St. Ann Parish in Midland has a new youth activity center, which was blessed by Bishop Michael Sis on Feb. 6, 2021. Pictured are: Deacon Tom Collier, Parochial Vicar Father Timothy Hayter, Coordinator of Youth Ministry Francisco Tejada, Samantha Braudaway, Bishop Michael Sis, Pastor Msgr. Larry Droll, and Director of Religious Education Emily Klemme.
A year to regenerate families

Deep down inside the heart of each one of us, we think about our family. For example, in my ministry as bishop, I visit with people across our large diocese, in parishes, schools, workplaces, hospitals, and prisons. In these encounters, people often ask me for prayers and blessings. When I ask them what they want me to pray for, can you guess what is their most frequent prayer request? It is for their family. Our family is a central part of our personal identity.

Just as no person is perfect, no family is perfect. In every family, there are hurts, disagreements, and embarrassments. Still, the family is a sacred, privileged place. The family is the domestic church. It is the place where we learn how to speak, to walk, and to tie our shoes. The family is our first school in learning how to love.

Family life molds and shapes us throughout our life. It is a gymnasium for growing in the virtues. The family is the most basic unit of society. If we are going to have healthy individuals, a healthy society, and a healthy church, we need healthy families. Pope John Paul II said, “As the family goes, so goes the nation and so goes the whole world in which we live” (Homily, Perth, Australia, November 30, 1986).

Not all families are the same. Some have a mother and father in the home. Some are blended families. Some have grandparents raising grandchildren. Some are single-parent families. Some have a stay-at-home mom, and others have a stay-at-home dad. Some are adoptive or foster families. No matter the size or composition, all families can be assisted by the message of our faith.

Those who work in schools and youth programs find that, as the years go by, they are seeing more and more students who experience challenging problems in their families. Far too many young people today are lacking a stable, supportive, and safe home life. Our local newspapers carry stories almost every day about abuse and neglect in families. As Catholic Christians, we consider the health of families to be a primary mission territory.

Pope Francis has frequently spoken about the importance of helping families. For two years in a row, in 2014 and 2015, he held synods in Rome on the topic of families. The first, in October 2014, dealt with the pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelization. The second, in October 2015, addressed the vocation and mission of the family in the church and in the contemporary world.

After those synods, Pope Francis published an apostolic exhortation on love in the family entitled Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love). That book can be read in its entirety at the Vatican website, www.vatican.va. This month, March 19, 2021, marks the fifth anniversary of the publication of Amoris Laetitia. To commemorate that anniversary, and to encourage all of us to regenerate the life of the family in our society today, Pope Francis has declared the Amoris Laetitia Year of the Family to be observed from March 19, 2021, through June 26, 2022, concluding with the celebration of the 10th World Meeting of Families in Rome.

The aim of the Amoris Laetitia Year of the Family is to reach every family around the world through several spiritual, pastoral, and cultural proposals. The goals of this year are the following:

1. To share the content of Amoris Laetitia, to let “people experience the Gospel of the family as a joy that fills hearts and lives” (AL, 200);
2. To proclaim that the sacrament of marriage is a gift that contains in itself a transforming power of human love;
3. To enable families to become active agents of the family apostolate through evangelization and catechesis inside the family;
4. To make young people aware of the importance of formation in the truth of love and in the gift of self;
5. To broaden the vision and scope of the family apostolate to include married couples, children, young people, the elderly, and situations of family fragility.

More information on this Year of the Family can be found at the following website from the Vatican office for the Laity, Family, and Life: www.laityfamilylife.va.

On the website of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops there is a wide array of information on the church’s teaching regarding marriage and family, resources for engaged couples and marriage at every stage, encouragement for living family life as a domestic church, and news of on-going initiatives of the USCCB that support and promote marriage and family life. These can be found at www.usccb.org/topics/marriage-and-family-life-ministries.

In the Diocese of San Angelo, the four priorities in our current diocesan Pastoral Plan are to form disciples, accompany youth, engage young adults, and nurture families. This plan covers the period from 2019 to 2022. The title of the Pastoral Plan is “A Future Full of Hope.” You can find it at our diocesan website at www.sanangelodiocese.org. On page ten of the plan document, we list several resources that can help families to thrive: Marriage Encounter, Engaged Encounter, Movimiento Familiar Cristiano, Couples for Christ, That Man Is You, Choice Wine, Families for Christ, Joyful Again!, and Strong Catholic Families/Strong Catholic Youth. These are very helpful in nourishing healthy family life.

As we begin the Year of the Family this month, I would like to conclude this article by sharing some insights based on many years of ministering with families. Here are twelve things that any of us can do to help our families become more holy, happy, and healthy:

1. Pray for our families. We need God’s help.
2. Pray with our families. Children need to see their parents praying, both at home and at church. As Patrick Peyton used to say, “The family that prays together stays together.”
3. Respect the God-given dignity of each family member.
4. When life brings hardship, take turns helping and supporting one another. Let our care for one another be a concrete expression of our love for God. Grow in compassion by suffering with one another through illness, accidents, unemployment, aging, and loss.
5. Speak the truth in love.
6. Whenever we hurt one another, apologize and forgive. Let forgiveness become a regular part of the pattern of life in the family.
7. When parents disagree on something, talk it out privately rather than arguing in the presence of the children.
8. Equip the home with resources that support the practice of the Catholic faith, such as Bibles, rosaries, a crucifix, religious art, a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, a book of the saints, and prayer books.
9. Encourage fellow family members by pointing out their positive qualities and affirming them.
10. Take the time to listen to one another.
11. Remember to say “please,” “thank you,” and “I love you.”
12. Make a conscious decision to become a more loving, generous, and constructive influence in the family.

By choosing behaviors such as these, and by utilizing resources like the ones listed in this article, we can foster strong families here in West Texas. We will thereby build a better church and society, and we will help souls get to heaven.

Reporting Abusive Abuse

The Catholic Diocese of San Angelo is firmly committed to providing the safest possible environment for our children and vulnerable adults. If you or someone you know has been sexually abused by anyone who serves the Church, and your are a place to talk with someone about your feelings of betrayal or hurt by the Church, we are here to help you. To report incidents, call Lori Hines, Victim Assistance Coordinator, 325-374-7609 (cell), or write Diocese of San Angelo, Victim Assistance Ministry, PO Box 1829, San Angelo, TX 76902. If the incident occurred outside this diocese, our Victim Assistance Coordinator will assist in bringing your concern to the attention of the diocese. Please keep in mind that one always has the right to report abuse to civil authorities, and civil law requires that any abuse of a minor must be reported.

Reportar Abuso Sexual

La Diócesis Católica de San Ángelo está firmemente comprometida a crear y mantener el ambiente más seguro posible para nuestros niños y adultos vulnerables. Si usted o alguien que usted conoce ha sido víctima de abuso sexual por cualquier persona que sirve a la Iglesia, y necesita un lugar para hablar con alguien sobre sus sentimientos de tracción o hecho por la Iglesia, estamos aquí para ayudar. Para reportar incidentes, llame a Lori Hines, Coordinadora de Asistencia a Víctimas, 325-374-7609 (celular), o escriba a la Diócesis de San Ángelo, Ministerio de Asistencia a Víctimas, PO Box 1829, San Angelo, TX 76902. Un intérprete en español está disponible. Si el incidente ocurrió fuera de esta diócesis, nuestra Coordinadora de Asistencia a Víctimas le ayudará a trascendar su preocupación a la atención de la diócesis correspondiente. Por favor, tenga en cuenta que uno siempre tiene el derecho de reportar el abuso a las autoridades civiles, y la ley civil requiere que cualquier abuso de un menor de edad debe ser reportado.
Un año para regenerar familias

En el fondo del corazón de cada uno de nosotros, pensamos en nuestra familia. Por ejemplo, en mi ministerio como obispo, visito a personas de nuestra gran diócesis, en parroquias, escuelas, lugares de trabajo, hospitales, y prisiones. En estos encuentros, la gente a menudo me pide oraciones y bendiciones. Cuando les pregunto por qué quieren que oré, ¿puede adivinar cuál es su petición de oración más frecuente? Es para su familia. La familia es una parte central de nuestra identidad personal.

Así como ninguna persona es perfecta, ninguna familia es perfecta. En cada familia, hay heridas, desacuerdos, y vergüenzas. Aun así, la familia es un lugar sagrado y privilegiado. La familia es la iglesia doméstica. Es el lugar donde aprendemos a hablar, a caminar, y a atarnos los zapatos. La familia es nuestra primera escuela en aprender a amar.

La vida familiar nos moldea y nos da forma a lo largo de nuestra vida. Es un gimnasio para crecer en las virtudes. La familia es la unidad más básica de la sociedad. Si vamos a tener individuos saludables, una sociedad saludable, y una iglesia saludable, debemos formarnos familias saludables. El Papa Juan Pablo II dijo: “A según cómo va la familia, así va la nación y así va el mundo en el que vivimos” (Homilía, Perth, Australia, 30 de noviembre de 1986).

No todas las familias son iguales. Algunas tienen una madre y un padre en el hogar. Algunas son familias mixtas. Algunas tienen abuelos que viven con ellos. Algunas tienen una madre que se queda en casa y otras tienen un padre que se queda en casa. Algunas son familias adoptivas o de crianza. No importa el tamaño o la composición, todas las familias pueden recibir ayuda del mensaje de nuestra fe:

- Aquellos que trabajan en escuelas y programas para jóvenes descubren que, a medida que pasan los años, ven más y más estudiantes que experimentan problemas desafiantes en sus familias. Demasiados jóvenes hoy en día carecen de una vida hogareña estable, con apoyo, y seguridad. Nuestros periódicos locales publican historias casi todos los días sobre abuso y negligencia en las familias. Como cristianos católicos, consideramos que la salud de las familias es un territorio de misión principal.
- El Papa Francisco ha hablado con frecuencia sobre la importancia de ayudar a las familias. Durante dos años seguidos, en 2014 y 2015, celebró sínodos en Roma sobre el tema de las familias. El primero, en octubre de 2014, abordó los desafíos pastorales de la familia en el contexto de la evangelización. El segundo, en octubre de 2015, abordó la vocación y misión de la familia en la Iglesia y en el mundo contemporáneo.
- Después de esos sínodos, el Papa Francisco publicó una exhortación apostólica sobre el amor en la familia titulada Amoris Laetitia (La alegría del amor). Ese libro se puede leer en su totalidad en el sitio web del Vaticano, www.vatican.va. Este mes, en el 19 de marzo de 2021, se cumple el quinto aniversario de la publicación de Amoris Laetitia. Para conmemorar ese aniversario y animarnos a todos a regenerar la vida de la familia en nuestra sociedad actual, el Papa Francisco ha declarado el Amoris Laetitia Año de la Familia que se observará desde el 19 de marzo de 2021 hasta el 26 de junio de 2022, concluyendo con la celebración del X Encuentro Mundial de las Familias en Roma.
- El objetivo del Amoris Laetitia Año de la Familia es el de llegar a todas las familias del mundo a través de diversas propuestas espirituales, pastorales y culturales. Los objetivos de este año son los siguientes:
  1. De compartir el contenido de Amoris Laetitia, para hacer “experimentar que el Evangelio de la familia es alegría que ‘llena el corazón y la vida entera’” (AL, 200);
  2. De proclamar que el sacramento del matrimonio es un don que contiene en sí mismo una fuerza transformadora del amor humano;
  3. De permitir que las familias se conviertan en agentes activos del apostolado familiar a través de la evangelización y la catequesis dentro de la familia;
  4. De sensibilizar a los jóvenes de la importancia de la formación en la verdad del amor y en el don de sí;
  5. De ampliar la visión y el alcance del apostolado familiar para incluir a parejas casadas, niños, jóvenes, ancianos, y situaciones de fragilidad familiar.
- Se puede encontrar más información sobre este Año de la Familia en el siguiente sitio web de la Oficina del Vaticano para los Laicos, la Familia, y la Vida: www.laityfamilylife.va.
- En el sitio web de la Conferencia de Obispos Católicos de los Estados Unidos hay una amplia gama de información sobre las enseñanzas de la iglesia sobre el matrimonio y la familia, recursos para parejas comprometidas y el matrimonio en cada etapa, estímulo para vivir la vida familiar como una iglesia doméstica, y noticias de iniciativas en curso de la USCCB que apoyan y promueven el matrimonio y la vida familiar. Estos se pueden encontrar en www.usccb.org/topics/marriage-and-family-life-ministries.
- Al comenzar el Año de la Familia este mes, me gustaría concluir este artículo compartiendo algunas ideas basadas en muchos años de ministrar con familias. Aquí hay doce cosas que cualquiera de nosotros puede hacer para ayudar a nuestras familias a ser más santas, felices, y saludables:
  1. Oremos por nuestras familias. Necesitamos la ayuda de Dios.
  2. Oremos con nuestras familias. Los niños necesitan ver a sus padres orando, tanto en casa como en la iglesia. Como solía decir el Padre Patrick Peyton: “La familia que ora unida permanece unida”.
  3. Respetemos la dignidad otorgada por Dios a cada miembro de la familia.
  4. Cuando la vida trae dificultades, turnémonos para ayudarnos y apoyarnos el uno al otro. Que nuestro cuidado mutuo sea una expresión concreta de nuestro amor por Dios. Crezcan en la compa-
  5. Hablemos con nuestras familias. Los niños necesitan sentir que sus problemas son escuchados y comprendidos. La familia es una parte central de nuestra identidad personal.
  6. Cada vez que nos lastimamos unos a otros, discúlpémonos y perdonemos. Dejemos que el perdón se convierta en una parte regular del patrón de vida en la familia.
  7. Cuando los padres no estén de acuerdo con algo, que se hablen en privado en lugar de discutir en presencia de los niños.
  8. Equipemos el hogar con recursos que apoyan la práctica de la fe católica, como Biblias, rosarios, un crucifijo, arte religioso, una copia del Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica, un libro de los santos, y libros de oraciones.
  9. Anímennos a los miembros de la familia seña-
  10. Tomemos el tiempo para escucharnos unos a otros.
  11. Recordemos decir “por favor”, “gracias” y “te amo”.
  12. Que cada miembro de la familia tome la decisión consciente de convertirse en una influencia más amorosa, generosa, y constructiva en la familia.

Para vivir en paz en familia

Señor, Dios nuestro, tu nos has elegido para ser tus santos y tus predilectos. Revistenos de sentimientos de misericordia, de bondad, de humildad, de dulzura, de paciencia.

Ayúdanos a comprendernos mutuamente cuando tenemos algún motivo de queja lo mismo que tú, Señor, nos has perdonado.

Sobre todo, danos esa caridad, que es vínculo de perfección. Que la paz de Cristo brille en nuestros corazones.

Esa paz que debe reinar en la unidad de tu cuerpo místico. Que todo cuanto hagamos en palabras o en obras sea en nombre del Señor Jesús por quien sean dadas las gracias a ti Dios Padre y Señor Nuestro Amén.

Obispo Michael J. Sis
Diócesis de San Ángelo

--de ACI Prensa, aciprensa.com.
 Remaining special collections in 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operation Rice Bowl</td>
<td>Lent February 17 – April 1, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Relief Services Collection</td>
<td>Fourth Sunday in Lent March 14, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pontifical Collection for the Holy Land</td>
<td>Good Friday April 2, 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catholic Home Missions Appeal</td>
<td>Last Sunday in April April 25, 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catholic Communications Campaign</td>
<td>Between Ascension and Pentecost May 16, 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parishes in Need</td>
<td>June 6, 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peter’s Pence (Collection for the Holy Father)</td>
<td>Sunday near Feasts of Sts. Peter &amp; Paul June 27, 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honduran Partnership Dioceses</td>
<td>Third Sunday in July July 18, 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diocesan Priests’ Retirement</td>
<td>First Sunday in August August 1, 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>College and University Campus Ministry</td>
<td>Last Sunday in August August 29, 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diocesan Seminarian Education</td>
<td>Last Sunday in September September 26, 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>World Mission Sunday</td>
<td>Next-to-Last Sunday in October October 24, 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Campaign for Human Development</td>
<td>Sunday before Thanksgiving November 21, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement Fund for Religious</td>
<td>Second Sunday in December December 12, 2021</td>
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Seminarian contact information

The seminarians of the Diocese of San Angelo continue to have limited opportunities for fellowship outside their schools. With that, we encourage the faithful to write our men at the addresses provided here. The young men will thus be reassured of the love and care of God’s people.

Conception Seminary College (Undergraduate)
P.O. Box 502
Conception MO, 64433

Kenrick Glennon Seminary
Graduate
5200 Glennon Dr.
St. Louis, MO 63119

Our Lady of the Lake
College of Our Lady of the Lake
1717 South 25th St.
San Antonio, TX 78210

Please contact the bishop's assistant, Lupe Castillo, for information about the bishop's calendar.
325-651-7500
lcastillo@sanangelodiocese.org

Necrology of Priests and Deacons

Please pray for our departed clergy.

March 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1–5</td>
<td>DOSA Annual Priest Retreat</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Lenten Retreat</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Confirmation Retreat</td>
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<tr>
<td>12–14</td>
<td>Deacon Formation</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>DOSA Staff Mass &amp; Lunch</td>
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<td>18–21</td>
<td>Men’s Walk to Emmaus</td>
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<tr>
<td>26–28</td>
<td>Engaged Encounter &amp; Natural Family Planning</td>
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April 2021

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CKRC Offices Closed in Observance of Good Friday</td>
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<tr>
<td>9–11</td>
<td>Deacon Formation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Confirmation Retreat (Virtual)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Deacon Lazaro Sevier (2009)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Deacon Edward Martinez (1985)</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Deacon Robert Daigle (1986)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Deacon Bonifacio Rodriguez (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Rev. George Fey, CPPS (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Deacon Cosme Ureta (2011)</td>
</tr>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Deacon Frank Trudo (1989)</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Deacon Audon Saldivar (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Deacon Alan Neff (2016)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Deacon Andres Hernandez (2013)</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Deacon Jerry Treviño (2017)</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Deacon Eliseo Carrillo (1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Rev. Thomas Leahy, SAC (1969)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Deacon Jesus Vasquez (2018)</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Deacon Juan Muñoz (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Deacon Robert Daigle (1986)</td>
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Local and diocesan ministries exemplify Lenten values in newly renovated facility

By Brian Bodiford
West Texas Angelus

When Catholic Outreach Services of San Angelo decided to reorganize, the Board of Directors likely envisioned a relatively quick process, but like so much these days, God had other plans. When the newly renovated Catholic Outreach building was blessed on Feb. 24, 2021, Board of Directors President Janice Pelzel noted how COVID and shipping delays meant the renovation project stretched on longer than anticipated, but the end result was worth the wait.

Originally primarily a wide-open thrift store, the Catholic Outreach building, located at 410 N. Chadbourne, has been beautifully renovated as office and meeting spaces in line with a new mission for the ministry. Father Charles Greenwell, pastor of Holy Angels Parish in San Angelo, was placed in charge of leading the project, and had the idea to shutter the thrift store in favor of providing services that are not duplicated elsewhere in town. The project was undertaken with the guidance of Bishop Michael Sis, whose dream, Pelzel said, “was that we utilize this building” to “bring services to the whole community.”

The volunteers of Catholic Outreach have wasted no time in serving the community. The building is the new home of the St. Francis Sack Lunch Ministry, which hands out meals each day through COVID-friendly, plexiglass screened windows, passing nourishing meals from the brand-new kitchen facility to recipients outside. They were also working during the recent winter storm to ensure people were safe and warm, handing out so many linens and blankets that they are in need of more donations. In addition to linens, one volunteer mentioned that they are always in need of lunch meat and cheese for the sack lunch ministry, and could always use cash donations to buy supplies and pay bills. As a ministry that thrives on donations, even the artwork and furniture in the facility were all donated.

In addition to local outreach services, the building also houses the offices of the Diocese of San Angelo’s Immigration Services and Pro-Life ministry. The diocesan criminal justice ministry will also have a home in the building soon.

Speaking at the dedication ceremony, Patricia Stokes Santana, supervisor of immigration services, shared the services her office provides, including help with naturalization and family reunification. Santana also mentioned that they are working to be fully accredited in order to help represent clients in court. “I love it,” she said of her work. “I love helping our community.”

Diocesan Pro-Life Director Jerry Peters also spoke at the event, noting that, especially during the current coronavirus pandemic, the ministry had been meeting in various places. He is excited that they will now have a permanent office location. “Having this office, I’m sure, will really help us,” Peters said, adding that he is hoping to expand the pro-life committee and find new people to help in their work preserving the sanctity of life.

Bishop Sis, speaking before blessing the facility, reiterated his hope that the ministries housed at the Catholic Outreach building will serve the entire community. “We serve those in need because we are Catholic,” he said, but help anyone in need, regardless of their faith. Citing chapter 25 of Matthew’s Gospel, Bishop Sis expressed the goals of the facility: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.”

Bishop Sis also mentioned that the Lenten season is the perfect time to bless a building with the mission of Catholic Outreach. Almsgiving, one of the three practices of Lent, can be defined as any kind of action to help those in need, he said. “The things that happen in this building and will happen in this building,” will help fulfill the Catholic call to almsgiving, even if the future services of the building are not fully known yet. “Now that this building is complete, we just let the Holy Spirit guide us,” he said.
Seeking the Gospel: Conference sparks hope amid pandemic

By Morgan Knobloch

After almost a year of canceled plans and staying home, students at Angelo State University found a reason to step outside their usual routines formed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. From Feb. 4–7, they, along with more than 27,000 people across 20 countries and six continents, gathered in their homes and local parishes to dive into the heart of the Gospel for SEEK21 — an annual conference hosted by FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students). Founded in 1998, FOCUS trains teams of missionaries to mentor and lead Bible studies for college students and has grown to serve 171 campuses across the nation, including ASU since 2018.

Usually, thousands of students, chaplains and FOCUS missionaries travel across the country to attend SEEK in person; the ongoing pandemic, however, called for a little creativity on the part of FOCUS to continue with this year’s conference. Utilizing modern technology, FOCUS staff launched SEEK on an online platform to create a hybrid conference, allowing more than 5,000 small groups around the world to livestream the main events and speakers from wherever they could safely gather — whether in their living rooms, parishes, seminars or on campus.

“One of my favorite parts of attending FOCUS conferences in the past has been seeing the rows and rows of people coming together to celebrate our faith,” senior Julian Huseman said. “Experiencing SEEK21 with our San Angelo community, however, gave me the opportunity to strengthen my friendships with people I used to only see in passing by having deeper conversations about what we experienced during the conference.”

Knowing that relationships compose a vital aspect of the conference, FOCUS staff encouraged attendees to invite friends and family to experience SEEK with them. Following local COVID-19 protocol, the FOCUS missionaries at ASU collaborated with the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart and local businesses to host nearly 50 students for SEEK21 in San Angelo, Texas, more than doubling last year’s participation in the conference.

“After attending SEEK21, I feel more equipped and excited to live out Jesus’ call to evangelize,” junior Raquel Porter said. “I felt so welcomed by the people I met throughout the conference, and I hope to be able to do the same for the people I meet in the future. I’m already looking forward to SEEK22!”

Despite occurring in the midst of a worldwide pandemic, SEEK21 made history as FOCUS’s largest event to-date. As an avenue to encounter the heart of the Gospel, SEEK21 sparked hope not only in the Concho Valley, but in souls across the world as well. “The themes shared by the presenters are still resonating with the story of the prodigal son,” senior Ronald Rowland said.

Rounding out San Angelo’s SEEK experience, Bishop Michael Sis celebrated Mass for the attendees on Sunday and stayed for a question-and-answer session afterward with students over coffee and breakfast tacos. To close the conference, keynote addresses from Sister Miriam James Heidland, SOLT, and Bishop Robert Barron, who launched them into small group discussions centered on two questions: “Who am I?” and “Who is Jesus Christ?”

“Seeing everyone who came to SEEK reminded me that though we haven’t been able to be together during this pandemic, we are not alone,” senior Julian Huseman said. “Also, nothing beats growing closer to Jesus by sharing a box of street tacos with your best friends.”

After Mass at the cathedral and dinner at The Original Henry’s on the second night, students gathered with their small groups at the Sacred Heart Cathedral gym for keynotes from Dr. Edward Sri and Immaculée Ilibagiza. Describing the Catholic understanding of the cross, Sri dove into the love demonstrated by Jesus in choosing to lay down his life for his people. Then, Ilibagiza shared her personal experience of the Gospel from surviving the Rwandan genocide in 1994, moving the audience as she spoke about the power of forgiving even those who persecuted her.

Packed with keynote and impact session speakers throughout the day, the third day of SEEK culminated in a worldwide prayer vigil Saturday evening. First, Father Mike Schmitz delivered a talk honing in on the story of the prodigal son described in the 15th chapter of Luke’s Gospel. Then attendees in San Angelo spent almost two hours praying before the Blessed Sacrament and receiving the sacrament of reconciliation.

“In realizing the parts of my life that resonate with the story of the prodigal son, Father Mike’s talk set the stage for me to receive healing through attending confession and adoration,” sophomore Benjamin Colombo said. “The Lord gave me the grace to experience the freedom that comes from living in the present moment and letting go of resentment.”

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“After attending SEEK21, I feel more equipped and excited to live out Jesus’ call to evangelize,” freshman Rachel Porter said. “I felt so welcomed by the people I met throughout the conference, and I hope to be able to do the same for the people I meet in the future. I’m already looking forward to SEEK22!”

Morgan Knobloch is a FOCUS missionary at Angelo State University.
By Mercedez Rassi

When you ask Racheal Jacoby about her faith journey, she recollects the Episcopalian church camp she went to every summer in her youth. As Racheal explains it, this church camp provided her the opportunity to transform her relationship with Jesus Christ alongside other young people through the unconditional love and friendship of a Christian community. The church camp became an annual recharge for her faith and moved her to want to do “big things for the Lord.”

Not only that, but it gave her a personal experience of charity that has shaped her own outlook on what it means to be a Christian: “My mom was a single parent, so money was tight in our family and there were years where our family could not afford to send me and my other siblings to church camp. Yet, we had a lot of generous people in our church who made sure (my siblings and I) could attend. Seeing their generosity always made me feel like I wanted to make it worth their while because they were giving me such a wonderful gift.” Her other biggest faith influence, to make it worth their while because they were giving me what they had — with fellow finance council members, Catholics from the surrounding area who recently completed renovations at their own churches, the church’s then-pastor Father Terry Brenon, and two pastors who had previously served St. Francis, Father Bhaskar Mendem and Father Hugh Wade — gained steam and eventually culminated in searching out contractors and figuring out how to fund a significant renovation. Renovating a church that was originally built in the 1920s is not an easy task and took many years of planning and searching for contractors who were willing to come to a very remote location. When they found the right contractor, Racheal knew it had been in God’s plan to bring the church someone with expertise in restoring older buildings: “We ended up finding really amazing contractors who were interested in restoring old stuff, so waiting that long was providential because we had someone who took the project as seriously as we did.” Racheal ensured that the renovation consisted of tastefully mixing older traditional pieces that were a part of the church’s original beauty while including newer elements that matched the ambiance of the prayerful space. The contractors were able to restore the original floors, pews, and ceiling of the parish, and installed new pendant lights that were partially funded by a grant from the Catholic Charitable Foundation for the Roman Catholic Diocese of San Angelo. Throughout the project, Racheal consulted with Mike Wyse, Chancellor of the Diocese of San Angelo, and Bishop Mike Sis to ensure that the renovations were fitting for a Catholic church. Moreover, Racheal worked with her fellow finance council members and other diocesan officials to ensure the project was responsibly funded with a mix of grants and savings. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, which shifted around the timeline for completion of the project, parishioners were able to celebrate Mass in the newly renovated space in September. When I asked Racheal if she has noticed any changes in the church’s congregation since the renovations were completed, she commented that many families who have ranches or land in the area seem to be making a special trip to Melvin to attend Mass in the newly renovated church. She’s also noticed an increase in new faces, possibly travelers from Highway 87 stopping to see the beautiful space and participate in Mass. Still, the small-town charm that Racheal loves about her home church remains, as parishioners continue to pitch in and help out with lecturing, altar serving, bringing flowers to the church, and mowing the grass out front. There are no schedules, no staff, just families that grew up together and whisper to one another at the beginning of Mass. “Will you say the readings today or do you want me to?”

As a fellow full-time, working, mother of young children, I know that Rachel’s time is precious, so I had to ask where she finds the motivation and desire to volunteer more time to the church. Her response is one many parents can relate to: “I want to set the example for my children. I want them to grow up in this church and have memories of being here with their cousins. I just love when my daughter asks on Saturdays to go to Mass. She’s excited to be a part of the church, and I want to do what I can to make sure it is there for them when they grow up.”

Because of her work in renovating the church, Bishop Mike Sis has nominated Racheal for Catholic Extension’s Lumen Christi award, which seeks to “honor an individual or group working in an Extension Diocese who demonstrates how the power of faith can transform lives and communities.” By being nominated for this award, Racheal secures a $1,000 grant for further needs at St. Francis Mission. Catholic Extension will narrow down nominees to finalists, who will receive a $10,000 grant, and a single winner, who will secure a $25,000 grant, for his or her ministry. Racheal’s work at St. Francis in Melvin is more than deserving of this honor and our diocese is proud to present her as our nominee.
Repentance: Have you turned around?

"Repent, and believe in the Gospel." We heard these words from Mark 1:15 at the Ash Wednesday Mass. Mark introduces these words in this way (v 14): "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand."

Although we hear these words every year (or "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return"), they are still a wake-up call. If they are not, they should be! Jesus is proclaiming his message to us emphatically, as a command, and he requires a response. Jesus is telling us that the kingdom of God — rule or reign of God — has begun anew in human history in his person — the New Covenant. He gives us free will to respond to Jesus Christ and his church and seek daily to follow him with "yes" or our "no."

If we say "no," we are cutting ourselves off from the Lord's plan for redeemed humanity — "thy kingdom come, thy will be done" — and, specifically, from his eternal plan of salvation for us, his redeemed children. Perhaps our response is not a refusal of the Lord's Way, but a provisional "maybe," if it's not too demanding. But the Lord will have none of that! He wants full repentance. He is commanding us to turn around from our present state to take our life in a new direction. This is the meaning of repentance — metanoia, a change in one's way of life resulting from penitence or spiritual conversion, from Greek metanoia, "change one's mind."

If we say "yes," we will know his kingdom NOW. God wants us to know heaven on earth! "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). That doesn't mean life free from suffering. It means the fullness of life in relation to the Holy Trinity, the church, and to each other about which he and his apostles taught and lived and for which he suffered, died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father to intercede for us. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16 RSVCE).

No conversion short of this will enable us to be who he is calling us to be, so we can participate in his kingdom coming and his will being done on earth as it is in heaven.

You may be thinking, "I've committed my life to Jesus Christ and his church and seek daily to follow his way." That's good, but repentance is not a one-time-only event in our lives. Conversion is an on-going process. None of us has arrived at the perfection in love to which God calls us. We are still sinners in need of continuing repentance and conversion of life. It is for our eternal benefit that Jesus, through his church, calls us to "turn around" every Lent. And it is for our eternal salvation that we say "yes" again and again.

Obviously, just saying "yes" and turning around are not enough. During this season of repentance of sin and penance for our sins, the church provides salvific means of grace for growth, renewal, and transformation. The church reminds us to be diligent in the traditional disciplines for Lent we began Ash Wednesday: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Part of your Lenten observance may be giving up some activity for a regular prayer time, or fasting from something you thought you couldn't do without, or praying against a particular sin that has dominated your life, or giving your time and energy to someone in need. In these Lenten disciplines, we are taken more deeply into Jesus' Sacred Heart and Mother Mary's Immaculate Heart to know their hearts, wills, and minds for us as we grow in holiness.

However, Lent is not only about "giving up" but also about "taking on." Perhaps you have taken on a means of prayer, fasting, or almsgiving you
Lent and the angst of evil

James R. Sulliman, PhD

It can be so perplexing when someone is telling us how easy something is to understand, and we are unable to “get it” no matter how hard we try. Algebra was the first math matcher I had with such a feeling. It was so easy when the teacher did equations on the board but somehow, when I brought them home, they morphed into the impossible when I was alone with them in my room. The problems stared at me and I stared back at them for hours, each waiting for the other to make the first move. Many nights ended in a draw. Eventually, things began to make sense and as unimaginable as it was at the time, in four more years I was accepted to the five-year chemical engineering program at Rutgers University.

And while on the subject of engineering, imagine how frustrating it would be for a professor of engineering at MIT to be stumped by “If A = B and C = D, what is B?” Or if Beethoven could not understand how to play “Chopsticks,” or how we could not figure out how mixing two colors together could possibly produce a third one. In this hypothetical scenario, the professor, Beethoven, and Renoir, all geniuses in their respective fields and having mastery over the complex, would all be going “out of their minds” by being unable to understand the basic phenomena that we take for granted.

As the greatest of angels, Lucifer was unable to resist the temptation of pride, “loving” himself more than God. Indeed, he was so incredibly attractive that many angels followed him, making the same eternally fatal mistake. One can only imagine the arrogant self-confidence that Lucifer displayed in having answers to all the questions that were asked by the fallen angels as the arrogant self-confidence that Lucifer displayed in having answers to all the questions that were asked by the fallen angels as the arrogant self-confidence that Lucifer displayed in having answers to all the questions that were asked by the fallen angels as the arrogant self-confidence that Lucifer displayed in having answers to all the questions that were asked by the fallen angels as the arrogant self-confidence that Lucifer displayed in having answers to all the questions that were asked by the fallen angels as the arrogant self-confidence that Lucifer displayed in having answers to all the questions that were asked by the fallen angels as the arrogant self-confidence that Lucifer displayed in having answers to all the questions that were asked by the fallen angels.

Having sharpened his skills against the angelic debate team, Adam and Eve were no match whatsoever, for Eve was quick to accept his fallacious opening statement without question or rebuttal. If these two were God’s crowning achievement of creation, then Satan may have had words similar to Kipling’s racing through his head: “you are the earth and everything that’s in it.” If anything, it might have even been a bit of a disappointment for evil to learn how easy it was to know mankind so completely, and to know that they shared in his love for self-gratification and self-centeredness. Knowing how we thought, it would be easy to fill his ranks with creatures of such little or no intelligence when compared to the master of deception and sin.

This was a man like no other. Satan used every temptation he had, but to no avail. And to make matters worse, Jesus was at his weakest physical state after fasting for 40 days and yet remained steadfast in his opposition to everything evil offered him. It had to make Satan absolutely crazy! Why would Jesus not be swayed?! And it went on for three more years, culminating in scouring, crowning, and crucifixion … all for the love of others! “This makes no sense!!!” Satan must have said and is still saying two thousand years later. But it does not stop with Jesus. Indeed, he is only the beginning!

Apostles, disciples, martyrs, and countless followers have sought to walk in his footsteps! “This is pure insanity!!! Why would anyone do this??!!” the master of deceit must exclaim over and over again. An entity that thinks it knows everything about the human mind and what attracts it to sin cannot possibly understand virtues because it, itself, is without virtue. It cannot possibly know what it is like to love another because there is no concern for anyone but itself.

The Lenten season must be especially brutal for Satan. Wanting nothing more than for us to be separated from God, absorbed in self-indulgence, and uncaring about the needs of others, our Lenten practices strike at the cold “heart” of evil. It is a time for us to strengthen our relationship with God through prayer. In so doing, we overcome the countless distractions that evil puts in our way. Prayer that may be any combination of speaking and listening.

It is a time to strengthen the relationship with ourselves as we develop fortitude and persistence and determine the sacrifices we will make for 40 days. As we master physical wants through mental and spiritual strength, we gain confidence in the things we can accomplish “if we just put our minds, and spirits, to it.” Just as importantly, we must try to quickly return to our desired sacrifices, should we disappoint ourselves by stumbling along the way.

It is a time to strengthen our relationships with others through acts of charity. It is not enough for us to help only those who come to us for assistance. We must actively seek out our brothers and sisters who have various needs and try to be of service to them. For what other reason have we been given the gifts we have?

When all evil wants is division and death, the Lenten practices of “prayer, sacrifice, and charity” provide constant torture to Satan’s personal hell. He relentlessly is tormented by the simple questions for which he has no answers: “Why do they do these things when I am offering them immediate self-gratification with no regard for others? How can they resist when I can? Indeed, why would they resist? HOW CAN THEY CHOOSE THE CROSS? WHY DO THEY CHOOSE HIM OVER ME?!”

Jesus’ agony in the garden was temporary; Satan’s is eternal. We add to that agony each time we pray, sacrifice, love, serve, and forgive. While, during Lent, we should try hard to practice these five steps on the stairway to heaven, hopefully it should be the start of a habit that never ends. Those who continue, not only walk in the direction of eternal love, but join with the countless others who, for centuries, have ensured the devil’s angst is never ending and not limited to 40 days each year.

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Dr. James Sulliman, a graduate of Rutgers University and Florida State University, has 50 years’ experience in individual, marriage, and family therapy. He is also the Adult-Area pro-life coordinator for the Diocese of San Angelo.

The triumph of the cross: The hope of Holy Week

In his passion, Jesus’ sufferings were unequalled. For the Son of God offered himself as a sacrifice for all. No one, not even the saintliest person, can take on the sins of all people in every time and place. Only God can, and did. It is this gift of God, at the heart of our Lenten journeys, that Matthias Grunewald, master German painter, brings to life in a vivid painting titled “The Small Crucifixion.” We are invited to reflect not only on the historical event of the Lord’s crucifixion, but the redemptive meaning of Jesus’ suffering love, poured out for all humanity and for each of us.

Grunewald’s image is particularly poignant in these challenging pandemic days as we walk the via crucis, the path of Jesus’ paschal journey from Good Friday to Easter Sunday.

Grunewald’s best-known masterpiece, the “Isenheim Altarpiece,” was commissioned for the high altar of the church of the Monastery of St. Anthony in Alsace. There, patients suffering from the plague were treated.

In that large altarpiece, Grunewald depicts a crucified Christ whose body is scarred with plague-type sores. Patients bearing the pain of their physical afflictions found spiritual comfort as they gazed on the crucified Jesus and found consolation in the mystery of his suffering.

“The Small Crucifixion” was, most likely, a personal devotional image, intended either for a domestic setting or for swearing the bread of the local church. Here we see Grunewald’s rendering of Jesus’ passion. Color, line, form and composition convey, with remarkable expressive power, the depths of Jesus’ abandonment and the extreme physical suffering of a crucifixion.

His gaunt body is racked with scars of torture. His emaciated face and bowed head evoke his unbearable agony. Under a piercing crown of thorns, the scarred face of Jesus bleeds. His tattered loincloth gives evidence of the depravity of his tormentors. Few artists have conveyed the scene of the crucifixion with the intense realism that Grunewald brings to his composition.

Jesus’ crucifixion is set in a bare landscape painted in an unusual greenish blue color, evoking the Gospel detail that, at the hour of his passing, the sun darkened and creation itself groaned.

Visitors who stand in front of this painting in its museum setting cannot help but notice that the small panel bends outward into the viewers’ space. Grunewald leaves no room for one to remain a passive bystander or onlooker in the face of Jesus’ sufferings.

From the center radiates the Lord’s outstretched arms with twisted hands and contorted feet stretched over the cross. His hands and feet convey the divine anguish over human alienation from God. Obedient even to death on a cross, Jesus’ self-offering rises as a perfect oblation to it.” Just as importantly, we must try to quickly return to our desired sacrifices, should we disappoint ourselves by stumbling along the way.

It is a time to strengthen our relationships with others through acts of charity. It is not enough for us to help only those who come to us for assistance. We must actively seek out our brothers and sisters who have various needs and try to be of service to them. For what other reason have we been given the gifts we have?

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Their perspective is meant to be ours as we contemplate Jesus’ passion. Grunewald’s vision allows us to glimpse the relentless mercy of God as it takes the form of suffering love on the cross. We are invited to receive the gift of divine crucified love poured out on the world and on each one of us.

Good Friday is good news in that death no longer has the final word on the human condition. As we enter into the mystery of Jesus’ passion and death on the cross, we are filled with hope in the victorious power of God who will raise him from the dead.

And as we journey from Good Friday to Easter Sunday, Grunewald’s image evokes our vocation to live the new life of the risen Christ.

We know and believe in faith that the horror of Jesus’ crucifixion will most certainly give way to the radiant glory of his, and our own, resurrection. And so we pray, “We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.”

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Jem Sullivan, educator and author, contributes a Scripture column to Catholic News Service and is the author of Believe, Celebrate, Live, Pray: A Weekly Retreat with the Catechism.
DIOCESAN BRIEFS

St. Margaret of Scotland to inaugurate new hall

After a delay related to the recent winter storm, St. Margaret of Scotland Parish in San Angelo will inaugurate their new parish hall on March 21. After the 9:00 a.m. Mass, Bishop Sis will bless the new hall.

Father Choutapalli to celebrate anniversary

Father Joseph Choutapalli will celebrate the 30th anniversary of his priestly ordination with a Mass at St. Ambrose Parish in Wall, April 10 at 6:00 p.m.

Diocesan Marriage Jubilee 2021

All couples who are celebrating their church wedding anniversaries of 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, and above in the calendar year of 2021 are invited to the Diocesan Marriage Jubilee bilingual celebration on Sunday, April 18, 2021, at 2:30 p.m. in the Sacred Heart Cathedral in San Angelo. Renewal of their commitment will take place within the Mass.

In light of the current coronavirus pandemic, social distancing will be practiced, and a couple need not be present to receive a certificate. Those who attend the Mass can pick up their certificates at the Cathedral that day. The certificates of those who do not attend will be sent to the corresponding parish office for distribution. Space is limited. Reserved seating will be available to the jubilarian couples; then, if space is available, family and friends may reserve seats on a first-come, first-serve basis. Livestreaming will be available for those unable to attend in person. For registration information, please contact your pastor. The deadline to register for this celebration is Monday, April 5, 2021.

St. Ann Parish in Sonora Cinco de Mayo festival

St. Ann Catholic Church in Sonora invites everyone to their 2021 Cinco de Mayo Music Fiesta. The parish festival will be held on Friday, April 30, from 6:00 p.m. to midnight, and Saturday, May 1, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 a.m.

The festival will be held at the Sutton County Civic Center Pavilion, and all activities will be outdoors. Seven bands will be performing over the 2-day event. An entry fee will be collected that grants admission for both days of the festival.

Raffle tickets will be $5 apiece, or $100 for a book of 20 tickets. The main prize of the raffle is a 2021 Jeep Rubicon. There will also be nine additional prizes given out during the raffle.

The festival will also include a country store, a silent auction, games, Loteria, food and craft booths, and contests to name a Queen, Little Miss, and Little Mister for the festival.

For more information, contact St. Ann Parish at 325-387-2278 or sonora@sanangelodiocese.org.
What is an endowment fund? Does my parish need one?

By Mercedez Rassi

An endowment fund is a permanent fund that is primarily meant to be invested in perpetuity. The principal amount of the endowment is invested and remains intact, while the investment income is used to fund immediate expenses. The income from an endowment is spent according to a spend rate that preserves the principal, and this income goes towards the benefit of whatever specific purpose the donor named in establishing the endowment.

At the Catholic Charitable Foundation for the Roman Catholic Diocese of San Angelo, there are two types of endowments that donors can establish for the benefit of our diocese.

Unrestricted Endowment Fund
An unrestricted endowment fund is a fund that is established when a donor signs an agreement with the foundation outlining what the fund should be named without specifying a specific purpose for the use of the fund. An unrestricted fund allows the foundation’s Board of Trustees to see that the most pressing needs in our area are met as they change over time. The Board of Trustees, with the approval of the chairman, determine how to distribute income from the unrestricted endowment fund through a grant application process that occurs annually in the spring.

The Catholic Charitable Foundation Unrestricted Endowment Fund is also the fund that has been set up to receive all gifts of $50 or more to the foundation when the donor does not specify an active designated endowment fund to which they wish to contribute.

Designated Endowment Fund
A designated endowment fund is a fund that is established when a donor signs an agreement with the foundation outlining what the fund should be named and designates the purpose and/or the beneficiary of the fund. The beneficiary and intended use of the fund must be consistent with the charitable purposes of the foundation. The fund may support the diocese, a parish, a Catholic school or Catholic charitable purpose or ministry within the Diocese of San Angelo.

Does My Parish Need an Endowment?
Many parishes in our diocese currently have endowments through the Catholic Charitable Foundation. These endowments can offset the annual operating expenses of the parish by providing a source of perpetual income. Over time, as the endowment grows, parishes can leverage their endowment income to supplement salaries, support repairs and construction, and create scholarship funds.

An endowment is also an important instrument to have for accepting bequests and other forms of legacy giving. Often, legacy gifts are substantial and might not be appropriate for a general operating budget. Parishes with endowments can encourage parishioners to support both the immediate needs of the parish with regular donations and the long-term needs with planned giving towards the parish’s endowment.

Does my parish have an endowment?
Currently, the Catholic Charitable Foundation has endowments that benefit the following parishes:

- Edward and Roberta Kalafut Brandecker Fund — Holy Family Catholic Church, Abilene
- Holy Family Catholic Church Endowment Fund — Holy Family Catholic Church, Abilene
- Morgan and Gene Knapp Memorial Endowment Fund — Holy Family Catholic Church, Abilene
- Our Lady of San Juan Endowment Fund — Our Lady of San Juan Mission, Odessa
- St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church Endowment Fund — St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Odessa
- St. Mary’s Church, Odessa Endowment Fund — St. Mary’s Catholic Church, Odessa
- The James D. and Kathleen J. Webster Endowment Fund — Holy Family Catholic Church, Abilene

Don’t see your parish on the list? You can help start an endowment for your parish. Contact Mercedez Rassi at 325-651-7500 or mrassi@sanangelodiocese.org for more information on starting an endowment for your parish.

Mercedez Rassi is the Director of Stewardship and Development for the Diocese of San Angelo and Executive Director of the Catholic Charitable Foundation for the Roman Catholic Diocese of San Angelo.
The West Texas Angelus

San Angelo during this challenging week.

of the experiences shared by people in the Diocese of

ately handle such an event, resulting in many left with-

followed ensured that much of the state was effectively

weather as Winter Storm Uri descended on the state Val-

distancing requirements, were confronted with unusual

Once in the town of Junction, he was able to speak with

suit. “I weaved around them and into Junction,” he said.

heat and consuming the water and crackers he had avail-

stopped, fearful of driving on ice. Father Rodriguez had

trip, however, as about 10 miles outside Junction, traffic

Parish Priest Retreat in Houston early. “I was speaking

fic jam.

up on Interstate 10 about 10 miles outside Junction. Father

In the morning, he noticed that a few SUVs were

Father Rodriguez was not able to make the entire

no easy task. Garcia’s house has an extraordinarily steep

cia’s case, it was her grandparents who lost power. “We

had a chance to sit and talk with God,” Father Rodriguez

had a few more experiences. Speaking about the retreat for

COURTESY

PARISHES IN MIDLAND AND ELSEWHERE

Homes were not the only buildings being offered to

people who needed warmth. Some of the parishes of the
diocese were able to operate and offer their facilities as

warming centers for those in need. Both St. Stephen Par-

ish and Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Midland were

able to operate the warming centers that they had been

offering throughout the winter. Our Lady of Guadalupe

Parish in Fort Stockton. The water pipes in the ceiling burst, resulting in widespread dam-

age to the building. “All the ceiling,” pastos Father Lo-

renzo Hatch said “the tiles and insulation and all the pipes

to there — they need to be replaced.

The damage was not contained to the ceiling either.
The falling water resulted in walls, paint, and floor tile

that will need to be replaced as well.

“We’re hanging in there,” Hatch Father said. “I think

that’s the buzzword of 2020-21, dealing with all the little

pains that keep coming.” Plans for relocating activ-

ities had not been solidified yet, with Father Hatch not-

ing that the end result could have been worse.

“We’re fortunate during this COVID-19 outbreak be-
doubtedly be much more limited and our regular groups know those limitations.”

Though a recently scheduled priest retreat that would have utilized the retreat center was postponed as the Val-

damage was still being assessed, most of the operations can continue as planned.

“We do have rooms available, we are able to oper-

ate under current COVID-19 restrictions,” Burke said. “In fact, the weekend following the storm, the retreat center was able to host a virtual Engaged Encounter as planned.

Holy Redeemer Catholic Church in Odessa was surrounded by thick snow during the winter storm.

not lost sight of her mission as a catechist. “What’s amazing,” Sister Azagran said, “is her love and concern for her kids at home doing their modular class and mark-
ing the situation a source of their growing in their faith.”

Holy Redeemer Catholic Church in Odessa was surrounded by thick snow during the winter storm.

COURTESY
Catholic schools announce open enrollment

Holy Cross Catholic High School, which serves the Midland and Odessa area, has announced that the school is now taking registrations for grades 9 through 12. To apply, visit https://holycrosschs.org/admissions. Once an application is received, the school will reach out with further information.

Angelo Catholic School in San Angelo is now accepting applications. The school serves students in grades 3K through 8. For more information, contact Angelo Catholic School at 325-949-1747 or angelocatholicschool@sanangelodiocese.org.

Religious education in the time of COVID:
An update from St. Mary Church of Odessa

By Sister Maria Theresa Arzagon, OND

The pandemic was not able to curtail the efforts of our catechists as they have labored to reach every home through virtual and modular home-based catechesis.

Indeed, a new home became incarnate — the Domestic Church — the church that is full of tiny joys from our children in religious instruction in their family-created sanctuary for learning and experiencing God in the midst of this situation.

Our catechists did not hesitate to give what is best for them. A lot has changed, but we are thankful for the effort of our diocesan Office of Evangelization and Catechesis in doing monitoring and follow-ups. The recent gift to us ministers was the virtual conference conducted by the lovely and talented couple Dobie and Lisa Moser, whose own experiences made us realize that our task today will never be easy. As we work with our parents, the call for today is to build family faith in the Domestic Church which is the home. However, we too are aware of how chaotic situations are in other homes that need our openness to create more relevant activities to uplift old and boring ways of catechesis, making it more palatable to this generation of kids.

These “techno kids” are in battle, finding themselves more relevant amidst changes, and from more alluring and very enticing promos of media and new means of communication. The movement is not forgetting the Gospel values and the faith dynamism that are taught, despite being swallowed by influences that turn them away from what is essential to life, a life that is now being numbed by all sorts of pains, hurting, and situations in the family that they cannot fathom.

We did not lose hope, but as we look at the trends of today, the reality around us, more and more we are convinced that our parish here at St. Mary’s, with the support of our pastor Father Bernard Getigan and leaders, are moving and changing so that needs can be prioritized and pastorally addressed.

Like all other religious education stakeholders, the task ahead of us is tough, but all we need, in our simple and most humble way, is to courageously take a leap, maybe one step at a time, slowly beginning from our own selves. Let that spark of hope grow as every initial step will create ripples to others, in every home and family, in the community and in the bigger society.

One thing is very sure today: when parents in the parish are involved, and are ready to be formed, informed and commissioned, then the future of our children will become more promising as we hone them as promoters that build the kingdom of God in their own family, in a more real and God-driven journey that we long for in each of them.

Notre Dame Sister Maria Theresa Arzagon is the director of religious education for St. Mary Parish in Odessa.

Midland man makes vows

Juan Macias Marquez of San Miguel Arcángel Parish in Midland made his vows as a Dominican Friar of the Province of St. Joseph on Feb. 6 at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C. Marquez (center) is pictured here with his parents, Delia and Robert Marquez.
St. Ann’s School celebrates National Catholic Schools Week

National Catholic Schools Week is celebrated each year the last week of January. This year, the students of St. Ann’s School in Midland thanked their parents for providing them with a Catholic education and created gift baskets for religious leaders like Sister Kate Fitzgerald and local frontline workers like the fire department and hospital administration. The students were also given a day free of the usual dress code in which they were encouraged to “dress for success,” dressing as their hoped-for future occupation. Several of the students chose to dress as medical professionals.

All photos courtesy St. Ann’s Catholic School.

Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem has new section representatives

After 11 years as section representatives of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem for the Diocese of San Angelo, Richard and Lois Folger have stepped down.

Bishop Michael J. Sis of the Diocese of San Angelo has appointed Deacon Tom and Pat Collier of St. Ann Parish in Midland as the new section representatives. The Colliers began their service as section representatives on March 1, 2021. The Colliers have been members of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem since 2012.

Bishop Sis said, "I am profoundly grateful to Richard and Lois Folger for their dedicated and honorable service. They have formed a wonderful spirit of diocesan unity in the group, and I trust that Deacon Tom and Pat Collier will build well upon the strong foundation they have laid."
Recently I received a letter from a woman whose life, in effect, had imploded. Within the course of a few months, her husband divorced her, she lost her job, was forced to move from the house she had lived in for many years, that was locked down in her new place by COVID restrictions, and was diagnosed with a cancer which might be untreatable. It was all too much. At a point, she broke down in anger and resignation. She turned to Jesus and with bitterness, said: If you’re there, and I doubt it, what do you know about any of this? You were never this alone! I suspect that we all have moments like this. What did Jesus know of any of this?

Well, if we can believe the Gospels, Jesus did know all of this, not because he had a divine consciousness, but because like the woman in the story he knew right from the beginning what it meant to be the one standing alone, outside the normal human circle.

This is evident right from his birth. The Gospels tell us that Mary was forced to give birth to Jesus in a stable because there was no room for them at the inn. That heartless innkeeper! The poor man has to endure centuries of censure. However, that thought misses the point of the story and misconstrues its meaning. The moral of this story is not that some heartless cruelty took place or that the world was too preoccupied with itself to take notice of Jesus’ birth, though this latter implication is true. Rather the real point is that Jesus, the Christ, was born an outsider, as one of the poor, as someone who, right from the beginning, was not given a place in the mainstream. As Gil Bailie puts it, Jesus was unanimité-minus-one. How could it be otherwise?

Given who Jesus was, given that his central message was good news for the poor, and given that he entered into human life precisely to experience all it contains, including its pains and humiliations, he could hardly have been born in a palace, enjoyed every kind of support, and been the center of love and attention. To be in real solidarity with the poor, as Meron once put it, he had to be born “outside the city,” and that it was the case historically or not, it is a rich, far-reaching metaphor. Right from the beginning, Jesus knew both the pain and the shame of one who is excluded, who has no place in the mainstream.

When we look closely at the Gospels, we see that there was no human pain, emotional or physical, from which Jesus was spared. It is safe to say, I submit, that no one, irrespective of his or her pain, can say to Jesus: You didn’t have to undergo what I had to undergo! He underwent it all.

During his ministry, he faced constant rejection, ridicule, and threat, and sometimes having to hide away like a criminal on the run. He was also a celibate, one who slept alone, one deprived of normal human intimacy, one with no family of his own. Then in his passion and death, he experienced the extremes of both emotional and physical pain. Emotionally, he literally “sweated blood,” and physically, in his crucifixion, he endured the most extreme and humiliating pain possible for a human being on earth.

As we know, crucifixion was designed by the Romans with more than only capital punishment in mind. It was designed as well to inflict the maximum amount of pain and humiliation possible for a person to endure. That was one of the reasons they sometimes gave morphine to the one being crucified, not to ease his pain, but to keep him from passing out and escaping the pain. Crucifixion was also designed to utterly humiliate the one being put to death. Hence, they stripped the person naked, so that his genitals were exposed and that in his dying convulsions the loosening of his bowels would be his final shame. As well, some scholars speculate that during the night leading up to his death on Good Friday, he may also have been helped by the soldiers. Truly there was not a pain or humiliation he did not endure.

An old, classic definition of prayer tells us this: Prayer is lifting mind and heart to God. Well, there will be low points in our lives when our circumstances will force us to lift our minds and hearts to God in a way that seems anti-esthetic to prayer. Sometimes we will be brought to a breaking point where in brokenness, anger, shame, and in the despairing thought that nobody, including God, cares and that we are all alone in this, consciously or otherwise, we will confess to Jesus with the words: And what do you know about that? And Jesus will hear those words as a prayer, as a sincere sigh of the heart, rather than as some kind of irreverence.

Oblate Father Ron Rolheiser is a theologian, teacher, and award-winning author. He can be contacted through his website: www.ronrolheiser.com. Now on Facebook: www.facebook.com/ronrolheiser

A crucially important feature of Catholic social teaching, but one frequently under-emphasized or misunderstood, is a clear animus against the concentration of power within a society. This perilous agglomeration can happen economically, politically, or culturally. By a basic and healthy instinct, Catholic social teaching wants power, as much as possible, distributed widely throughout the community, so that one small segment does not tyrannize the majority or prevent large numbers of people from enjoying the benefits that are theirs by right.

We can see this phenomenon perhaps most clearly in the economic order. If one organization manages to monopolize its segment of the economy, it can set prices arbitrarily, hire and fire according to whim, preclude any competition that might provide better products and/or higher wages for employees, etc. One thinks here of the "trusting" work of Theodore Roosevelt in the early twentieth century and the similar concern today for breaking up Google, Facebook, Amazon, and other large conglomerates that exercise an almost unchallenged dominance in their field. A cornerstone of Catholic social teaching is what is traditionally called "distributive justice" — which is to say, the equitable allocation of goods within a society. Now this can take place through direct government intervention, for example through anti-trust legislation, minimum wage requirements, programs to aid the poor, taxation, etc., but it can also happen, more indirectly, through the natural rhythms of the market. In Centesimus Annus, John Paul II observes that profit-making itself can and should signal to prospective entrepreneurs that there is money to be made in that segment of the economy and that they should, accordingly, get involved. The bottom line is this: spreading out wealth within a society tends to make an economy both more just and more efficient.

We can furthermore see this dynamic in the political realm. If one party comes to dominate a nation, a state, a city, or a community, corruption almost inevitably follows. Unchallenged, the ruling conglomerate can impose its will, compel the acceptance of its vision, and eliminate prospective opponents and critics. It is quite obvious that this sort of arrangement obtains in banana republics, communist dictatorships, and oppressive theocracies, but it is also apparent, to a lesser degree, in local and state governments in our own country. If you doubt me, ask yourself why pro-life candidates in Illinois, Massachusetts, or California could never have hoped to be elected to office. When a political monopoly couples itself with economic power, the corruption becomes only deeper and more intractable.

Once again, according to Catholic social teaching, the desideratum is the breaking up and spreading out of power throughout the society. This could happen in a number of ways: equipping a variety of parties, providing for a greater turnover within legislatures, lifting up various expressions of local government, allowing for mediating institutions, strengthening the system of checks and balances, etc.

Though perhaps less obvious than the first two instances, a third example of this dangerous hyper-concentration of power is in the cultural arena. Under both the Nazi and Soviet dictatorships of the last century, only very definite types of art, music, and literature were acceptable, and any deviation from the norm was quickly squelched by the state. Today, strict censorship of the arts holds sway in many Islamist states, as well as in communist China. But lest we think we in the West are free of this sort of cultural monopoly, take a good look at the kind of strict leftist ideology that exists in practi- cally every film or television project produced in Hollywood. This is not only state censorship to be sure, but it is indeed a sort of monopolization of cultural power that effectively excludes rival expressions of the good, the true, and the beautiful. Once again, it is very useful to notice the ways in which this cultural dictatorship allies itself with both political and economic power in order to consolidate its hegemony. Catholic social teaching would like this sort of power to be spread out as widely as possible too, permitting a range of artistic expressions at a variety of levels within the society. How dull it is when only one style of art or only one type of thinking is acceptable.

Someone who was acutely sensitive to the danger of hyper-concentrated power in the society was the great Catholic writer G.K. Chesterton. Accordingly, along with Hilaire Belloc and others, he developed an economic and political program that became known as "distributism," deriving the name from the Catholic preoccupation with the just distribution of wealth. As the great Chesterton commentator Dale Ahlquist has recently pointed out, an alternative name for distributism might be "localism," since the Chestertonian doctrine emphasizes the importance of the many local expressions of political and economic power over any grand project of centralization. If you want to see a vividly narrative presentation of distributism, read Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings, paying particular attention to the manner of life in the hobbits’ shire in contrast to the political and economic arrangements in Mor- dor.

What I hope is at least relatively clear is that this uniquely Catholic approach cuts against both the extreme left and the extreme right. Catholic social doctrine advocates neither statist control nor individual freedom run amok. It holds out a wide and just distribution of economic and political power as an at least asymptotically approached ideal.

Bishop Robert Barron is an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and the founder of Word on Fire Catholic Ministries.
**Empezando con el tema principal de la semana, el hambre que agrava la pandemia del COVID-19.**

El hambre aumenta al mismo paso que la pandemia del COVID-19. Le habrá quitado la vida a 500,000 habitantes de los Estados Unidos cuando se publique esta columna. Millones aquí y billones por todo el mundo ya sufren escasez de alimentos.

La primavera pasada, temprano en la pandemia, mi nieto Keith me envió un mensaje en Facebook diciendo, “Abuelo, tengo hambre.” El y su novia habían perdido su empleo en un restaurante. El hecho de embargo que del gobierno federal dio apenas cubrió el alquiler de su apartamento. Envíe $300 para que ellos compraran abarrotes hasta que empezaran sus beneficios de desempleo. Luego, utilizando su experiencia como pintor, Keith empezó un negocio pequeño que generó ingresos suficientes para sobrevivir.

Margaret, la madre de Keith, también ha necesitado ayuda ya por varios años, porque como jubilada, recibe una pensión muy pequeña del Servicio de Seguridad Social. Cubre las cuentas mensuales de electricidad, gas y otras necesidades para que ella viva en nuestra casa de vacaciones en Nuevo México. Recientemente envíé $900 para el gas propano para el calentamiento de la casa por el invierno.

Además, viendo que grave es la “inseguridad de alimento”, he sentido la necesidad de contribuir a Foodshare, un banco de alimentos en Connecticut.

Siendo como niño vivo en un pequeño rancho arido en los estribos de la sierra Sangre de Cristo en Nuevo México, se lo es sufrir hambre. Teníamos ca- bras, vacas, cerdos y gallinas y por eso no carecíamos de carne pero nos faltaba fruta fresca, cereales y hasta papas en el in- vierno. Por eso, en la escuela, le pedíamos a compañeros de clase que traían naranjas para su almuerzo que nos dieran los pelle- jos.

Recuerdo un invierno amargo cuando se nos acabó la carne y mi padre le dijo a mi madre que necesitábamos cazar un ve- nado, aunque no era temporada de caza, y él no tenía fusil. Un tío le prestó uno y con un solo tiro, mató a un enorme venado que nos suplió hasta que llegara la primavera. Éramos una familia en ese entonces de seis hijos y nunca teníamos suficiente para comer.

En varias ocasiones, ya como adulto, también experimenté hambre, especialmente cuando estudia en la universidad de Marquette al mismo tiempo que trabajaba. Era el mayor de 10 hijos y mis padres no podían ayudarme. Un fin de semana, sobrevivi con una torta de pan y una lata de carne de res cocinada porque había in- vertido todos mis ahorros en los costos de enseñanza y libros.

Durante mi carrera trabajé de lavaplatos, cocinero, recepcionista de noche en un hotel, reportero en un diario a tiempo parcial, y en el verdadero cocoa en un parque nacional. Fue mucho trabajo, pero buena experiencia para mi profesión de periodista.

Ahora, al comenzar el segundo año de la pandemia, siento compasión por los que, además del temor del COVID-19, no saben de donde va a venir el alimento que necesitan diariamente para si mismos y sus niños. Y en agradecimiento que a mí y a mi esposa no nos faltó comida, queremos contribuir algo. Recientemente, envíe $200 a Foodshare, y ahora que el gobierno nos ha enviado otro cheque de estímulo voy a enviar otros $200.

Sin embargo, siento ira y desilusión que miembros del Congreso se oponen a aumentar el sueldo federal mínimo a $15 por hora, como nos ha propuesto, para que contribuya a esta proporción. La última vez que subió fue el 24 de julio en 2009, tras la Gran Recesión, y solo por un miserable aumento de $6.55 a $7.25 por hora.

La compasión del Congreso nunca ex- cede su penuria.
**The ‘Quality of Life’ error**

Father Tad Pacholezyk
Making Sense of Bioethics

During “serious illness conversations,” some doctors will ply their patients with this question: “What is your minimally acceptable quality of life?”

Behind the question can be the implication that if patients are experiencing a low quality of life, their medical treatments can be discontinued because their life has become “no longer worth living.”

This can even become a shorthand to justify actions like physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia. Making quality of life assessments about ourselves or others can lead us to devalue the gift of human life by insisting it must have a certain amount of “quality” before it can be deemed “meaningful” or “worthwhile.”

The clearest rebuttal of the “Quality of Life” error I’ve come across was from a 64-year-old retired Boeing computer programmer named John Peyton (1945-2009). He lived in Kent, Washington, and had an unusually aggressive form of amytrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, commonly known as Lou Gehrig’s disease. The disease made him totally dependent on Patricia, his wife of 40 years. She dressed him, fed him, and regularly shifted his body position in the living room recliner where he spent his declining months.

As Peyton’s once-strong voice gradually began to fade away, he continued to use it publicly to oppose and lobby against Initiative 1000, the assisted suicide initiative in Washington.

When he was interviewed by Laura Ingraham of Fox News, he said, “I’m one of those people who is somewhat of a target of the initiative and I don’t know how we as a society could really consider making doctors into killers.”

Laura countered: “John, I think a lot of people who are for this type of assisted suicide would say, ‘Look, what about the quality of life?’ ‘Look, you know, people suffering like you — what kind of quality of life do you really have?’ What do you say to those people?”

His reply was as brilliant as it was simple:

“I have a marvelous quality of life! Right now I am totally dependent. I can do nothing for myself. I’m effectively paralyzed. But I have a family. I have friends. I have my church community. I have loving support all around me. I understand how anyone could deny that I have a very high quality of life, and it gets me to understand and be compassionate toward those without the support that I have. Rather than giving them the temptation to kill themselves, we should be trying to figure out how to help them to have the quality of life I enjoy.”

Peyton’s answer cuts to the heart of the matter: if anyone who is sick or dying is facing a low quality of life, we should take steps to raise and improve it.

His story also reminds us how the one-sided category of “quality of life” can easily tempt us in the wrong direction when it comes to basic moral duties owed to our loved ones in compromised states like a coma, ALS, stroke, Alzheimers, or dementia.

Instead of making quality of life judgments about people, we should be making “quality of treatment” judgments for those who are ailing and vulnerable, and perhaps “quality of help” judgments against ourselves.

As our focus should be on the benefits and burdens of a proposed medical intervention rather than on trying to impose our own conclusion that certain individuals no longer have enough value or meaning in their lives to merit receiving a particular treatment. Their humanity is violated if they are treated according to their functionality or quality of life, rather than according to their personal dignity.

Of course everyone has a certain natural fear or hesitation when it comes to living in a disabled or compromised state. We may also be afraid of “being a burden to others.” When we acknowledge that the gift of life has “absolute value,” that doesn’t mean we must do absolutely everything scientifically available to maintain it, but it does mean that we should exercise good stewardship over it, making use of ordinary means of treatment and receiving supportive care, even in the face of imminent decline.

It also means the decision to refuse or stop a particular medical treatment should be based on the judgment that the treatment itself is extraordinary, that is to say, it offers minimal benefit or is unduly burdensome. It should not be because we conclude that someone’s life itself lacks value and needs to end.

Individuals struggling with grave ailments, even though they may be very compromised and unable to act as their own decision makers, remain persons of great moral worth. They contribute to the common good simply by being, rather than by doing or choosing. Moreover, they continually call each of us to a higher and more beautiful standard of full acceptance, loving support and authentic care, even and especially in the midst of very challenging medical circumstances. They raise the bar for us and we should respond by elevating their quality of life.

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Rev. Tadeusz Pacholezyk, Ph.D.
edited his doctorate in neuroscience from Yale and did post-doctoral work at Harvard. He is a priest of the diocese of Fall River, MA, and serves as the Director of Education at The National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia. See www.ncbcenter.org and www.fathertad.com.

**Lent’s promise in bleak times**

Elise Italiano
Ureneck Catholic News Service
Finding God in All Things

During a homily this past Advent, my pastor referenced the 19th-century poem “In the Bleak Midwinter” by English poet Christina Rossetti. He spoke about its perennial relevance for Catholics living in New England: Each year at Christmas we celebrate the Incarnation, which is the subject of the poem.

But at Christmas we also find ourselves preparing for midwinter, the half-marathon marker of the long, winter season that starts a few weeks before Thanksgiving and doesn’t let up until April (though that month is often marked by one final blizzard).

Rossetti aptly describes this desolate season: “In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan/ Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone/ Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow.”

Having just survived back-to-back snowstorms and now preparing for a few weeks of below-freezing temperatures, bleak doesn’t begin to cover how I feel being cooped up in an apartment with a caged-in 15-month-old. My recent Amazon search history has been exclusively dedicated to indoor play gyms, though we lack the space for them. A bleak Catch-22.

But this midwinter feels bleak for more serious reasons. We’re suspended between the availability of a vaccine and the distribution of it to the masses. We can almost make out the finish line of the pandemic, yet we anticipate that hundreds of thousands of people will lose their lives before spring.

We watch news crawlers tick off peripheral casualties of the pandemic: teens facing dangerous levels of anxiety, depression and suicide; business owners losing their livelihoods; families being evicted from their homes.

Our political, cultural and ecclesial landscape all feel equally bleak. Despite calls for unity and healing, polarization persists in our discourse, political dealings and even in our leadership. We all seem to be enslaved to what Harvard professor Arthur Brooks calls the “outrage industrial complex” — that web of cable news and social media that keeps us angry, fearful and pointing fingers — and which profits off of our miserable dealings with one another.

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**Joe Biden and the U.S. white Catholic self**

Hosffman Ospino
Catholic News Service
Journeying Together

Joe Biden is the second Roman Catholic to serve the United States of America as president. More exactly, the second “white” Catholic to serve in such capacity. Does it matter that President Biden is white and Catholic? I think it does.

Since the foundation of our nation, Catholics have fought hard for affirmation and recognition amid periodic waves of anti-Catholic sentiment deeply ingrained in the U.S. social imagination.

Could Catholics be loyal to the U.S. Constitution? Could Catholics embrace the U.S. social contract? Could Catholics thrive in a mostly Protestant nation? In time, the answer to these questions has been yes.

During the past two centuries, the vast majority of those Catholics struggling for affirmation and recognition, arguing their merits to be as American as any other U.S. citizen, shared European cultural roots. Their children and grandchildren would embody a Euro-American way of life that distinguishes them even to this day.

The “white” Catholic was not somehow demanding buying into the “whiteness” project. Despite its ambiguity, whiteness brought acceptance, voice and privileges to millions of Euro-American Catholics in a fragmented society divided by racial biases.

Whiteness managed to strain for centuries the relationships among these Euro-American Catholics and their own Catholic sisters and brothers not deemed white.

White Catholics — read mostly Euro-American, fair skinned and mostly English-speaking — have achieved great successes as a group. About 55% of Catholics in this group have a college degree; most would fit into what we would call middle and upper social status.

Of course not all white, Euro-American Catholics are highly educated or successful. Yet, millions are. The vast majority of Catholic influential leaders in church and society are white, Euro-American. Think of bishops, university presidents, Catholic school teachers and principals, politicians, academics, businesspeople and, as noted, the current president.

Agreeing or disagreeing with President Biden’s political views does not take away the fact that he is particularly emblematic...
Young people challenge us to care about creation

On Feb. 16, the Pontifical Academy for Life invited its members to meet online for a seminar on some of the ethical perspectives presented in Pope Francis’ encyclicals Laudato Si’, On Care for Our Common Home, and Fratelli Tutti, on Fraternity and Social Friendship. This meeting gave us a space to discuss and reflect on the human impact on all life on our planet.

This raised some critical questions, such as, How can we speak about the dignity of every individual while our lifestyles and our use of natural resources are already depriving a significant part of humanity of the foundations of life? It’s important to share those reflections with the church and the community to indicate practical steps for all of humanity to move forward.

Laudato Si’ is a huge wake-up call for humanity so that we realize the destruction we inflict on the environment and our fellow human beings. We must develop and apply sustainable, ecologically compatible production methods with the help of people’s expertise and science’s creativity. But we must also shape our lifestyles in such a way that the earth’s resources are used justly.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed our false security. Fratelli Tutti highlights how this time has highlighted our interconnection and interdependence. The pope writes that “the brutal and unforeseen blow of this uncontrolled pandemic forced us to recover our concern for human beings, for everyone, rather than for the benefit of a few” (No. 33).

Pope Francis has given the church and the community a guiding light that shows the way to repair our common home and build a better future for our society. It is time to recognize ourselves as the body of Christ, to support one another and to reflect God’s concern for all people, especially for the most vulnerable. This direction will move society toward a better future.

One of the major challenges of my generation is the loss of faith. After seeing so much suffering, especially in the current pandemic, many millennials have questions. Their spiritual leaders don’t have answers to these questions. The future looks alarming to this generation.

If we are willing to repair our common home, we will need young minds who are animated by their faith in God and care for creation. We care for creation not only because we live in it, but also because it reveals who God is. Millennials are in great need for spiritual leadership and discipleship in order to see creation the way God sees it! The church cannot neglect this responsibility.

A recent document published by the Pontifical Academy for Life, Old Age: Our Future. The elderly after the pandemic, highlights the role played by the elderly in the preservation and transmission of the faith to young people.

I believe that our role as young believers and scientists is to make the most of our faith and gifts, “for we are his handiwork, created in Jesus Christ for the good works that God has prepared in advance” (Eph 2:10).

Young people can serve as a voice of peace and reassurance and have the energy and passion to repair what has been damaged, both to the planet and to the fabric of human solidarity.

Scripture says, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him” (Acts 10:38). This is how young people, infused with faith, should seek the transformation Pope Francis dreams of for our world.

Sandra Azab is a pharmacist, international health specialist and a researcher at St. Joseph Institute for Family and Life in Egypt. She is a member of the Pontifical Academy for Life.

Forced labor and what we buy

One morning I discovered that a sheet on my bed had ripped during the night. I thought they were good quality sheets. How could they shred?

Then I did the math. I bought them 10 years ago and they were my favorites. I slipped them into the rotation far more than the other sets, probably using them well over a thousand nights. Stuff wears out.

But in this time of globalization, and with Pope Francis reminding us to remember that justice isn’t just a local issue, my sheet set took my thoughts a world away.

In China, an ethnic Muslim minority called Uighurs (pronounced "WEE-gurs") is suffering incredible persecution, facing ethnic and cultural cleansing. Separated from their families, subjected to “re-education,” torture and rape, they’ve been herded into work camps and forced labor. Qurans have been seized and worship suppressed. It’s reminiscent of the gulags of Josef Stalin.

So what does this have to do with my desire for a new set of cotton sheets?

Bloomberg reports that many very prominent American companies are suspected of relying on forced labor in China’s Xinjiang region, where the Uighurs are detained. Many of these companies deny that they use textiles produced in the area. They insist that they do not use forced labor in their supply chains. However, it’s a tricky, complicated subject.

The Guardian reports that China is the biggest supplier of cotton products in the world. And 84% of the country’s cotton output comes from Xinjiang region. So even if a company does not have a factory in Xinjiang or purchase cotton or other textiles directly from the region, what about the suppliers who do, and who eventually produce for your favorite brand? How carefully does a big company follow this chain? Or does the bottom line often turn a blind eye to abuse?

In my closet, I note a favorite sweater, produced by a well-known American brand, with the familiar “made in China” tag. I put the sweater down, wondering if it could be related to the horrors of Xinjiang province. The next sweater I pick up is “made in Vietnam.” Is that better, or was the cotton sourced from Xinjiang province?
Catholic health care officials aim to get COVID-19 vaccine to everyone

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) — To make sure COVID-19 vaccines reach everyone, Catholic health care officials are working to overcome hurdles of bias, language barriers, and technology and transportation access.

As the vaccine has been rolling out across the country, they have been hosting town hall meetings at churches and community centers, promoting vaccinations on social media and forming partnerships with other hospitals and businesses.

They also are providing bilingual materials about the vaccines and physically signing up people for appointments and making sure they have necessary transportation to get to them.

“This is not new work for us,” said Shivonne Laird, director of community health impact for Bon Secours Mercy Health, a Catholic health system with 50 hospitals in seven states. Laird said the work of engaging with communities’ needs and "addressing them in authentic ways," is what they do and the current focus on vaccine equity is just an extension of that.

In a March 1 interview with Catholic News Service, she said data shows that people who earn $90,000 or more a year are two or three times as likely to know someone that has been vaccinated than those who make under $40,000 a year.

“It's not just a race issue; it's an underserved community issue and we're approaching it from that standpoint,” she said.

The system's hospitals are working with analytics teams that have researched data on economic disparities to come up with action plans to make sure communities with fewer resources get the health care, and in this case the vaccine, they need.

“We are definitely called to do this work, and we're trying to do it as fast as we can,” she said.

Laird said disparities exist in the current vaccine rollout for seniors, health care and front-line workers and those with health conditions, but the hurdles are different in various locations. “Our goal right now is to reduce the disparities in the initial piece of the rollout,” she said, so by the time the larger rollout begins, “we can at least have a strategy for addressing the disparities we know are coming.”

She said COVID-19 has highlighted “existing disparities within our communities” noting that people of color are often more likely to be working in front-line jobs or more likely to have underlying chronic conditions.

Transportation access is also a major factor, she said, which is why Bon Secours hospitals are building partnerships with companies to make sure people can get to and from vaccine distribution sites.

Laird said she has been working on health disparity issues in different settings for 20 years and has been encouraged in the vaccine rollout with how “working together, all of us, we can really make a dent.”

Laird, president and CEO of SCL Health, a Catholic health care system in Colorado, Kansas and Montana, similarly stressed the urgency of working together to make sure the vaccines reach people in vulnerable communities.

“We can't do it alone, and partnerships are critical to success,” she said in an email. “We have forged relationships in each of the communities we serve with dozens of organizations who work closely with the most vulnerable.”

A big example of partnerships working together was the large-scale vaccine distribution for 5,000 seniors conducted by SCL Health Feb. 6, with follow-up doses scheduled for March 6. The event took place at the National Western Complex in Denver, known for its yearly livestock show and rodeo.

Colorado's governor, Jared Polis, had asked the SCL Health officials if they could launch this type of event specifically targeted to underserved communities and people of color.

Megan Mahncke, president of SCL Health Foundations, said the large-scale vaccination stemmed from collaborations that began a year ago when the pandemic first hit and SCL leaders began meeting with others in the community and government officials on the best responses to the then-unknown virus.

These partnerships in turn enabled the large-scale vaccination to work because partner groups were able to first help get people on board to want the vaccine, then get them transportation to and from the site.

Mahncke said the men and women who received the first doses of the Moderna vaccine at the Denver complex, the largest and most complex, came out “in tears and smiles of relief ... that they felt safe.”

"It was one of the most moving things I was a part of,” she said, adding that it lived out the mission of the health system.

The 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. vaccination day Feb. 6 required set up at around 4:30 a.m., and volunteers worked into the evening to take it down. It was staffed by 500 SCL Health workers who filled up the volunteer slots within two hours after the call for help was issued. That response alone, Mahncke said, is impressive because these workers were already tired from the year of pandemic work.

The urgency of getting the COVID-19 vaccines to the most vulnerable has a pragmatic and theological basis, said Brian Kane, senior director of ethics for the Catholic Health Association.

He said the country's most vulnerable were “the most hard-hit with infection rates, so it's a public health challenge” and Catholic social teaching stresses the commitment to care for the most vulnerable among us.

“So, it’s not just pragmatic, but about our faith and how our faith calls us to act.”

To that end, he said, Catholic hospitals have been trying to reach vulnerable populations with mobile and parish clinics or through their data-driven work that highlights ZIP codes in their areas with the greatest disparities.

They also have been trying to get the vaccine to homeless populations and reaching those without internet access who want to sign up for appointments.

SCL Health work is not new for many Catholic hospitals, and Kane said one advantage they have now is that so many of them have merged into larger groups covering a number of states where they can share both knowledge and resources, such as redistributing staffs and ventilators at the height of the pandemic and efforts now in the best ways to reach vulnerable communities with the vaccine.

“There are some hidden benefits to the work that's been done over several decades to address the needs today,” he said.

And now, as so many are frustrated with trying to get the vaccine, sometimes the work of sharing expertise overlaps into the personal lives of health care officials.

Laird said she and her colleagues in Baltimore and Cincinnati, in their spare time, have been helping seniors unsure of how to get the vaccine.

“This is a true calling for all of us,” she said of newfound work making phone calls and looking through websites to find vaccination distribution sites and available appointment slots.

She said people have told her they are on lists for the vaccine and just waiting for a call back, and she advises them to be more active in the process. She also has heard from people who say they might not go to their scheduled vaccination appointment because of potential bad weather and she advises them not to miss it.

Neighbors need to reach out to people and make sure they understand the process or make sure they have a ride, she said.

Laird said people who work in analytics for Bon Secours in Greenbelt, Maryland, end up trying to help people who aren't Web savvy make their vaccine appointments online or with a few phone calls.

“I have to help,” one person told her, and that's not the exception. "That's just how we feel in the ministry," she said.

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Follow Zimmermann on Twitter: @carolmaczim

'Finally,' pope says he will be able to make pilgrimage to Iraq

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope Francis told the people of Iraq he was going to their country as a "penitential pilgrim," asking God's forgiveness for years of war, persecution and destruction, and as a "pilgrim of peace," hoping to remind people that they are all brothers and sisters.

His March 5-8 pilgrimage of peace, he said, would aim to strengthen a sense of fraternity, "animated by the desire to pray together and to walk together, including with brothers and sisters of other religious traditions," under the gaze of Abraham, who was born in Iraq and is recognized as patriarch by Jews, Christians and Muslims.

He said the trip was to begin.

"We are coming as a pilgrim, as a penitential pilgrim to Iraq, and I come among you as a pilgrim of peace, to after years of war and terrorism, to ask God for consolation for hearts and healing for wounds," the pope said. "And I come among you as a pilgrim of peace, to repeat: 'You are all brothers and sisters.'"

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"I come as a pilgrim, as a penitential pilgrim to Iraq," he said in a video message, released by the Vatican March 4, the day before the trip was to begin.

"I come as a pilgrim, as a penitential pilgrim to implore forgiveness and reconciliation from the Lord after years of war and terrorism, to ask God for consolation for hearts and healing for wounds," the pope said. "And I come among you as a pilgrim of peace, to repeat: 'You are all brothers and sisters.'"

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Pope Francis said that throughout the years of war and the reign of terror of the Islamic State militants, he thought often of the Iraqi people, especially the Christians, Muslims and Yazidis who suffered so much.

"Now I come to your blessed and wounded land as a pilgrim of hope," he said.

Pointing to the story of Jonah — recognized as a prophet in Green, Christians and Muslims — and Nineveh, an ancient city in what is now Iraq, Pope Francis contrasted the threatened destruction with the hope that came from the people turning to God.

"Let us be infected by this hope, which encourages us to rebuild and begin again," the pope said. "And in these hard times of pandemic, let us help each other to strengthen fraternity, to build together a future of peace — together, brothers and sisters of every religious tradition."
Bishops address concern over Johnson & Johnson vaccine's abortion link

By Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Use of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine, approved Feb. 27 by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, raises moral concerns because it was "was developed, tested and is produced with abortion-derived cell lines," the chairmen of two U.S. bishops' committees said March 2.

The bishops concluded, however, that "while we should continue to insist that pharmaceutical companies stop using abortion-derived cell lines, given the world-wide suffering that this pandemic is causing, we affirm again that being vaccinated can be an act of charity that serves the common good."

Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Doctrine, and Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, chairman of the USCCB's Committee on Pro-Life Activities, made the comments in a joint statement.

In December, the prelates addressed concerns over what then were the newly approved BioNTech and Moderna vaccines because "an abortion-derived cell line was used for testing them," but "not used in their production."

However, the Johnson & Johnson Janssen one-shot COVID-19 vaccine raises "additional moral concerns" because it was "developed, tested and is produced with abortion-derived cell lines," Bishop Rhoades and Archbishop Naumann said.

In their December statement, the bishops noted that cell lines used were derived from fetuses aborted in the 1970s.

In their March 2 statement, the bishops quoted the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which judged that "when ethically irreproachable COVID-19 vaccines are not available ... it is morally acceptable to receive COVID-19 vaccines that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process."

"However, if one can choose among equally safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines," the bishops added, "the vaccine with the least connection to abortion-derived cell lines should be chosen. Therefore, if one has the ability to choose a vaccine, Pfizer or Moderna's vaccines should be chosen over Johnson & Johnson's."

Doses of this newest vaccine — now the third approved for use in the United States, were being shipped to distribution points around the country March 2.

On March 1, a number of dioceses, including the New Orleans Archdiocese, Diocese of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and the Diocese of Burlington, Vermont, issued their own statements warning about the moral concern over the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Bishop Rhoades and Archbishop Naumann reiterated in their latest statement what they stated in December: that getting a COVID-19 vaccine is an important act for the common good amid this pandemic.

The Vatican COVID-19 Commission and the Pontifical Academy for Life have said, "We believe that all clinically recommended vaccinations can be used with a clear conscience and that the use of such vaccines does not signify some sort of cooperation with voluntary abortion."

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Editor's Note: The USCCB Secretariat of Pro-Life Secretariat has prepared an informational resource titled "Answers to Key Ethical Questions About COVID-19 Vaccines" and posted it online at https://bit.ly/3sGUqUR.
Contiúna de Página 17

En general, y en particular, se ha dicho que la crísis de contagio es un problema que puede ser resuelto con estrategias de aislamiento y contención. Sin embargo, es importante destacar que el impacto de la crisis en diferentes sectores de la economía puede ser significativo. En este sentido, es importante evaluar la situación de manera completa y tomada en cuenta en el contexto del desarrollo y la prosperidad de las diversas economías afectadas.

March.

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he said. "I literally had them out at the
trash, and changed my mind and brought
them back in."
Eventually, he began to add more to the
collection, and now estimates its value at
more than $25,000. Soon, he will make
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This time instead of a trash can, they will
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Nonprofit organization gives scholarships
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He was inspired to sell his collection
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spite the coronavirus pandemic, which has
kept many public schools closed since last
March.

By Dave Hrbacek
Catholic News Service

ST. PAUL, Minn. (CNS) — A baseball
card collection worth thousands of dollars
was stolen second away from being
dropped into a trash can and disappearing
forever in a landfill.
Father John Ubel, rector of the Cathed-
dral of St. Paul, recalled that moment more
than 15 years ago when he was transferred
to a different priestly assignment and
wanted to purge some of his belongings.
He wasn't sure what to do with a box con-
taining hundreds of cards in mint condition
from the 1970s.
"Every time you move assignments, it's
a great opportunity to divest yourself a bit," he said. "I literally had them out at the
trash, and changed my mind and brought
them back in."
Eventually, he began to add more to the
collection, and now estimates its value at
more than $25,000. Soon, he will make
good on his urge to get rid of the cards.
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March.

Although archdiocesan schools closed
as well and quickly implemented distance
learning, they reopened in the fall for
person learning.
"I thought to myself, (Catholic) schools
are hitting it out of the park. And, I thought,
it's time to give something back," he told
The Catholic Spirit, newspaper of the Arch-
diocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.
He has more than 2,000 cards, but will
focus on the most valuable — about 50
—or she qualifies beginning in kindergarten.
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CNS PHOTO | DAVE HRBACEK, THE CATHOLIC SPIRIT

"And, to me, it's time (to sell the cards).
"It's the only sport I ever really
played." He was a member of a city cham-
pionship team in 1977.
The reason he fell in love with baseball
cards is equally simple.
"This is nostalgia, and it brings you
right back. ... And, I think memory is very
powerful, and memory is very compelling.
It brings us back to a simpler time," he said.
For sentimental reasons, it would be
understandable for Father Ubel to want to
keep his collection. He admitted there's a
tug on his heart to do so, which creates ten-
sion surrounding his decision to let go.
"On a human level, I don't want to part
with these," he said, "but I also think there
are other needs right now that in my life are
more important. And, the benefit I received
from a Catholic education is really immeas-
urable to me, my whole life, from kinder-
garten all the way through seminary and
beyond.
"And, to me, it's time (to sell the cards).
I just felt the Lord speaking to me.
You know, Matthew 19 (verse 21): 'Go, sell
what you have.' It's time. It's time to do
something and to give back."

Hrbacek is a staff writer for The Catho-
lic Spirit, newspaper of the Archdiocese of
St. Paul and Minneapolis.
BIDEN

Continued from Page 18

of the promise and ambiguity of the white, Euro-American Cath-
olic experience. Some see him as a champion of key Catholic
values. Others as the antithesis of certain Catholic values. Per-
haps he is both.

President Biden's religious identity, as particularly manifest
in public life, brings forth his white, Euro-American Catholic
self. Like millions of white, Euro-American Catholics, in-
cluding supporters and critics, he is heir of the bargain made
among Euro-American Catholics made in the 21st century.

Due to the question for the next and more diverse generation
of Catholics, the church's body, the church, Catholics in the
U.S. have many opportunities for spiritual sacrifices that give glory to
God and contribute to the salvation of souls.

The idea is that Christ's Passion is continued in the members of his
mystical body as we unite our sufferings to Jesus.

Through prayer we will have the grace of the Holy Spirit to
be faithful in the Lenten disciplines to which he is calling us and discemment about which disciplines he wants us to continue after Lent.

As the Israelites were called to do, we must repent not only
for our own sins, but the sins of our nation. "If my people who
are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek
my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from
heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chr 7:14
RSVCE). In his Apostolic Exhortation, Reconciliation and Pery-
ance, Pope St. John Paul II wrote of social sins that have become
imbedded in our society (12-2-1984), sins against the dignity of
the human person. In short, we are offending God and need to re-
pent and pray in reparation. In President Abraham Lincoln's
March 30, 1863, Proclamation Appointing a National Fast Day,
we read these words:

"And whereas it is the duty of nations as well as of men, to
own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to con-
fect their sins and transgressions, in humble sorrow, yet with as-
sured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and par-
don; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy
Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are
blessed whose God is the Lord.

And, insomuch as we know that, by his divine law, nations
like individuals are subjected to punishments and chastisements
in this world, may we not justly fear that the awful calamity of
civil war, which now desolates the land, may be but a punish-
ment, inflicted upon us, for our presumptuous sins, to the needful
end of our national reformation as a whole people? We have
been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven. We have
been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We
have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation
has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten
the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied
and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined,
in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were
produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. In-
toxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-suffi-
cient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too
pride to pray to the God that made us!

"It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before the of-
fended power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clem-
ency and forgiveness."

Almighty and Merciful Father, Jesus our Lord and Savior,
Holy Spirit Soul of our souls, we humbly repent of our personal
and communal sins against your Holy Name through our pride,
indifference, ingratitude, faithlessness, blasphemy, and rejection.
We have withstood the truth. Write, write, write. We have tolerated
a culture of death, and we are paying the price. Help us to heed
your call to turn from our sins, to seek forgiveness, to amend our
ways, and to do reparation praying and living. We want our lives
not only to glorify you and bring others to your saving grace so that all
will worship, praise, and adore you. We pray for the grace to
walk the way of the cross with you as you prepare us for your

" Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in
heaven."

Father Knick Knickerbocker is a retired priest of the Diocese
of San Angelo, ordained under the Pastoral Provision which al-
loves for the reception of married former Episcopalian priests
into the Catholic Church. He and his wife, Sandie, write a
monthly column for the

URENECK

Continued from Page 18

It's a batten-down-the-hatches kind of winter. But that
prospect and posture is hard to face, given that many of us
are running on physical and emotional fumes. Spring feels
like light-years away.

Perhaps it's a blessing, then, that the church gives us
Lent in midwinter. It's a season of soul-searching; the gray
skies give us no other choice but to turn inward and ex-
amine the dark spaces we'd rather not explore.

Despite the ashes and calls for repentance, I have
never found Lent to be a frosty, bitter season. The days get
longer as we turn toward the sun and the light of Christ
awaits us at the Easter Vigil. If we use those 40 days well,
they can be the bridge out of the misery of lockdown and
isolation, but also out of our online tribal wars and call-out
culture.

If this pandemic is a marathon, Lent can be our repleni-
ishing station. It can be the period in which we take in the
things that will nourish us for the rest of the race and the
opportunity to shed the things or habits we no longer need to
hold onto.

At the end of her poem, Rossetti muses: "What can I
give Him, poor as I am?/ If I were a shepherd, I would
bring a lamb/ If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part/
Yet what I can I give him: give him my heart." When
we make it to the other side of this bleak mid-
winter, it would be good for our hearts not to be "anesthe-
tized," as Pope Francis has warned, but made ready to
receive the joy of Easter, that eternal spring for which we
all wait in hope.

Elise Italiano Ureneck is a communications consultant and is a columnist for Catholic News Service.
This painting was created by Iliana Carmen Davila of St. Mary Parish in Odessa. Davila is the daughter of parish catechists Pablo and Rocio Davila. Sister Maria Theresa Arzagon, director of religious education at St. Mary, shared that this painting, done during the winter storm, shows “a positive leap of faith appreciating the God of creation who gave us Mother Earth to care for, protect, and respect for the future generations.”

A statue of the Virgin Mary was surrounded by ice at St. Mary Church in Odessa.