

CATHOLIC
SISTERS WEEK

‘So in love with God’

Young women share local stories of their call to religious life



Darby Heard, center, attended Mass in October 2025 at the Bl. Stanley Rother Shrine in Oklahoma City. Photo Chris Porter/Sooner Catholic.

By Sally Linhart
The Sooner Catholic

Darby Heard’s path to a religious life started with a simple question prompted by a blossoming faith throughout high school. “I wonder if this could be something I might be called to?” she wondered.

Discernment and prayer confirmed that calling for Heard, who now resides with the Carmelite Sisters of Saint Thérèse of the Infant Jesus in Oklahoma City. With the annual arrival of Catholic Sisters Week, spanning March 8-14, perhaps more will answer such a call, religious sisters across the country gather and share a more modern experience by highlighting the diversity and impact of

their work, ultimately hoping to shift the perception of religious life.

Locally, examples for young women discerning such possibilities exists with Heard and with Sister Viviana de la Inmaculada López de Loera, who professed her final religious vows last year in the Congregation of Carmelite Missionaries of Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, then moved to Arizona to begin her mission.

When asked “Who inspires you to be a religious sister or to discern the calling,” Heard and de Loera, two young religious women from the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, offer their stories of discernment, prayer and the ability to listen.

Heard, a 2013 graduate of Bishop McGuinness

continued on page 9

Put Out Into the Deep Luke 5:4

A new Pentecost awakening faith

Since my installation as archbishop 15 years ago, I have not ceased praying for a new Pentecost leading to a New Evangelization in Oklahoma, a renewal that would stir in hearts a deeper encounter with the Word made flesh and a conscious decision to follow Jesus Christ.

While the Lord certainly has the power to pierce thousands of hearts in a single moment, as he did in Jerusalem on that first Pentecost Sunday 2,000 years ago, more often he works quietly and faithfully, like a seed growing beneath the soil.

On a recent Sunday, I had the distinct joy of witnessing those fruits at the Blessed Stanley Rother Shrine as I celebrated the Rite of Election for catechumens – men and women who have never been baptized and who now desire to receive the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist as well as candidates who have already been baptized in another Christian community and who are preparing to be received into full communion with the Catholic Church at Easter.

Last year, we were blessed to welcome 635 people into the Church at Easter. This year, that number will be nearly 1,000!

Each Lent, we hear the words of the prophet Isaiah: “Just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to the one who sows and bread to the one who eats, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10–11).

God’s word carries within it the power to awaken, to heal and to transform. The message we carry of love, mercy and hope is an invitation to encounter the living Lord. Standing before hundreds of catechumens and can-

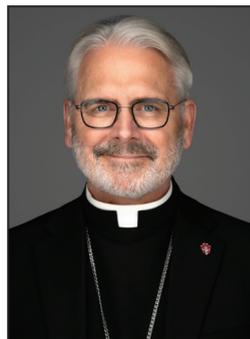
didates, I witnessed the fruitfulness of that word with their courageous “yes” to Christ serving as a visible sign of grace at work.

No conversion happens in isolation. Every person who stood before me that day undoubtedly represented countless prayers of spouses, parents, siblings, friends and co-workers. I cannot help but think of Saint Monica, whose persistent prayers bore fruit in the conversion of her searching son, Saint Augustine. In much the same way, the Lord has used the faithful prayers of many in the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City to draw these men and women to himself.

Lent offers each of us 40 days of renewal through prayer, fasting and almsgiving. It is a season of purification, but also of hope. As these catechumens – now called the elect – and candidates enter their final weeks of preparation, we are invited to accompany them spiritually. Their journey is not separate from ours. Their conversion invites us to examine our own hearts. Have we allowed the word of God to accomplish its purpose in us?

I invite you to hold them in your prayers and give thanks to God that they have heard his voice and responded. Ask the Lord to strengthen and protect them as they journey toward the waters of Baptism and the banquet table of the Lord. And let us continue to pray for those whom the Lord is still calling, that they may find the courage to respond.

May these remaining days of Lent draw each of us into deeper dependence on God’s love and greater confidence in his saving work among us. May the Holy Spirit continue to bring about that new Pentecost for which we pray.



Archbishop Paul S. Coakley

Find more news on the website

By Sooner Catholic Staff

Additional coverage of Church and archdiocesan news and events, only on soonercatholic.org.

✓ **To send photos**, event information or story ideas, e-mail communications@archokc.org.

✓ **For the ministries** supported by contributions to the Annual Catholic Appeal. May their work be fruitful as they continue to serve communities in need. We pray to the Lord. Lord, hear our prayer.

✓ **Registration is open** for the 2026 Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Camp season. Visit campguadalupe.org/summercamp.

✓ **As part of** the Cathedral Arts Series, there will be a Vincent Dubois concert at 7 p.m. April 30 at The Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, 3214 N. Lake Ave. in Oklahoma City. Dubois is the Titular organist at Notre Dame, Paris. This event was made possible by Doug Eason in memory of Tish Eason.



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Archdiocese of Oklahoma City

Arquidiócesis de Oklahoma City

God, heavenly Father, look upon me and hear my prayer during this holy season of Lent. Help me to discipline my body and to be renewed in spirit. Teach me to find new life through penance. Keep me from sin, nourish me with your word of life and prepare me for the glory of your kingdom. I ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever. Amen.

Archbishop Coakley’s Calendar in Review

The following events are part of Archbishop Coakley’s official calendar.

- Feb. 22** – Rite of Election, Blessed Stanley Rother Shrine
- Feb. 24** – Mass, St. Francis de Sales Chapel, Catholic Pastoral Center
- Feb. 24** – Mount St. Mary Seminary Board virtual meeting
- Feb. 26** – Mass, Center of Family Love, Okarche
- Feb. 26** – Catholic Charities Board meeting, Catholic Charities office, Oklahoma City
- Feb. 27** – Mass, St. Francis de Sales Chapel, CPC
- March 3** – Confirmation, St. Joseph Catholic Church, Hennessey
- March 4** – School Mass, Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Okarche
- March 5** – St. Ann Assisted Living Center Board of Directors meeting
- March 5** – Archbishop’s Cabinet meeting
- March 5** – Student Affairs Committee, Board of Trustees of Catholic University of America virtual meeting
- March 5** – Confirmation, St. Monica Catholic Church, Edmond
- March 6** – School Mass, Bishop McGuinness Catholic High School
- March 7** – Confirmation, St. Francis of Xavier Catholic Church, Enid
- March 8** – Confirmation, St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, Edmond

Prayer app-titude

Our Lady’s Cathedral bringing Hallow to Lenten mission

By Andrew W. Griffin
The Sooner Catholic

Hallow, the popular American Catholic prayer and meditation app featuring celebrities Mark Wahlberg, Jonathan Roumie, Chris Pratt, Gwen Stefani and others, has captured widespread appeal.

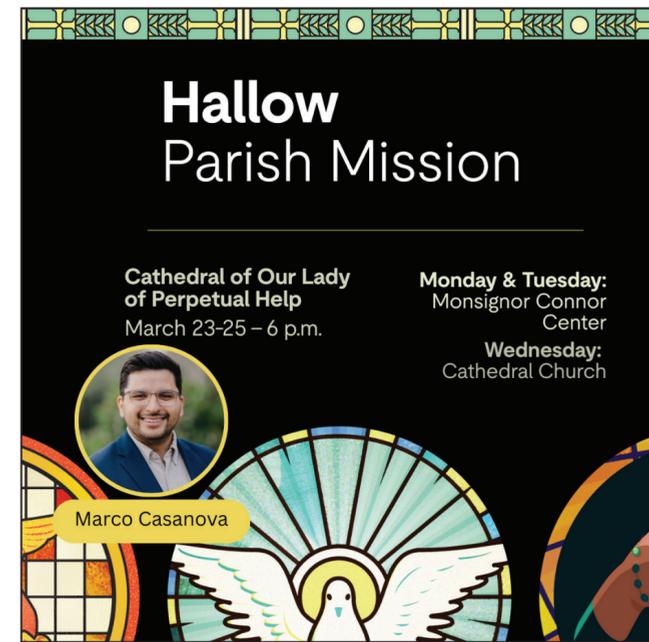
Intentional local appeal, too, including at The Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, where the parish’s Lenten mission in late March will flow through the Hallow app, led by Marco Casanova, who works as the parish lead at Hallow.

“Will be our best event of the year,” said Jayce Palmer, director of evangelization for the cathedral.

Hallow is, Palmer said, “the most downloaded Catholic and meditation and prayer app that is out there. We’re in the middle of a huge Lenten push, which we call the Lenten Pray 40 challenge where we encourage all of our parishioners to take on this challenge by praying 10 minutes a day.”

Palmer said the prayer challenge will “come to a crescendo” at the end of Lent.

And the Hallow app is at the center of that prayer. And for the Lenten mission, set for 6 p.m. each



Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help
March 23-25 – 6 p.m.

Monday & Tuesday:
Monsignor Connor Center

Wednesday:
Cathedral Church

Marco Casanova

night March 23-25.

“The Hallow app has been proven to help people deepen their faith and spirituality,” said Monsignor Rick Stansberry, pastor of The Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. “The Lenten mission led by

one of their top speakers will help lead those who attend to a more grace-filled Lent and Easter and that is my hope and prayer.”

With a theme of “The Return,” which is a reference to Christ’s parable of “The Prodigal Son,” in

the Gospel of Luke, Casanova, a Catholic podcaster and speaker from Houston, Texas, will dive deep into areas including God’s grace for sinners, redemption and repentance, and the dangers of self-righteousness. It is also about the humbling aspects of Lent as Catholics grow closer to God and the celebration of the Resurrection at Easter.

Casanova has been featured on a number of online and televised Catholic programs ranging from Catholic Answers to Pints with Aquinas and FOCUS. Each of his three presentations will last less than an hour.

“The mission is about the Father who runs toward us and never stops looking at us with love,” Casanova said. “No matter how far someone feels – rebellious or religious – there’s always a way home.”

The last night, Palmer said, will feature adoration and a guided meditation as they pray with the Lord. Priests will also be present to hear confessions will also be available.

“Anyone can come,” Palmer said. “We want as many people to come as we can. We have room for hundreds.”

No reservations or RSVPs are required for the event. For more information, visit cathedraokc.org.

THE BLESSED STANLEY ROTHER SHRINE MUSEUM PRESENTS

LENTEN EVENING PRAYER

AT THE BLESSED STANLEY ROTHER SHRINE

Devotional readings & Vespers
Exposition of relics for veneration

- St. John of the Cross
- St. Maria Goretti
- Piece of the True Cross

Wednesdays Feb. 25 through April 1
5:30 to 6:30 p.m. in the Rother Chapel
Led by Deacon Rob Blakely

INVITE ONE BACK

Everyone knows someone who no longer goes to church. What if it only took one heartfelt invitation to bring them back? WOULD YOU BE THE ONE TO ASK?

NEW DATE
Saturday, March 28
9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
The Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help

\$40 per person
Includes workshop materials, morning hospitality, and lunch.

SCAN QR CODE to register or visit
WEBSITE archokc.org/GMDevents
CONTACT Larann Wilson for more information at lwilson@archokc.org

Don't miss this chance to be renewed in mission and better equipped to share the love of Christ with those who are waiting for an invitation back home.

Register today to save your spot!

THE ALUM INSTITUTE
SAINT PAUL STREET EVANGELIZATION



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Archbishop Coakley celebrated the annual TET Mass on Feb. 14 at St. Andrew Dung Lac Catholic Church in Oklahoma City. A celebration for the Lunar New Year was held after Mass. *Photos Chris Porter/Sooner Catholic.*



Fr. Nerio Espinoza recently greeted a parishioner after Mass. *Photo provided.*

Pauls Valley priest prays for the well-being of Venezuelan people

By Bella Gutierrez
The Sooner Catholic

The bold capture of President Nicolás Maduro from Venezuela resulted in many reactions.

Among them for some Venezuelans locally: hope.

“The recent events in Venezuela represent a seed of hope for the country to return to the path of democracy and promote better opportunities for its people, in general, for the well-being of the Venezuelan people,” said Father Nerio Espinoza, a native of Venezuela and pastor of Saint Catherine of Siena Catholic Church in Pauls Valley.

Venezuela has been under a totalitarian/socialist regime since the late 1990s, led by Hugo Chávez Frias and then continued by Maduro, who was taken into custody by the U.S. government on Jan. 3 to face trial on charges of narco-terrorism, cocaine trafficking and weapons offenses.

Father Espinoza recalls many pressures and restrictions on Venezuelan people’s freedoms, including freedom of religion and worship.

“I recall that during my student days, explosive devices were detonated in the Cathedral of Mérida, incidents that have been repeated

over the years in other churches,” Father Espinoza said.

Some priests have been threatened, including Cardinal Baltazar Porras Cardozo, who continues to support political prisoners in Venezuelan jails.

Freedom of speech is another of the freedoms curtailed by the regime. Many media outlets, including religious radio stations, have been shut down.

“The situation is tense that some priests have been threatened, and in general, every one of them should be very careful with the words they use and the messages they share,” Father Espinoza said.

The complex situation, due to the economic and humanitarian crisis, along with many other issues, triggered the largest migration exodus in recent decades, with around 8 million Venezuelans dispersed worldwide.

Porfirio Valera among them. Valera arrived in the U.S. with his wife, Violeta, seeking a better quality of life, finding open arms in Pauls Valley. Family and friends gave them a warm welcome, and now, as a parishioner at Saint Catherine of Siena, he expressed hope after Maduro’s capture.

“We need to maintain faith in God that Venezuela will overcome all obstacles,” he said.

Father Espinoza emphasized the

need to maintain radical hope that promises are fulfilled in Jesus.

“It’s not going to be easy for the country to improve, but there’s a process of reconnecting with good values and respect for faith and commitment to good actions,” he said.

The message is to “keep faith in God, with Our Lady of Coromoto, patron of Venezuela, and Saint José Gregorio Hernández, that our prayers for a better Venezuela in peace are heard.”

The totalitarian regime didn’t vanish with Maduro’s capture. Many Venezuelans are cautious, as popular uprisings could trigger a more dangerous scenario.

“Our prayers are for world leaders to make decisions supporting peace, justice and strengthening institutions and democracy,” Father Espinoza said.

“The message of Pope Leo XIV resonates, ‘The good of the beloved Venezuelan people must prevail over any other consideration.’”

Father Espinoza is not the only foreign priest to be the pastor of Saint Catherine of Siena Catholic Church. Father Joseph Duffy, from Salford, England, arrived in Oklahoma by the invitation of Bishop McGuinness in 1949. Father Espinoza, was born in Trujillo, Venezuela. He holds a degree in religious sciences from the Javeriana University in Colombia,

and a bachelor’s and doctorate in philosophy from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Italy.

Serving the Saint Catherine community for nine years, Father Espinoza has also ministered to many Hispanic families.

“My message to the Hispanic community, often victims of social rejection, racism and discrimination, is to move forward, overcome fear, and seek God’s peace that will give you strength,” he said.

“This community has been and will continue to be filled with values, playing important roles and missions in the Catholic faith.”

In this country, built by immigrants, too, Father Espinoza said, “It’s essential not to be afraid, because in God’s eyes, I am like you before God” (Job 33:6).

“Though our accents sound different and may give us away, we’re people of good will,” he added, referencing Peter’s recognition as a Galilean after denying Jesus (Matthew 26:73).

“Diversity is beautiful and powerful. We have different accents, ways of speaking, and a rich vocabulary that should fill us with confidence. Don’t be ashamed of our language and accent; we’re all God’s children.”

Bella Gutiérrez is a freelance writer for the Sooner Catholic.

Cristo Rey OKC announces leadership appointments

Cristo Rey Oklahoma City Catholic High School has formally appointed Kelsey Herman as president and Kinsey Genheimer, as principal, solidifying the school's permanent leadership team following a period of transition.

Kelsey Herman, who has been serving as interim president, has been formally appointed as president by the board of directors. Her leadership builds on five years as principal at the school, along with prior experience within the national Cristo Rey Network. Herman's understanding of the school's mission, students and community ensures consistent leadership as Cristo Rey OKC continues to grow and serve families across Oklahoma City.

"Kelsey has demonstrated steady, mission-driven leadership during a pivotal season for our

school," said Nico Gomez, board chairman and president of Bethany Children's Health Center. "The board's decision to remove the interim title reflects our confidence in her ability to lead Cristo Rey OKC into its next chapter of growth and impact."

Kinsey Genheimer, who has been serving as interim principal, has now been officially named principal. Known for her strong instructional leadership, meaningful relationships with students and faculty, and steady presence on campus, Genheimer brings a clear commitment to academic excellence and the day-to-day success of the school.

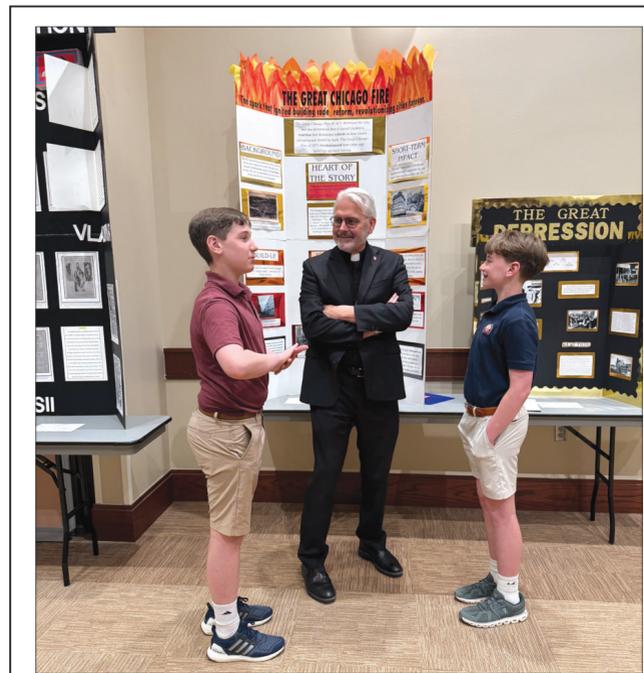
"With strong leadership in place, we remain committed to providing a faith-based, college-preparatory education combined with real-world work experience," said



Kelsey Herman, left, and Kinsey Genheimer, right, are the new president and principal, respectively, of Cristo Rey OKC Catholic High School. Photo provided.

Herman. "I'm grateful to partner with Genheimer as we prepare our students for college, career and

lives of purpose." To learn more about Cristo Rey OKC, visit cristoreyokc.org.



Teddy Tumbleson and Weyland Poe showed Archbishop Coakley their project during the National History Day competition on Feb. 25 at the Catholic Pastoral Center in Oklahoma City. Photo provided.



Diego Espinoza, Rogelio Oregon and scoutmaster Roy Oregon, from Boy Scouts Troop 4008 of Elgin, attended Mass at Bl. Sacrament Catholic Church in Lawton for Scout Sunday. Photo provided.

Magic at the Mount Gala: Denim and Diamonds raises \$302,000



Mount St. Mary Catholic High School hosted its annual Magic at the Mount Gala on Feb. 7 at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City. Photos provided.



Mount Saint Mary Catholic High School hosted its annual Magic at the Mount Gala on Feb. 7 at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, raising \$302,000.

The 2026 event embraced a Denim & Diamonds theme, bringing together alumni, parents, faculty and friends of The Mount for an evening of celebration, fellowship and giving. Guests arrived in true Western glam style, donning boots, hats and even sparkle, setting the tone for the night.

The evening featured live music, a formal dinner, an alumni awards ceremony and spirited silent and live auctions, resulting in donations which will be used to support Mount Saint Mary's mission and future. Proceeds from the event directly benefit the school's academic programs, student opportunities and the school's capital campaign called Higher Ground: Phase II.

"For 20 years, I've had the privilege of watching Magic at The Mount Gala bring our community together and raise vital support for our mission," said Chris Stiles, director of advancement at Mount

Saint Mary. "Its success reflects the incredible commitment of our staff, volunteers and families. I love this community, and I never doubt their willingness to step forward for The Mount."

The 2026 Alumni of the Year Award recipients were recognized for their outstanding contributions and lasting impact. The Spirit of the Mount Award was awarded posthumously to Ben Averyt. The Young Alumni Award was presented to Mica Martinez. The Professional Achievement Award honored Tony J. Tyler, while the Lifetime Achievement Award was given to Martha McDannald. The Community Service Award was presented to Matthew J. Mollman in recognition of his dedicated service and commitment to others.

Magic at the Mount will return to the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum on

Feb. 13, 2027, for another unforgettable evening in support of Catholic education in Oklahoma City.

For more information or to contribute to Mount Saint Mary Catholic High School, contact the advancement office at castiles@mountstmary.org.



Young Adult and Campus Ministries Office

The Young Adult and Campus Ministries office holds a variety of events to get OKC young adults and college students involved with their community.

Annual Events Include:

- Theology on Tap
- OKCCYA Softball League
- Archbishop's Young Adult Cookout

@okccatholicya OKC Catholic Young Adults

Scan QR code for more information and upcoming events!



2026 Annual Catholic Appeal Goal: **\$4,600,000**

archokc.org/aca-sooner-catholic

Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer, you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am!

—Isaiah 58:9

To make a gift, scan here





Catholic school teachers and administrators from the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City and the Diocese of Tulsa attended a special Mass and graduation Feb. 21 at the Catholic Pastoral Center in Oklahoma City. The group completed a Catholic Educator and Formation Credential Program administered by the Institute for Catholic Liberal Education. The Mass was celebrated by Msgr. William Novak, V.G. *Photos Chris Porter.*

Sr. Sigrid Simlik, OP

SINSINAWA, Wis.—Sister Sigrid Simlik, OP, died Jan. 23 at Saint Dominic Villa, Hazel Green, Wisconsin. Her remembering service was held Feb. 12 at Saint Dominic Villa, and her Funeral Mass followed.

Lillian Agnes Simlik was born June 28, 1928, to Paul and Catherine (Mikeska) Simlik in Chicago, Illinois. She professed vows with the Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa in 1949 and received the religious name Sister Sigrid. She received her Bachelor of Arts in classics from Rosary College (now Dominican University), River Forest, Illinois; a CPE as certified chaplain from Shannon Hospital, San Angelo, Texas; and a Master of Arts in theology from Saint Mary University, San Antonio, Texas.

Her ministry was dedicated to teaching and hospital chaplaincy. She taught elementary education at Saint Rose of Lima School, Baltimore, Maryland; and Saint Rose School, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. At Aquin Catholic Central High School, Freeport, Illinois, she taught French and Latin. Sister Sigrid also taught various foreign languages in the role of lecturer at Rosary College. She then served

as educational consultant in the Oklahoma City Diocesan Office of Education, and as director of the Newman Center at Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas. She was hospital chaplain at Mercy Hospital, Independence, Kansas, and at Seton Medical Center and Brackenridge Hospital, both Austin, Texas. She retired to Sun City, Arizona, in 2002 and then moved to Sinsinawa Mound in 2015. Sister Sigrid moved to Saint Dominic Villa in 2017, then moved to Saint Elizabeth Manor in Footville, Wisconsin, in 2020. She returned to the Villa 2024. She had a deep appreciation for world culture and was a lifelong learner.

Sister Sigrid was preceded in death by her parents and a brother, Father Frank Simlik. She is survived by her Dominican Sisters. Memorials may be made to the Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa, 585 County Road Z, Sinsinawa, Wisconsin, or online at sinsinawa.org/donate.



Sr. Sigrid Simlik, OP

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An Oklahoma Virtual School

ENROLLMENT

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2026-2027 SCHOOL YEAR



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How to Enroll for the Oklahoma Parental Choice Tax Credit

- ENROLL IN ST. CARLO ACUTIS ACADEMY**
Parents must have submitted application for their children, been accepted, and completed enrollment for the 2026-2027 school year at SCAA before applying for the Oklahoma Parental Choice Tax Credit (PCTC). We ask that you enroll your child(ren) in February 2026, before the PCTC application opens.
- RECEIVE ENROLLMENT VERIFICATION NUMBER (EVN) FROM ST. CARLO ACUTIS ACADEMY**
Once your child(ren) has completed the entire enrollment process for the 2026-2027 school year, an Enrollment Verification Number (EVN) will be provided to the family.
- APPLY EARLY TO QUALIFY FOR OKLAHOMA PARENTAL CHOICE TAX CREDIT**
The application for 2026-2027 school year tax credit opens Monday, March 16, 2026. For optimal chance on being awarded this tax credit, it is recommended to apply as soon as possible.

Have questions? Want to discuss more about the school?

CONTACT:
Misty Smith
Head of School
(572) 202-1715
misty.smith@archokc.org



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Catholic High School, first felt called to discern a vocation in the Church as a high school freshman. She called the discernment of a calling to religious life a “prayerful process” that for her was inspired by the time she spent near the Eucharist.

Heard attended Saint John Nepomuk Catholic Church in Yukon and said her desire to learn more about religious life grew as her relationship with Christ grew.

“I was a cantor and sang at weekend Mass,” she said. “Doing that really helped me grow in my faith. I grew in my prayer life and in awareness of the saints when I was in high school.”

It was then that she asked herself that question of a possible calling.

“I spent more time listening and really listening to where the Lord wanted me to be at that moment,” she said.

As Heard continues the discernment process, she is carefully considering the commitment required to, as she says, “enter directly into a relationship with God.” The one

question she strives to answer each day is simple: “How is he asking me to love him?”

In the meantime, Heard shares her joy to be “in a house with Jesus in it, growing in my prayer routine and listening to his word.”

Sister Viviana grew up in Norman and attended Saint Joseph Catholic Church. Her journey of discernment began in March 2015 after returning from leading a young adult retreat in Oklahoma. She returned “so in Love with God and wanting to share the love of God with others.”

After graduating high school two months later, she attended another retreat in California. It was there that she met a sister who invited her to visit the community and live with them while she discerned her calling.

“I left everything and whenever I left home, honestly, I knew I was not coming back,” she said. “In my heart, I knew I had arrived home.”

Sister Viviana’s message to any young woman even considering exploring religious life:

“Do not be afraid!”
Sally Linhart is a freelance writer for the Sooner Catholic.



Sr. Viviana de la Inmaculada López de Loera. *Photo provided.*

Gracious God, we ask that you bless and strengthen Catholic sisters as they provide care, comfort and hope to those who are suffering. May their unwavering faith and selfless devotion bring peace and healing to all who seek it. We pray to the Lord. Lord, hear our prayer.



Fr. Alex Kroll celebrated Ash Wednesday Mass for St. Mary Catholic School students at St. Mary Catholic Church in Ponca City. *Photos Cindy Heidlage.*

Oklahoma Catholic Women's Conference: **3** takeaways

By Stephanie Stovall
For the Sooner Catholic

State's largest 'Bible study'

With 1,500 women in attendance, the 19th annual Oklahoma Catholic Women's Conference became the largest Catholic women's Bible study in the state.

Centered on the theme, "The Holy Scriptures are our letters from home," words said by Saint Augustine of Hippo, women were encouraged to bring their Bibles for a more personal and prayerful journey throughout a full day Feb. 21 at the Oklahoma City Convention Center.

Though Catholics are often stereotyped as unfamiliar with Scripture, the conference powerfully told a different story. Through the teaching of Scott Hahn, Mary Healy and Monsignor James Shea, attendees were reminded that the Catholic faith is where Sacred Scripture lives in its fullness.

Hahn called women to a true transformation of mind through immersion in the Word of God and revealed how the promises of the Old Testament are fulfilled in the New, most profoundly in the Holy Eucharist.

Sip and Shop

Conference Eve introduced a new tradition: "Sip & Shop."

Each ticket included early access to the vendor sale, a relaxing glass of wine and appetizers. With fellowship central to the mission of the conference, this event provided a peaceful and festive space to browse sacramentals, sacred art and gifts for Confirmation

and First Communion, all in an atmosphere free from the usual rush of the day.

Lessons from the well

One of the most moving moments of the weekend came during Monsignor Shea's keynote, "Transformation at Jacob's Well."

He reflected on Jesus' encounter with the Woman at the Well, the longest recorded conversation Jesus has with any individual in the Gospels. In choosing to go out of his way to speak not only with a woman, but with a Samaritan woman, Jesus broke through deep religious and cultural barriers.

It was a deliberate and powerful statement. Many attendees heard for the first time the name traditionally given to her, Saint Photina. This woman, once marked by brokenness and multiple marriages, becomes "equal to the apostles" through the vast number of people she brings to Christ. Shea reflected that Jesus "reveals her to herself," and there, at the well, drinking from the Living Water, she discovers that nothing in her story is wasted. In Christ, all is grace, and he makes all things new.

Looking ahead to No. 20

Next year's conference – the 20th conference – will be held earlier than usual, Jan. 16. As a result, the traditional Oct. 1 early-bird registration date has been moved up to Sept. 8. That date is special – the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a joyful day that also marks when Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, patroness of OCWC, made her final vows.



The Oklahoma Catholic Women's Conference was held Feb. 21 at the Oklahoma City Convention Center. Speakers included Msgr. James Shea, Mary Healy and Scott Hahn. Photos Chris Porter/Sooner Catholic.



Moments at the Mount

Lent in focus at The Mount

The Church has once again entered the liturgical season of Lent. It is a time of fasting, almsgiving, and prayer as everyone prepares their hearts for the Passion, death and Resurrection of Christ. This preparation takes many different forms at The Mount.

On Ash Wednesday, The Mount community was blessed to celebrate Mass with Most Reverend Archbishop Paul Coakley. He spoke in his homily of how Lent is a time for everyone to prepare their hearts to be more like Jesus. The archbishop also said that during Lent, people can't just do one or two of the practices. To fully participate in Lent, everyone must pray, fast and give alms.

Kathleen Bertels and her peer ministry class designed a Lenten bingo to draw people into the chapel and into closer relation with God. Some of the squares include attending morning prayer in the chapel, leading class in prayer, spending 30 minutes in Adoration and other individual activities.

Along with this bingo, Bertels put together a Lenten Bible Study during lunches. One is led by math teacher Kathryn Pickens, the other by junior theology teacher Kim Dandurand. This will be a time of prayer and reflection and an opportunity for students to



Archbishop Paul Coakley gave ashes to senior Ivan Borgert during the Ash Wednesday Mass at Sacred Heart Catholic Church. Photo Ani Vazquez.

walk through Lent together.

Some students and staff were asked the question "What does Lent mean to you?"

Math teacher Mark Woodward said that Lent is like a spiritual bootcamp and a time for people to re-train and re-strengthen themselves to do battle against sin.

"The 40 days are supposed to be a challenge," Woodward said, "One that we do not succeed on our own

accord but with God's grace.

"The three practices of fasting, almsgiving and prayer unite us with Jesus during his Three Temptations in the desert where he sets things right for us. And in the end, Lent is a spiritual cleansing to make us more open to receive the grace and gifts of Easter."

Sophomore Ella Still described Lent as a time of recentering. "Lent is the perfect time to refo-



Lucy Rosenhamer

Mount Saint Mary Catholic High School

cus and rediscover who I truly am at the most basic part of myself and prepare my best self for when Jesus rises on Easter," Still said.

She added that life can get so busy and it's easy to lose track of what really matters. Lent gives Still the time to focus on Jesus and his blessings in her life.

This Lent, The Mount community will walk through one section of the Litany of Humility a week. Bertels describes this prayer as one that allows people to not think less of themselves, but allows them freedom.

Through prayer, Bible studies, and a fun bingo, The Mount will walk through the journey of Lent together. It will give all the time to recenter their lives and focus on the one who truly matters.

Lent isn't about what students can give up, but what students can do to be more like Christ and shine his light throughout the community.

Royals Report

Royalty among the Royals

Crowning leadership

When Sarai heard her name announced as homecoming queen, she stood still for a moment, visibly surprised, before classmates surrounded her with congratulations. Moments later, Isaiahs stood beside her as homecoming king, smiling as students filled the gym with applause.

The Feb. 9 homecoming celebration brought color wars energy, laughter and school spirit, but the crowning of the royalty marked something deeper. Sarai and Isaiahs were chosen not only for their enthusiasm, but also for the way they represent the Cristo Rey OKC community.

Both students have built reputations for leadership and encouragement by greeting classmates in the hallways, supporting school events and setting an example in and out of the classroom. Their recognition reflected the values Cristo Rey OKC seeks to cultivate, such as character, commitment and care for others.

Serving with joy

In the front office, junior Mariana Carrera quietly makes a dif-



Cristo Rey OKC Catholic High School Homecoming Queen and King, Sarai and Isaiah. Photo provided.

ference long before most students notice.

She was named February's Student Worker of the Month. Carrera serves as one of the first faces visitors see when they enter Cristo Rey OKC. Whether organizing

paperwork, answering questions or assisting administrators, she approaches each task, whether it's big or small, with what staff members describe as a cheerful "yes, miss" and an infectious smile. Her role may not come with a



Allison Turrubiarartes

Cristo Rey OKC-Catholic High School

stage or spotlight, but it carries impact.

Carrera's recognition highlights the dignity of everyday service. In a school built on the value of meaningful work, her steady presence reminds the community that leadership often looks like reliability, kindness, and consistency.

Honoring history through art

Students gathered Oct. 11 to hear from an Oklahoma-based artist, Leondre Lattimore, a Forbes 30 Under 30 honoree whose work blends history and culture through powerful imagery.

During the Black History Month assembly, Lattimore challenged students to think critically about the stories they see and the ones

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Irish Insights

Irish Baseball begins with young team, new coach

With a couple scrimmages behind them, Irish baseball is gearing up for its season with the addition of new coach Grant Ledbetter.

Having lost 11 players since last season, Ledbetter said there is "really not a lot of game time experience" among the returners.

"We've had three or four that had significant playing time last year, so we're in the middle as far as youth goes," Ledbetter added.

Still, Ledbetter said he believes many on his team are eager to prove themselves after a long pre-season.

"We've tested them physically and we've tested them emotionally," the coach said, "and I know that they are being put through and asked to do a whole lot more than they've been asked at times in the past, and they're not letting it break them."

In particular, he mentioned freshman Gehrig Lair as an underclassman to watch.

"He's already had a couple outings, pitching in some of our scrimmages and done real well and proven that we can trust him with the ball in his hand," Ledbetter said.

Though he is new to the school, Ledbetter said he has already seen resilience in the team.

"I just think that there's been a huge amount of buy-in from guys, and I think we've had three or four scrimmages already, and just the investment that they've, they've made over the offseason in the weight room is really kind of surprising itself," Ledbetter said.

As a new high school coach with "a pretty young roster," Ledbetter hopes to continue building on what the team has created in pre-season preparation.

"I don't know how good we're going to be, I don't know how many wins we're going to have," he said, "but I think the pieces are being put in place, and they're doing a good job of building the culture that can sustain itself."



Bishop McGuinness Catholic High School junior William Shughart slid into second base at a Feb. 16 scrimmage. Photo Molly Taylor.

Juniors prepare with career research

In the weeks leading up to spring break, junior English teacher Genieve Pezalski's classes have been working on career research projects helping students to develop professional skills and begin college research.

After reaching out to different professionals within the community, and researching their career of choice, students give a presentation discussing the job, all while dressed according to their career. Later, they have the opportunity to attend a career workshop with different university and vocational representatives.

Though many attend a university after graduation, Pezalski designed the project to help students prepare for all potential possibilities.

"Even if they don't go to college, everyone's going to have some kind of a job, some kind of a career,

and I want them to start thinking about it and thinking about that process," Pezalski said.

For those who do plan to attend college, the project is meant to help students consider their options.

"I think if you know what career you want, then that should help shape what college you go to, because you need to go to the college that best suits that major, that degree," Pezalski said.

In addition to post-graduation preparation, the project helps students to develop professional skills.

"This might be the first time that they have had a conversation with somebody that they're not directly related to, or that they are maybe not a teacher," Pezalski said.

In facilitating the project, Pezalski said she is grateful for the Irish community's support.

"I love the way that our Catholic community, our Irish community



Katherine Menz

Bishop McGuinness Catholic High School

kind of jumps in and gives of their time and their talents to be able to help our students," Pezalski said.

Swim teams wrap up seasons

Facing more than 20 teams, the Irish girls and boys finished seventh and fourth, respectively, at the state swim meet concluding what coach Mark Veneklasen said was a successful season.

Sophomore Camryn Kanaly won both the 200 individual medley and the 100 backstroke, defending her title in the medley and improving from last year's second place finish in the backstroke. Having been in either the pool or weight room daily, Kanaly said the wins felt "very gratifying."

"It felt really good," she said. "I put a lot of work in. I work out every single day pretty much. I don't really take recovery days."

With two more state wins under her belt, Kanaly reflected on her outlook for next season.

"I think I'll be a lot more positive and confident going into the season with the knowledge that what I've been doing is working, and so I can continue doing what I'm doing," Kanaly said.

For the boys, John Nguyen placed second in the 100 breaststroke.

"It went better than I expected," Nguyen said. "I set a school record in the 100 breaststroke, and I helped set records in two relays."

"I think the team actually did pretty good. We, a lot of us, set new personal records. For example, my little brother, he did really well. He cut five seconds from the beginning of the season. He almost broke the school record."

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they do not. Through vivid visuals and personal reflection, he demonstrated how art can honor the impact of Black African Americans, past and present, while also inspiring future generations.

Students listened intently as he described using creativity not simply for recognition, but for purpose. His message seemed to resonate with a student body preparing to enter professional spaces where identity, voice and integrity matter.

The assembly did more than commemorate history. It encouraged students at Cristo Rey OKC to see themselves as con-

tributors to history.

Holy Hour for Peace, Justice

Following Archbishop Coakley's invitation to pray for peace, the Cristo Rey OKC community gathered in the gym for a Holy Hour for Peace and Justice. In a world often marked by division and unrest, students and staff stepped away from their routines to enter a space of reverence.

Through Eucharistic adoration, worship music, guided prayer and silence, intentions were lifted for reconciliation where there is division, justice where rights are violated, and comfort for those overwhelmed by fear or loss.

Bibles, rosaries, and journals rested in students' hands as the gym, typically filled

with movement and noise, became a place of reflection.

The gathering served as a powerful reminder that faith remains central to the mission of Cristo Rey OKC. Academic excellence and professional preparation stand alongside spiritual formation, shaping graduates who understand that their prayers, actions and choices carry weight.

Together, these moments, whether they were joyful, creative or contemplative, reflected a school community committed to forming leaders of character. For the families and alumni who continue to support Cristo Rey OKC, they offer reassurance that the mission remains alive in the students who walk in their halls each day.

Jobs Box

Coordinator of youth ministry – Edmond

St. John the Baptist Catholic Church is seeking a coordinator of youth ministry to lead young people, grades 6-12, in becoming active and intentional disciples of Jesus Christ. Will work collaboratively and under the direction of the priest and director of mission, in addition to working with parents, Youth Advisory Council, core teams, parish staff and volunteers. Bachelor's degree; degree in theology, religious education or related field preferred. Organizational skills, including ability to communicate well both orally and written; time management, delegation, planning, and budgeting. Successful completion of Safe and Sacred. Proficiency in Microsoft Office. Flexible hours, including evenings, weekends and occasional overnight stays. Contact Amy Dennis at adennis@stjohn-catholic.org.

Cantor/pianist - Prague

The National Shrine of the Infant Jesus of Prague/St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church is seeking a cantor/pianist to play at 5 p.m. Mass on Saturday and 11 a.m. Mass on Sunday. Call (405) 567-3080.

Teachers - Norman

All Saints Catholic School is seeking teachers for third grade, fifth grade, music and junior high social studies. A bachelor's degree is required and teaching experience is preferred. Visit the careers link at allsaintsnorman.org to apply.

Chemistry teacher - OKC

Mount St. Mary Catholic High School is seeking a dedicated, faith-filled and passionate chemistry teacher for the current academic year. The ideal candidate will be committed to academic excellence and the spiritual and moral formation of students in the Catholic tradition. This full-time faculty position includes teaching chemistry and physics courses, possibly at the honors or AP level. A bachelor's degree in chemistry, science education, or related field required (master's preferred) as well as valid teaching certification or eligibility for certification. Send resume to Laura Cain, Ed.D. at lcain@mountstmary.org.

Director of admissions, retention - OKC

Cristo Rey OKC Catholic High School is seeking a director of admissions and retention for recruitment and outreach, admissions and enrolment, retention and student support, marketing and communications and data and analysis. Bachelor's degree required; master's degree preferred. Five-plus years of relevant experience in admissions, recruitment, community outreach, sales or education. Excellent communication and interpersonal skills with fluency in Spanish preferred. Strong project management, organizational, and data analysis skills. Experience working in urban school environments or with first-generation students is highly desirable. Availability to work evenings and weekends

as needed for events and outreach. Apply at cristoreyokc.org.

Development officer - OKC

Cristo Rey OKC Catholic High School is seeking a development officer to support and advance the school's fundraising and stewardship efforts. Bachelor's degree in nonprofit management, business, communications, marketing or related field preferred. Three to five years of experience in fundraising, development operations or nonprofit administration. Proficiency with donor database software (DonorPerfect a plus) and Microsoft Office Suite. Excellent writing and editing skills, Canva experience a plus, strong organizational skills and the ability to manage multiple projects simultaneously. Event planning experience and comfort coordinating logistics. Apply at cristoreyokc.org.

Esports coach - OKC

Cristo Rey OKC Catholic High School is seeking a part-time/seasonal esports coach to be responsible for developing a competitive, disciplined and character-driven team culture. This role requires leadership both on and off the field/court, emphasizing academic achievement, personal growth, and athletic excellence. Previous coaching or playing experience required (head coaching experience preferred); Strong leadership, communication and organizational skills; Ability to build strong relationships with student-athletes and families; Must pass back-

ground checks and complete Safe Environment training. Send cover letter and resume to Don Lewis at donald.lewis@cristoreyokc.org.

Head volleyball coach - OKC

Bishop McGuinness Catholic High School is seeking a part-time head volleyball coach for the 2026 Fall Season. Must have bachelor's or higher college degree in a related field; values in alignment with the school and the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City; five-plus years of experience as a head high school coach; CDL Class B with air brakes or willingness to obtain. Send cover letter and resume to John Hamilton at jhamilton@bmchs.org.

Music teacher - OKC

Christ the King Catholic School is seeking a full-time music teacher for the 2026-2027 school year for grades kindergarten through eighth grade. Responsibilities include general music instruction for kindergarten to sixth grade; elective classes for seventh and eighth grade; lead the school choir; support the musical and theater program; support the mission of the Catholic Church. Requirements: degree in music or education; certification in music education. Send cover letter and resume to Principal Jenny Richard at jrichard@ckschool.com.

To see more job openings, go online to archokc.org/jobs-box. Find Catholic school jobs at archokc.schoolspring.com.

Do you really believe God loves you?

By Sr. Constance Veit, ISP

If you're like me, you were impressed by the athletes of the Milan-Cortina Olympics. In them we witnessed both the rewards of hard work and the traumatizing effects of extreme expectation.

It's hard to believe that most of these athletes were just teens and young adults.

As I watched them, I was brought back to the recent gathering of the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS), SEEK26, in which I participated. During the SEEK conference, I was struck by the pressures and anxieties experienced by young people today, and by the number of times the speakers tried to convince them to believe in God's personal, unconditional love.

I started to wonder why this message was being repeated with such insistence. It seemed a little cheesy. Doesn't God's love go without saying?

Then I read the letter our superior general had just sent to all the Little Sisters around the world, establishing a spiritual orientation for us for 2026. In it, she proposed we spend a year of joyful confidence in God's Providence, and she asked, "Do we truly believe in God's Love for us?"

There was that question again!

Whether a freshman in college or a consecrated person with a life-long commitment to God through religious vows, this question is central to our lives!

So, I asked myself, why is it that so many of us find it so hard to believe in God's love? I decided to do a survey on this question, asking fellow sisters, together with some friends and colleagues – anyone on my phone's contact list

– about why believing in God's love is so difficult.

The responses I received fell broadly into three categories.

Some of those I surveyed suggested that the memory or shame of past sins deters many people from believing in God's love. I'll call these folks the Saint Peters among us, for when Jesus called Saint Peter to follow him, he immediately recoiled, protesting, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man!"

Another group seems to be victims of the prejudices and negative judgments of others, which crush their sense of self-worth. Even if unfounded, these negative messages coming

'The simplest way to overcome our doubts about God's unconditional love is to turn to the Cross.'

from outside ourselves can drown out the truth that God's love is personal and unconditional. Those who suffer from prejudices and negative judgments remind me of the Samaritan woman at the well in Saint John's Gospel. Painfully aware of her inferior social status in the eyes of the Jewish majority, she shies away from Jesus. "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?"

The third set of responses suggested that some people find it difficult to believe simply because they have never seen God or experienced his love firsthand. "How can I believe in someone or something I can't even see?" they ask. These folks are like "doubting" Thomas, who, after the resurrection protested, "Unless

I see the nail marks in his hands and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

The results of my survey – unscientific as it was – gave me much food for thought. There are so many Saint Peters, doubting Thomases and women at the well, including ourselves.

What can we do to convince us that God really loves us, regardless of our sins and faults? I believe that the simplest, most direct way to overcome our doubts about God's personal and unconditional love is to prayerfully turn to the Cross.

The image of Christ on the Cross – whether it be a very large crucifix hanging in a grand cathedral or a simple one at the end of our rosary – speaks volumes about God's love. From the Cross Jesus calls out to all the St. Peters among us, urging them to let go of their sins and accept his forgiveness. Just as he said to the good thief, he says to them, "You will be with me in Paradise."

To those who distance themselves from God because others have convinced them that they are not worthy of love, Jesus stretches out his arms and says, "I love you so much that I would have died for you even if you were the only person on earth."

And to those who say they will not believe without seeing, Jesus holds out his wounded hands and says, "See my hands and my side, these wounds were really for you."

During this Lent, I pray that we will all turn to the Cross and find there the undeniable proof of God's personal, unconditional love. Then, through our kindness and love, may we convince others that they too are worthy of God's love.

Sister Constance Veit is the communications director for the Little Sisters of the Poor in the United States and an occupational therapist.

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Book review: '40 Days, 40 Ways to Pray'

By Br. Benet Exton, O.S.B.
The Sooner Catholic

Jonah Soucy is a graduate with a Master of Arts degree in catechetics and evangelization from Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio. His book, "40 Days, 40 Ways to Pray" is an introduction or summary of various kinds or methods of prayer within the Roman Catholic Church. This includes Eastern Rites, too.

The reader can take 40 days to read this book or read several chapters a day. The book is divided into 12 parts. The first part is an introduction into what prayer is and how it can be expressed. The second part is called "Christian Essentials," which looks at eight important ways of praying, such as the Sign of the Cross, confession, receiving Holy Communion, reading Scripture, prayer in a group and finding God in silence. Soucy reveals how these are forms of prayer.

The third part is called "Sacred and Traditional Methods of Prayer," which are the Liturgy of the Hours (the prayer of the

Church) and Lectio Divina, which is a prayerful slow reading of the Scriptures and other sources. Parts four through eight are about prayer methods or programs attributed to religious orders. Part four is Benedictine, which Soucy said involves Gregorian chant and Ora et Labora. Gregorian chant refers to the Liturgy of the Hours, where monks, nuns and sisters celebrate the Liturgy using Gregorian chant in English or in Latin. The work of the Benedictines can be mixing their work with prayer. Benedictines are also known for Lectio Divina.

Part five is Carmelite, which involves the Little Way of Saint Therese, mysticism and solitude. Part six is Franciscan which Soucy said involves poverty, finding and praising God in nature. Part seven is Jesuit or Ignatian; this involves using the imagination when praying or reading Scripture. Part eight is Dominican, which Soucy suggested their method is academic and reaching out to others to spread the faith. There are other orders which have their own spirituality or prayer method; like the Augustinians which is the order

that Pope Leo XIV belongs. Soucy in part nine brings in two aspects of the Eastern Rite or Eastern Christianity's spirituality: that of the Jesus Prayer and praying with an icon.

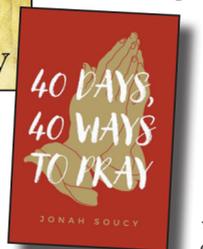
Part 10 is about seven forms of prayer; some of which are pilgrimages, like what was done last year with Holy Year when people went to Rome or to a designated place in one's local archdiocese or diocese. Many people go to Lourdes, Fatima, Guadalupe, Spain or the Holy Land on pilgrimage which involves prayer. Other methods include novenas, litanies, and the Divine Mercy spirituality and prayer. Part 11 is Marian prayer like the Rosary, the Angelus, wearing of a scapular or Miraculous Medal, and Marian consecration. Part 12 is the conclusion.

There are footnotes, bibliographical references and spaces to take notes. There are appendices which include a list of common vocal prayers, examination of

conscience, more bibliographical references, and Saint Ignatius's rules for discernment.

Soucy's book is an interesting introduction

Book Review



to various prayer methods, styles or programs. He covers a lot of territory and tries to inspire the reader to investigate more deeply these prayer forms,

etc. For that reason, the book is recommended to those interested in prayer.

Br. Benet Exton, O.S.B., Saint Gregory's Abbey, Shawnee, is a freelance writer for the Sooner Catholic.

■ 40 Days, 40 Ways to Pray. Soucy, Jonah. Manchester, N.H.: Sophia Institute Press, 2024. ISBN 979-8-88911-254-9. 273 pages.

Lánzate a lo más Profundo
Luke 5:4

Un nuevo despertar de la fe en Pentecostés

Desde mi nombramiento como arzobispo hace 15 años, no he dejado de rezar por un nuevo Pentecostés que conduzca a una nueva evangelización en Oklahoma, una renovación que conmueva los corazones para un encuentro más profundo con el Verbo encarnado y una decisión consciente de seguir a Jesucristo.

Aunque el Señor ciertamente tiene el poder de penetrar miles de corazones en un solo instante, como lo hizo en Jerusalén hace dos mil años en aquel primer domingo de Pentecostés, la mayoría de las veces obra en silencio y con fidelidad, como una semilla que crece bajo la tierra.

El domingo pasado, tuve el gran gozo de ser testigo de esos frutos en el Santuario del Beato Stanley Rother, mientras celebraba el Rito de Elección para los catecúmenos – hombres y mujeres que nunca han sido bautizados y que hoy desean recibir los Sacramentos de Iniciación: Bautismo, Confirmación y Primera Comunión, al igual que otros candidatos que fueron bautizados en otras comunidades Cristianas y que hoy se están preparando para ser recibidos en comunión plena con la Iglesia Católica durante la Pascua.

El año pasado tuvimos la bendición de dar la bienvenida a 635 personas dentro de la Iglesia Católica. ¡Este año ese número será casi de mil personas!

Cada Cuaresma escuchamos las pal-

abras del profeta Isaías: “Así como la lluvia y la nieve descienden del cielo y no vuelven a él sin haber empapado la tierra, sin haberla fecundado y hecho germinar, para que dé la semilla al sembrador y el pan al que come, así sucede con la palabra que sale de mi boca: ella no vuelve a mí estéril, sino que realiza todo lo que yo quiero y cumple la misión que yo le encomendé” (Isaías 55,10-11).

La palabra de Dios lleva consigo el poder de despertar, sanar y transformar. El mensaje de amor, misericordia y esperanza que proclamamos es una invitación para encontrar al Señor vivo. De pie ante cientos de catecúmenos y candidatos, fui testigo de la fecundidad de esa palabra con su valiente “sí” a Cristo, como un signo visible de la gracia en acción.

La conversión no se produce de forma aislada. Cada persona que se presentó ante mí ese día representaba sin duda innumerables oraciones de cónyuges, padres de familia, hermanos, amigos y compañeros de trabajo. No puedo evitar pensar en santa Mónica, cuyas persistentes oraciones dieron fruto en la conversión de su hijo indeciso, san Agustín. De manera muy similar, el Señor ha utilizado las oraciones fieles de muchos en la Arquidiócesis de la Ciudad de Oklahoma para atraer a estos hombres y mujeres hacia Él.

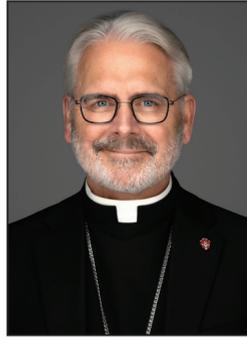
La Cuaresma nos ofrece a cada uno

de nosotros cuarenta días de renovación a través de la oración, el ayuno y la limosna.

Es un tiempo de purificación, pero también de esperanza. A medida que estos catecúmenos —ahora llamados elegidos— y candidatos entran en sus últimas semanas de preparación, se nos invita a acompañarlos espiritualmente. Su recorrido no es diferente al nuestro. Su conversión nos invita a que examinemos nuestros propios corazones. ¿Debemos permitir que la Palabra de Dios cumpla su propósito en nosotros?

Los invito a tenerlos presentes en sus oraciones y a dar gracias a Dios porque han escuchado su voz y han respondido. Pidamos al Señor que los fortalezca y los proteja en su camino hacia las aguas del Bautismo y a la mesa del banquete del Señor. Y sigamos orando por aquellos a quienes el Señor sigue llamando, para que encuentren el valor de responder.

Que estos últimos días de Cuaresma nos lleven a cada uno de nosotros a una dependencia más profunda del amor de Dios y a una mayor confianza en su obra salvadora entre nosotros. Que el Espíritu Santo siga propiciando ese nuevo Pentecostés por el que tanto rezamos.



Arzobispo Pablo S. Coakley

Sacerdote de Pauls Valley reza por el bienestar del pueblo venezolano

Por Bella Gutierrez
The Sooner Catholic

La audaz captura del Presidente Nicolás Maduro resultó en diversas reacciones.

Entre ellas para algunos locales venezolanos: esperanza.

“Los recientes eventos en Venezuela representan una semilla de esperanza para que el país retorne al camino de la democracia y promoción de mejores oportunidades para su pueblo, en general, por el bienestar del pueblo venezolano,” dijo el Padre Nerio Espinoza, nativo de Venezuela y Pastor en la Iglesia Católica Santa Catalina de Siena en Pauls Valley.

Venezuela ha estado bajo un régimen totalitario/socialista desde finales de los años 90, liderado por Hugo Chávez Frías y luego, continuado por Maduro, quien fue tomado en custodia por el gobierno de Estados Unidos el 3 de enero para enfrentar un juicio con cargos de narco-terrorismo, tráfico de cocaína y delito de armas.

El Padre Espinoza recuerda muchas presiones y restricciones de las libertades del pueblo venezolano, incluyendo la libertad de religión y culto.

“Recuerdo que durante mis días como estudiante, artefactos explosivos fueron detonados en la Catedral de Mérida, incidentes que se han repetido con los años en otras iglesias,” dijo el Padre Espinoza.

Algunos sacerdotes han sido amenazados, incluyendo al Cardenal Baltazar Porras Cardozo, quien continúa abogando por prisioneros políticos en las cárceles de Venezuela.

La libertad de expresión es otra de las libertades coartadas por el régimen. Muchos medios de comu-

nicación, incluyendo estaciones de radio religiosas, han sido cerrados.

“La situación es tan tensa que algunos sacerdotes han sido amenazados, y en general, cada uno de ellos debe ser muy cuidadoso con las palabras que usan y con el mensaje que quieren compartir,” dijo el Padre Espinoza.

La compleja situación, debido a la crisis económica y humanitaria, sumado a muchos otros problemas, desencadenó el más grande éxodo migratorio en las recientes décadas, con alrededor de 8 millones de venezolanos dispersos alrededor del mundo.

Porfirio Valera es uno de ellos. Porfirio llegó a Estados Unidos, con su esposa, Violeta, buscando una mejor calidad de vida, encontrando brazos abiertos en Pauls Valley. Familia y amigos le dieron a ellos una calurosa bienvenida, y ahora, como feligreses de Santa Catalina de Siena, el expresó esperanza después de la captura de Maduro.

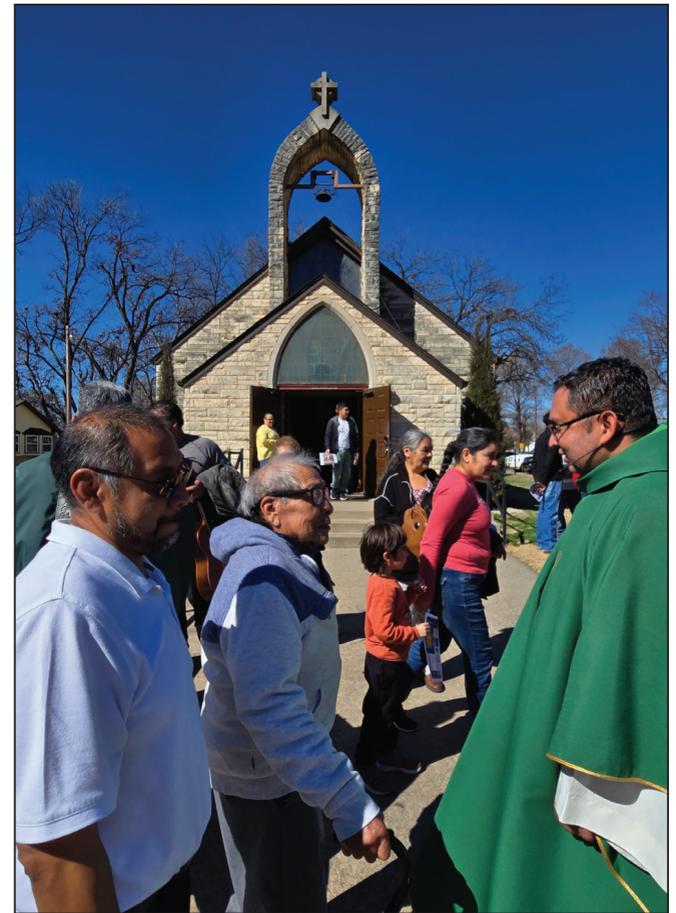
“Necesitamos mantener la fe en Dios de que Venezuela superará todos los obstáculos,” dijo.

El Padre Espinoza enfatizó en la necesidad de mantener la esperanza radical que promete será alcanzada en Jesús.

“No va a ser fácil para el país mejorar, pero hay un proceso de reconexión con los buenos valores y el respeto por la fe y el compromiso con las buenas acciones,” dijo.

El mensaje es “mantener la fe en Dios, con nuestra Señora de Coromoto, patrona de Venezuela, y con San José Gregorio Hernández, para que nuestras oraciones por una mejor Venezuela en paz sean escuchadas.”

El régimen totalitario no acabó con la captura de Maduro. Muchos venezolanos son cautelosos, ya



El padre Nerio Espinoza saludó recientemente a los feligreses después de la misa. Fotos proporcionada.

que levantamientos populares podrían desencadenar en un escenario mucho más peligroso.

“Nuestras oraciones están con los líderes del mundo a que tomen decisiones que apoyen la paz, la justicia y el fortalecimiento de las instituciones y la democracia,” dijo el Padre Espinoza.

“El mensaje del Papa Leo XIV resuena, ‘el bien del amado pueblo venezolano debe prevalecer sobre cualquier otra consideración.’”

El Padre Espinoza no es el único sacerdote extranjero en ser Pastor de la Iglesia Católica de Santa Catalina de Siena. El Padre Joseph Duffy, de Salford, Inglaterra, llegó a Oklahoma por invitación del Obispo McGuinness en 1949.

El Padre Espinoza, nació en Trujillo, Venezuela. Tiene un título en ciencias religiosas de la Universidad Javeriana en Colombia, y una licenciatura y doctorado en filosofía de la Pontificia Universidad Gregoriana en Roma, Italia.

Sirviendo a la comunidad de Santa Catalina por nueve años, el Padre Espinoza también ha ministrado a muchas familias hispanas.

“Mi mensaje a la comunidad Hispana, a menudo víctimas de

rechazo social, racismo y discriminación, es de seguir adelante, superar el miedo, y buscar la paz de Dios que les dará fortaleza,” dijo el Padre.

“Esta comunidad ha estado y continuará estando llena de valores, jugando importante roles y misiones en la fe católica.”

En este país, también construido por inmigrantes, el Padre Espinoza dijo, “es esencial no tener miedo, porque en los ojos de Dios, ‘Soy como tu delante de Dios’” (Job 33:6).

Aunque nuestros acentos sean diferentes y puedan delatarnos, somos personas de buena voluntad, el agregó, refiriéndose al reconocimiento de Pedro como Galileo después de negar a Jesús (Matthew 26:73).

“La diversidad es hmosa y poderosa. Nosotros tenemos diferentes acentos, maneras de hablar, y un rico vocabulario que debería llenarnos de confianza. No te avergüences de tu lenguaje o tu acento, todos somos hijos de Dios.”

Bella Gutiérrez es escritora independiente para el Sooner Catholic.



PESCADO FRITO de Cuaresma

El Consejo 16214 de los Caballeros de Colón de la Iglesia Católica San Pablo Apóstol organizará un pescado frito de Cuaresma de 5 a 6:30 p. m. los días 20 y 27 de febrero, y 6, 13, 20 y 27 de marzo en 3901 S. Sunnlyane Rd. en Del City. La donación sugerida es de 12 dólares por plato. Se puede comer allí o pedir comida para llevar.

PESCADO FRITO DE CUARESMA

✓ 5-6:30 p.m.

✓ Marzo 6, 13, 20 y 27

COMER ALLÍ O PEDIR COMIDA PARA LLEVAR

St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church
3901 S. Sunnlyane Rd., Del City



VÍA CRUCIS

EN EL SANTUARIO DEL BEATO STANLEY ROTHER
LIVING STATIONS AT THE BLESSED STANLEY ROTHER SHRINE

Viernes Santo
11 a.m.
En Español

Good Friday
11 a.m.
In Spanish



El padre Nerio Espinoza visitó a Porfirio Valera y a su esposa, Violeta.

Rite of Election

Archbishop Coakley celebrated the Rite of Election on Feb. 22 at the Bl. Stanley Rother Shrine in Oklahoma City. This year there were 515 catechumens-turned-elect and 497 candidates.
Photos Chris Porter/Sooner Catholic.

