Charities and always felt like something was missing.” Lee said, adding that the Eucharist made her feel complete. Gayllette called her conversion experience “amazing.”

“Three years ago, I was really trying to dig deeper in my faith, have more Bible time and reading books about how to better my relationship with myself, others and God,” she said. “I’ve been wanting to encourage other people and share my journey with them as well.

“I’ve also been trying to pray more and it’s really been amazing to see what God can do in your life if you just let him. I am so excited.”

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MOVIE REVIEWS

USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting classifications:
A-I – General patronage
A-II – Adults and adolescents
A-III – Adults
A-IV – Adults, with reservations
L – Limited adult audience
O – Morally offensive

Motion Picture Association of America ratings:
G – General audiences; all ages admitted
PG – Parental guidance suggested; some material may not be suitable for children
PG-13 – Parents are strongly cautioned to give special guidance for attendance of children under 13; some material may be inappropriate for young children
R – Restricted; under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian
NC-17 – No one under 17 admitted

The High Note
Focus
An aspiring music producer (Dakota Johnson) finds herself caught between the demands of her day job working as a personal assistant to a famous rock star (Tracee Ellis Ross) and her desire to nurture the career of the promising singer-songwriter (Kelvin Harrison Jr.) with whom she also becomes involved romantically. Glossy and generally upbeat, the film supplies an ensemble of comedy and drama, penned by Susan Scarf Merrell, director Josefine Decker and screenwriter Sarah Gubbins. The story involves a mid-20th-century period drama centered on famed horror writer Shirley Jackson (“The Lottery”), played by Elisabeth Moss. Jackson and her professor husband, Stanley Edgar Hyman (Michael Stuhlbarg), acquire fictitious foils in the form of a young couple, Rose (Odessa Young) and Fred (Logan Lerman). Rose becomes Jackson’s housekeeper and sometimes nemesis, while Fred engages in heated academic battles with Hyman. Deliberately parallels to Edward Albee’s “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” are established as the barbs fly, the cigarettes are chain-smoked and the bourbon flows freely. There’s also a tinge of the gothic as Rose becomes identified with the main character in the novel Jackson is slowly and painfully writing, 1951’s “Hangsaman.” Those who enjoy literary arguments will get them. Those looking for clear moral messages will be out in the fog. Occult themes, two brief scenes of marital lovemaking, one of them in a sodid setting, glimpses of upper female nudity, references to suicide, fleeting rough and crass language. A-III; R

Shirley
Neon
Working from the fact-based novel by Susan Scarf Merrell, director Josefine Decker and screenwriter Sarah Gubbins deliver a mid-20th-century period drama centered on famed horror writer Shirley Jackson (“The Lottery”), played by Elisabeth Moss. Jackson and her professor husband, Stanley Edgar Hyman (Michael Stuhlbarg), acquire fictitious foils in the form of a young couple, Rose (Odessa Young) and Fred (Logan Lerman). Rose becomes Jackson’s housekeeper and sometimes nemesis, while Fred engages in heated academic battles with Hyman. Deliberately parallels to Edward Albee’s “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” are established as the barbs fly, the cigarettes are chain-smoked and the bourbon flows freely. There’s also a tinge of the gothic as Rose becomes identified with the main character in the novel Jackson is slowly and painfully writing, 1951’s “Hangsaman.” Those who enjoy literary arguments will get them. Those looking for clear moral messages will be out in the fog. Occult themes, two brief scenes of marital lovemaking, one of them in a sodid setting, glimpses of upper female nudity, references to suicide, fleeting rough and crass language. A-III; R

Capone
Vertical
Queasy biographical drama tracks the last year in the life of legendary kingpin Al Capone (Tom Hardy). Drying of neurosyphilis, the recently paroled tax evasion convict rambles around his Florida mansion hallucinating and grunting incoherently. His loyal wife (Linda Cardellini) tries to comfort him and his estranged son (Mason Gooding). The three are chain-smoked and the bourbon flows freely. There’s also a tinge of the gothic as Rose becomes identified with the main character in the novel Jackson is slowly and painfully writing, 1951’s “Hangsaman.” Those who enjoy literary arguments will get them. Those looking for clear moral messages will be out in the fog. Occult themes, two brief scenes of marital lovemaking, one of them in a sodid setting, glimpses of upper female nudity, references to suicide, fleeting rough and crass language. A-III; R

SCOOB!
Warner Bros.
Bland animated addition to the Scooby-Doo franchise that began as a Saturday morning TV show in 1969. Opening with an origins story of the bond between a future laid-back beatnik (voice of Will Forte) and his faithful dog (voice of Frank Welker), director Tony Cervone’s adventure then jumps forward a decade to the battle between the Mystery, Inc. gang to which the duo belong, its other members voiced by Gina Rodriguez, Zac Efron and Amanda Seyfried and a villain (voice of Jason Isaacs) who wants to kidnap the titular spirit of the supernatural power he possesses as a descendant of Alexander the Great’s pet pooch. The ensemble is aided by an aspiring superhero (voice of Mark Wahlberg), his brainy sidekick (voice of Kiercey Clemens) and a mechanical pup (voice of Ken Jeong). While it sates unity, loyal friendship, courage and self-sacrifice, this passable feature fails to make much of an impression. Too frightening for little kids, it’s acceptable for most others. Much peril, mature wordplay, a single crass term, brief scatological humor. A-II; PG

How to Build a Girl
IFC
There’s a tension within this coming-of-age comedy, set in Northern England, between the generally upbeat personality of its precocious 16-year-old protagonist (Beanie Feldstein) and the seaminess of some of the mistakes to which she falls prey on her path to maturity. Smart but socially awkward, she relies heavily on her close-knit relationship with her gay brother (Laurie Kynaston) as she yearns to be thought of as cool. She gets a seemingly unlikely opportunity to remake her image when she’s hired as a freelance critic by a pop music magazine. But the poise and suave spirit of the rock star (Frank Dillane) she starts an affair with turns her toxic and threatens her friendship with the sensitive older singer (Alfie Allen) she would like to make her boyfriend. Based on Caitlin Moran semi-autobiographical 2014 novel, director Coky Giedroyc’s film is rife with the vulgarity it portrays as characteristic of its working-class milieu and sees its heroine pass through a promiscuous phase that’s depicted both too explicitly and too flippantly. A frivolous view of human sexuality, strong sexual content including graphic casual activity, masturbation and rear nudity at least one mild oath, numerous rough and about a dozen crude or crass terms, an obscene gesture. O; R

True History of the Kelly Gang
IFC
Brutal reimagining of the life and legacy of Australia’s famous 19th-century outlaw, Ned Kelly, played in childhood by Orlando Schwerdt and as an adult by George MacKay. In adapting Peter Carey’s 2000 novel, screenwriter Shaun Grant and director Justin Kurzel trace the bush ranger’s volatile relationship with his fierce mother (Eizzie Davis), his apprenticeship with a kindly seeming but savage thief (Russell Crowe), his persecution by a pathological police officer (Nicholas Hoult) and his romance with a prostitute (Thomasin McKenzie). The view of human nature presented by this bold, relentlessly disturbing film is, with the exception of McKenzie’s character a loving albeit out-of-wedlock mom so universally degraded that there is nowhere to be found, only an endless cycle of oppression and the revenge it provokes. Skewed values, much gory violence, strong sexual content, including aberrant acts, implied premarital activity and rear nudity, gruesome images, at least one use of profanity, pervasive rough and occasional crude language. O; R
El miedo a la incertidumbre puede generar ansiedad durante el aislamiento

Por Richard Meek
El comentarista católico

Las órdenes de quedarse en casa y estar en cuarentena han sido una bendición para muchos, ya que finalmente han podido terminar esos proyectos domésticos, desempolvando libros parcialmente leídos y tal vez incluso fortaleciendo los lazos familiares al pasar tanto tiempo juntos. Otros, sin embargo, no han sido tan afortunados. El aislamiento ha creado ansiedad y, en muchos casos, depresión, según Darrell Ducote, director de la Oficina de Matrimonio y Vida Familiar de la Diócesis de Baton Rouge.

“Depende de cómo interprete la orden de quedarse en casa”, dijo Ducote. “Para muchas personas, esto es solo un inconveniente”, estoy aburrido, “pero para algunas personas puede ser un gran problema si su salud se ve amenazada, si están aterrizando para contraer la enfermedad, o más a menudo las personas sin trabajo y sin dinero”.

Ducote dijo que la forma en que las personas perciben la amenaza creada por la pandemia determinará cómo les afectará emocional o psicológicamente. El miedo puede ser la fuerza impulsora que puede ser el catalizador de la depresión, pero dijo que estar aislado no significa que un individuo tenga que perder el contacto con la familia. Por el contrario, mantenerse en contacto con otros a través de una variedad de dispositivos de comunicación disponibles subyugará esos sentimientos de soledad.

“Si se está aislando como resultado del miedo o la ansiedad, entonces sí puede tener un efecto muy negativo (en un individuo) y perpetuar el miedo”, dijo. “Puede exacerbar la situación porque no hay nada que te empuje a salir de ella si tienes esa tenencia. Realmente tienes que llegar a un punto en nada que te empuje a salir de ella si tienes esa tenencia”.

Ducote reconoció que la incertidumbre sobre el estado laboral de las personas puede ser depresiva e incluso afectar su sentido de esperanza. Cuando se enfrentan a tal amenaza, las personas a menudo muestran signos de trastorno de estrés postraumático, mostrando síntomas como dificultad para dormir, nerviosismo, ataques de miedo o uso del entumecimiento emocional como mecanismo de afrontamiento.

Al experimentar un trauma, como la pandemia actual, Ducote dijo que “la mayoría de todos” exhibirán signos de TEPT, pero la mayoría de las personas comenzarán a buscar formas de enfrentar la amenaza. Las estadísticas muestran que solo alrededor del ocho ciento por ciento de las personas que experimentan un trauma desarrollarán TEPT.

“La situación es una crisis, pero uno de los detalles es que el trauma provoca cambios, ya sea para lo negativo o para lo positivo”, dijo Ducote.

El cambio positivo en realidad puede conducir a una vida más rica y plena al salir de la crisis, dijo, pero los cambios negativos pueden llevar a uno a “atascarse”. En esos casos, la persona se enfoca en el miedo, el miedo crece y cambia en el cerebro, lo que hace que sea cada vez más difícil salir de él, lo que conduce a TEPT.

Ducote ofreció seis estrategias para hacer frente a la tensión mental creada por la pandemia COVID-19.

Dijo que lo primero es contar una nueva historia, lo que significa reconocer que una persona no puede recuperar su antigua vida y que el trauma destruyó lo que creía que era su antigua vida. Eso individuo tiene que crear un nuevo sentido de “quién soy, a dónde quiero ir, cuáles son mis metas”, dijo Ducote.

Otras estrategias incluyen confiar y conectarse con los demás, así como sentir un sentimiento de gratitud por la bendición que cada persona tiene; expresarse contando su historia a otros verbalmente o mediante un diario; buscando identificando lo positivo en la vida, como un mayor aprecio por la familia y los amigos o incluso hacer más ejercicio; estar abierto a nuevas experiencias; y finalmente, encontrar significado en la fe. “Llegar a creer y reconocer que Dios está con nosotros durante estos tiempos difíciles para ofrecer apoyo y, en última instancia, creer que Dios puede transformar esto en algo nuevo como si transfor- mara la muerte de Jesús en la resurrección es uno de los elementos más importantes para lidiar con el trauma”, dijo Ducote.

Desafortunadamente, la violencia doméstica también ha aumentado durante los últimos dos meses, provocada por el temor que una persona propensa a la violencia podría tener de perder el control y mantener el control de todos los que la rodean.

En general, Ducote dijo que la crisis es difícil en sus primeras etapas, pero si las personas están dispuestas a hacer cambios y reevaluar su situación de vida, el crecimiento es posible.

Ducote está en proceso de grabar una presentación en video sobre el crecimiento postraumático que estará disponible en CatholicLife TV y YouTube.
Salvific use of the flag

Another Perspective
Father John Carville

“A picture is worth a thousand words.” I don’t know who said it, but the truth of that statement has certainly been proven throughout the turmoil following the cruel murder of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis. On June 6, the Advocate’s opinion page carried a block of six drawings summarizing the oppression of racism from slavery to today. A white overseer whipping a slave, Ku Klux Klan burning a cross, the legs and feet of a hanging lynched black person, modern cops brutally beating a black man with their batons, Officer Derek Chauvin with his knee on the neck of Floyd and a clueless white guy asking protesters, “Why so angry?” A perfect description of our problem today.

There is no doubt that the majority of Americans, white, black, Arab, Asian and Hispanic are truly appalled, and many are determined to protest until they see meaningful action taken. The same day, June 6, the Advocate ran an excellent editorial entitled “Let us channel righteous outrage toward lasting change.” That should be the ultimate goal of everyone. But how do we bring that about, and where do we begin? Our discouraging national history of repeated failure to stop the killing of people of color, black and Hispanics highlights the tremendous difficulty of eliminating racism.

Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda, of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota, where Floyd was murdered, wrote about how the murder revealed the concern and anger about racism “that was just below the surface” throughout our country. It was “shocking,” he said, “that there could be in anybody’s heart such an absence of concern for human life.” Both Archbishop Hebda and the editors of the Advocate admitted that the anger this caused was righteous and the longing for justice palpable, but both also warned about the violence and destruction in the rioting that occurred in some places. Again, in the Advocate, this sad evidence of the evil that racism leads to was captured by a cartoonist who drew a couple, both masked, passing a row of destroyed shops as the wife asked her husband, “Remember when we just had a global pandemic?”

From morning TV talk shows to university deans and presidents, everyone is being interviewed for their opinions and solutions. All have opinions but no one has solutions. Even the players of the National Football League have been brought into the growing division of opinions. Saints quarterback Drew Brees was asked whether, as a result of Floyd’s killing, he expected more players to take a knee when the flag was presented and the National Anthem played at football games this coming season. He offered his previously stated objection to showing disrespect to the American flag and anthem. Then he got bombed by his fellow players. “He just got it all wrong,” they said. He could have argued back: “What American does not respect his country’s flag?” But he respected his fellow players, so he listened to what they were trying to tell him. And because he was humble, he came to understand their argument. They had to be heard. ‘Too many people of color were dying because of bigotry and hatred and police brutality. They could no longer live in fear that they or their children would be the next victims. That was the issue, not intentional disrespect for the flag. Brees changed his way of seeing the problem. He came to see that it was a cry for solidarity against abuse of power, a plea for unity rather than division. We are all Americans, and that means we should all seek equality for all of our fellow citizens. For too long we have not achieved that, and we cannot kick the problem down the road any longer; black lives matter, all lives matter, and too many lives are being lost, including those of police officers.

SEE CARVILLE PAGE 15

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

PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PRAY FOR US

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

YOUTH SPEAK OUT ON RACISM, VIRUS

Let your voice be heard by casting a vote

Upon learning of the news of George Floyd’s passing, I shared in the utterly despair felt by many across the nation. I wish that I could say that I am shocked but, unfortunately, this appears to be the new norm. This is something that happens way too often and seemingly nothing is done. Each time something like this happens, I would always pray and hope that it would be different but it never has been. One would think after years of tears, blood and fighting for change there would be change, but instead, it has become a never-ending cycle of oppression.

My grandmother found herself explaining to my mom about the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in 1963, then my mom found herself explaining to me Treyvon Martin and Alton Sterling. What now scares me the most is that there will be another victim that I will have to explain to my children. My great-grandparents fought hard for equality and then passed the torch on to my grandparents, who passed it to my parents. Now it is my turn to resume their struggle.

The question the new generation must ask is, “What is a new effective way for our cries to be heard and to bring about change?” We ask ourselves, “Should we protest?” But my people bring about change? We ask ourselves, “How will we bring about change?”

Next, consider who your mayor will be. The mayor hires the police chief and the police chief will hire the officers who will patrol our communities. Many people who are new to the voting process might not have had access to this information, which is why it is critical to educate them. This simple act of voting changes everything for the people. When you vote for good candidates, good can happen.

With social media being at its most influential, it is critical I use social media to tell all my friends to vote and demand changed actions with our vote. I can use social media to highlight what each candidate stands for.

In 2020, four million young adults will turn 18. That is four million more people that can make an impact in the future election. Our vote is powerful and essential so we should fully educate ourselves. We should attend town hall meetings, council members’ events and campaign parties. To all that will be new voters, this is our time.

Now that I have explained how politics work on a local level, I plan to inform all new voters about the importance of voting locally and using their platforms to spread the word and tell their friends. Persistence and consistency is the key; we must continue the fight. Our consistency will bring in the next wave of new voters. We will create a new cycle and bring new changes to our country.

Coleman is the 2020 salutatorian of Cristo Rey Baton Rouge Franciscan High School.

COVID-19 challenges for young people

The novel COVID-19 struck our country with an undeniable amount of incredible force. With hospitals being overwhelmed with thousands of sick patients, civilians scared out of their minds, schools, workplaces and places of worship closing their doors, it is clear that this pandemic has wreaked havoc.

Many agree the effects of the coronavirus will have a severe and lasting impact on the future. Being a teenager during this time of crisis has its own unique challenges. Our school year cut short, encounters with isolation, uncertainty of the future and experiencing an event of this magnitude for the first time in most of our lives are all part of the issues people of my age are facing. Although these difficulties do not compare to what others (police officers, essential workers and their families) are facing, they are still relevant.

I asked some of my close friends how they think this pandemic has affected them. One said she believes that because she is an only child and was not allowed to leave her house, she felt extremely isolated, and this had a negative impact on her mental health. She felt alone and felt anger when seeing others willingly ignore the cautions and regulations given by medical experts and the government. This feeling is a frustrating one. Especially as a teenager, we are constantly surrounded by social media. These images and videos of people on these apps were discouraging to see. Without school or being able to see friends and others like usual, the lack of “face to face” interaction can be detrimental.

Although during the 2019-2020 school year I was a junior in high school, I understand and empathize with what the Class of 2020 had to deal with. Their dreams of walking across the stage at graduation, surrounded by their families, friends and fellow classmates were crushed. I know that ever since I was in kindergarten, I have seen the graduating classes have their special moments as seniors and have always thought of the day that my friends and I would enjoy those special moments. Now because of COVID-19, those seniors cannot have those experiences and memories of previous classes. This is heartbreaking seeing my friends having to deal with this.

However, some people believe the quarantine has benefited them. Another one of my friends said that it has “given me a lot of time to do things I normally wouldn’t have time to do like playing instruments, cleaning, painting, drawing and other various activities.” Also, they all agreed that this time has allowed them to spend more time with family.

I believe that this time apart from friends, classmates, co-workers and others will make everyone closer in the end, because we have a newfound realization of how precious our time is together. Also, this is a great time to really connect and grow your relationship with the Lord.

Romans 12:12 says “Let your hope make you glad. Be patient in times of trouble and never stop praying.” This verse is extremely applicable to our world’s current state. During these strange times of struggle and fear, we should remain strong in the Lord and trust in his ways. We should never give up hope and keep on praying for peace and patience. Although it may be difficult to see the light at the end of this tunnel, we have to know that this will not last forever. Knowing that we have the Lord almighty on our side we must say to ourselves, in the words of Psalm 118:6, “What do we have to fear?”

Auzine is a rising senior in high school and a parishioner at St. Aloysius Church in Baton Rouge.
Wedding prep going virtual

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

While many things are put on hold because of the coronavirus pandemic, the Office of Marriage and Family Life of the Diocese of Baton Rouge is moving forward by providing virtual retreats to help engaged couples fulfill diocesan requirements before their wedding day.

Beginning in July the OMFL is planning to offer the Called to Love retreat for engaged couples online.

“The retreat is part of the larger plan for marriage preparation,” said Darryl Ducote, director of the Office of Marriage and Family Life. “We felt couples were entering into marriage with an insufficient foundation, not only for their relationship but their faith, which impacts their marriage.”

About 18 months ago the department introduced the Called to Love retreat to allow engaged couples to focus on their relationship skills and the spiritual dimensions of their relationship. The retreat is designed to have couples address two questions: What role do they want God to play in their marriage? Do they understand what God is calling them to in marriage and are they willing to commit to that call?

Normally couples meet at the Bishop Robert E. Tracy Retreat Center in Baton Rouge. However, pandemic restrictions have closed the retreat center, creating a hardship for couples because it interfered with their ability to plan their wedding in a timely manner, Ducote said.

His department consulted with Barry Schoedel, associate director of the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis, who set up a virtual retreat program.

Couples will take part in a “real time” retreat with other engaged couples from their homes using Zoom, according to Ducote. The agenda is similar to the on-site retreats in that a facilitator couple gives a brief presentation, couples complete various experiences and then have an opportunity to share their experiences and insights with the other couples.

The retreats are scheduled Friday through Sunday. Retreats at the Tracy Center usually end with Mass but the virtual retreat will close with a livestream Mass at 11 a.m.

Ducote acknowledged online retreats lose some of the benefits of the overnight retreats.

“They were (at the Tracy Center) for two nights. The purpose of the retreats was to remove everyday distractions so they can focus on God and their relationship with each other,” Ducote said. “By doing an online retreat we would lose some of the value of removing them from their everyday lives. But it will still help them focus on their relationship.”

One of the perks of the online retreat is that couples can participate in comfortable surroundings and “take breaks” when needed, he said.

Couples are responding positively and seem to be excited about the new format, Ducote said.

The OMFL will still attempt to solicit feedback by asking couples to fill out evaluation forms, just as they would at an onsite retreat.

“This will help us to adjust based on recommendations from the evaluations,” Ducote said.

“It’s been challenging for us, but it’s also caused us to be creative and that’s been exciting,” he added.

The online retreats will continue through the end of the year, according to Ducote.

Retreat dates and registration information can be found at mfldiobr.org. Those who have questions can call Mila Gerton of the OMFL at 225-242-0323.
From page 1

**PRAYERS ▼**

During his homily Bishop Duca pointed to his upbringing in Dallas, noting that his “innate and intuitive knowledge about storms are about tornados.” He said he knew “when to be afraid and when not to be afraid.”

“I know that when the sky turns green and the wind which was blowing 30 miles per hour stops and it becomes absolutely still, run for cover,” he said. “I don’t know where you run but run because it is close.”

The bishop then gave a second anecdote in which his father said he took high blood pressure medicine in order “to eat the way he wanted to eat,” which included salting his food. He used both stories as examples, “because it’s always a strange thing when we pray to God to protect us from storms.”

“Hurricanes are unique things,” said Bishop Duca. “They’re coming right at you and you pray, ‘Lord, send this hurricane in another direction.’ And the people on the other sides are saying, ‘Lord, don’t change the direction at all leave it right where it is. We’re happy with that, thank you, Lord!’”

He said while one group is giving thanks to God for the storm veering away from them, another group is asking why God has inflicted such pain. The bishop said it’s interesting how people pray for such things but it is important that “we do pray for God’s protection” because we believe we are self-sufficient.

“We need to remind ourselves that in the great powers of nature, which we’re seeing in the pandemic as well, which is a power of nature, microscopic nevertheless, that we don’t have all that knowledge, we don’t have all that power,” said Bishop Duca. “We think we’re in control of our lives, but we know that in a moment we can get sick; in a moment we can commit a sin that turns our life around in ways that are not really good and painful and difficult. The illness of a loved one can throw our life into a complete twist. And so we need a firm center, a place where we have a faith strong enough to know that God is working.”

The bishop then recounted a story he read online by a woman whose neighbor lost a child. He described the sorrow and suffering that filled the home.

“She said, ‘Lord, are you here?’ and then she was inspired that God was in this, too -- ‘That’s why Jesus died on the cross and rose again, that not even the powers of this world, the nature that is all around that has a certain order and law within itself that God created, that he is even over that and while we cannot see it, his victory is present here in this child raised from the dead, in with God’ said Bishop Duca.

The bishop said it’s important to see that “God is always with us,” even in the pandemic.

“The more we can find our center in God’s strength, the more we will find peace, even in difficult times,” said Bishop Duca.

However, he said we can’t depend on God to take care of us which is why God gave us a mind, free will and the ability to make decisions to protect ourselves.

“If you’re sitting in your house on a beach in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux and you say, ‘God’s going to protect me’ and there’s a nine-foot wall of water coming towards you, well, I’m sorry, God’s with you but he’s there to protect you and let us acknowledge, even now in our difficulties, when we are helped, let us give thanks to God, whether it comes from a person, a grace, a moment of inspiration, through a healing, let us pray to God and thank God to know he is with us, he is not asleep.”

FATHER CARVILLE ▼

It is strange that our flag should be a cause of division in our struggle against racism. Its 50 stars proclaim unity, while its stripes honor all of those from every ethnic group who have shed their blood in defense of our country. I am not a politician, nor a professional political commentator. However, as a Catholic priest, I have spent my life trying to help others follow the Lord of life who came to call us out of division, hatred and cruelty into God’s kingdom of love, mercy and support of one another. His message began with a call to metanoia, repentance, calling for a change of vision, away from the reliance on power and privilege won at the expense of others, to a life of service to others. He often used symbols like the vine and the branches, the shepherd and his flock, the one bread of his body feeding all and uniting all. We are not all Christian, nor even all believers in one God, but as Americans we all share a desire for the peace, unity and equality of God’s kingdom that in our secular, pluralistic society is promised by the symbol of our flag. Today, that flag is calling for a change in our vision, away from the narrow exclusivity of racism to the broader inclusivity of equality for all Americans.

As a first practical step towards that change, I would suggest that when professional football begins to be played again, the flag be not raised but lowered as a sign of our repentance for the great number of black lives killed by racism. We traditionally lower the flag to honor our dead. It would be a sign that they were all our dead, cherished and not forgotten. In that spirit we could all kneel with disrespect to nothing nor anyone.

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.
COMMUNION

From page 1

day trying to get everyone ready and out the door early enough to get seats. Being able to show up right before Mass and having all of our family able to sit with us in the same pew and actually see him receive his first Communion, it was just really special.’

Molly Rose, director of Child Faith Formation at St. George, said as she tried to find the best way to proceed to accommodate the 25% capacity requirement with 111 children, she spoke with several parents and children.

“I asked them what was most important – being with their school friends and immediate family or being able to receive the sacrament with their immediate family and extended family and the absolute consensus across the board was, ‘I want to be with my immediate family and my extended family.’ That’s what touched me the most,” said Rose.

From May 26 through June 17, families of communicants had a choice of five weekend Masses and five weekday Masses with four communicants per Mass to allow for front row seating. Rose said the families arrive 30 minutes prior to Mass and would go over the procedure and helps each child with how to remove the mask before receiving the Eucharist and how to put the mask back on afterwards.

For some, the mask added another facet that had some children a little anxious. Noel said Lucas was nervous about removing the mask correctly while others took it in stride.

“At first, it’s not what you envision, your first Eucharist wearing a mask, but it was fine, we made do,” said Jessica Williams, whose son Andrew received his first Communion.

She was there with her husband Daniel and two other children, Tyler, 10, and Cate, 6.

“We have not been back to Mass,” she said. “Because of the masks, my kids wouldn’t sit still. They wouldn’t be comfortable wearing it during Mass.”

“Andrew asked (Sunday) if we were going to Mass, but I explained to him the masks and Cate so young, she’s not going to be able to sit through Mass wearing one, so we’ll just wait until that rule is lifted. So we’re just going to watch it through TV for now.”

Mindy Calandro said her daughter Madison was excited but nervous.

“After the Mass, she said, ‘That wasn’t anything to be nervous about, that was totally fine,’” said Calandro, who was there with her husband Blaze, and sons Joseph, 9, and Levi, 6.

Calandro said Madison’s grandparents, who remain in quarantine, watched the Mass on YouTube and messaged Madison afterwards about “how proud they were of her.”

One surprising aspect of this new procedure has been the profound effect on those organizing the Mass and the priests. Rose said she has now witnessed first Eucharist both with the grand celebration and in this smaller setting and said she is “taken aback” every time she sees the second-graders take holy Communion in the latter celebration.

“Seeing this, where our first Eucharist candidate is able to receive the body of Christ with their family in such an intimate setting, it’s just breathtaking because it truly makes the body of Christ the center and the focus,” said Rose. “It shows how it is the source and summit of our religion and faith and it gives you goose bumps every time you get to witness it, and it’s breathtaking.”

Father Yi agreed. He said celebrating the Masses has been “fruitful” for both him and Father Paul Gros, parochial vicar at St. George.

“It has helped us because actually every Mass should be like a first Communion Mass, for the grownups as well as kids,” said Father Yi. “It’s a very special time when Jesus comes to us as a gift. As I’m doing more of these Masses, it has not become a routine. It’s become more of a special occasion for me to kind of pull out of myself, and from the Scripture and also from the teachings of the church, what’s now another aspect that I can highlight at this Mass.”

Father Yi said celebrating the first Communion Masses made him realize the liturgy is truly a special gift.

“Only being able to see (Mass) on TV or computer screens for 60 days and only being able to do spiritual communion – we really got to appreciate the physicality, why (Jesus) wants to come to us, so that we can touch, we can taste, literally kind of chew him. That (realization) just came alive for me as we did these Masses.”

Father Yi said the masks add a “different dimension” to both the Mass and receiving holy Communion. Firstly, he said it “keeps us from yacking along” during Mass and makes us pay attention. Secondly, he said removing the mask or “unveiling your mouth to receive” has a lot of symbolism.

“It makes you pay attention to what’s going in your mouth,” said Father Yi. “But for some people, (because of the quarantine), it just became a heightened experience of, ‘I do miss Jesus in the Eucharist, I do want to make the step to go physically and be present to him because he’s present to me. And I missed him. I missed his presence. I long to be united to him.’”

St. Vincent de Paul Community Pharmacy Saving Lives During Difficult Times

Our St. Vincent de Paul Community Pharmacy is responding to our community’s need for prescription services during the COVID-19 pandemic. It’s critical that people in our community with underlying health conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure and pulmonary diseases have access to free prescription medicines, since individuals with chronic illnesses are at greater risk from COVID-19.

We never know who will come through the doors of our St. Vincent de Paul Community Pharmacy. Last year, we filled over $1.4 million worth of life-sustaining prescriptions, but the people we serve are much more than numbers. They are people just like you and me, with one exception: They are sick and can’t afford their life-sustaining medications.

In this COVID-19 environment, we see the fear, the worried expressions and, quite often, we also see the shame at having to ask for help. The St. Vincent de Paul Community Pharmacy isn’t about numbers; it’s about people helping people, and you don’t have to be a doctor or pharmacist to help fill a prescription. It’s people like you that make our work possible.

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

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

If you need help with your prescription medicines, call us at (225) 383-7450 weekdays, or request help at svdpbr.org/request-help. Note: We are unable to fill prescriptions for controlled substances.

See the envelope insert in this issue to learn more about how you can save a life today, or give online at svdpbr.org.