



Bishop Duca issues guidance to faithful on coronavirus vaccines



From the Bishop
Bishop Michael G. Duca

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to ravage populations around the globe. Worldwide over 2.5 million have died. In the United States the death toll is over half a million, with Louisiana's approaching 10,000. Thankfully, vaccines have been developed to reduce the spread and effects of this virulent killer.

In a letter read in all parishes several weeks ago, I explained,

"Vaccines are now being made available to various groups throughout the United States. I have reviewed these remedies along with the Bishops of the United States and we have determined, reinforced by the Holy Father Pope Francis, that receiving the new Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are justifiable and morally acceptable ways to help end this pandemic. Being vaccinated should be considered as an act of charity toward others in our

communities. I encourage all of the faithful of the Diocese of Baton Rouge to take this moral evaluation to heart as you make your decision to receive the coronavirus vaccinations as they become available."

I continue to encourage everyone to receive a vaccination, but the new vaccine from Johnson & Johnson has some moral concerns we must acknowledge. Unlike the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines, Johnson & Johnson uses a line

of stem cells procured from abortions performed over 30 years ago in the production of its vaccine. To the question of whether a person should receive this vaccine in good conscience the Congregation of Doctrine has stated,

"As for the moral responsibility of those who are merely the recipients of the vaccines, the Congregation affirms that a serious health danger could justify use of a vaccine which

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Saturday evening weddings to be allowed

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Weddings will now be allowed to be celebrated on Saturday evenings in the Diocese of Baton Rouge, effective upon the decree's publication in The Catholic Commentator.

Bishop Michael G. Duca issued the decree Feb. 23, stating "pastors are now given the discretion in the Diocese of Baton Rouge to schedule weddings and convalidations on Saturday evenings, Sundays or even on holy days of obligation, if necessary. Proper liturgical laws should be observed for any of these ritual celebrations."

Bishop Duca noted in the decree that "previous legislation" in the diocese prohibited weddings and convalidations on certain days and times. He abrogated the diocesan law as found in the Pagella and Policies of the diocese that stated "weddings and convalidations are not permitted on Sundays or holy days of obligation ..."

The diocese also issued a Liturgical guide for pastors regarding the new policy. While this change gives the pastor the option to schedule wedding on Saturday evenings, the present scheduling of parish events/Mass may still make this difficult in some parishes.

Darryl Ducote, director of the Office of Marriage and Family Life for



Saturday evening weddings, previously not allowed in the Diocese of Baton Rouge, will now be able to be celebrated. Bishop Michael G. Duca issued a decree Dec. 23 allowing for weddings and convalidations to be celebrated on "Saturday evenings, Sundays or even holy days of obligation, if necessary." Catholic Commentator file photo

the diocese, said he was "very pleased" with the decree. He noted how he has frequently received calls from upset couples who wanted confirmation that the diocese would not allow Saturday

evening or Sunday weddings.

He said the biggest complaint seemed to revolve around the fact that many couples hoped for an evening wedding and having Friday evening as

the only option often created a hardship for guests coming from out of town.

He noted that as a result many couples chose to move their wedding celebrations in the Archdiocese of New Orleans, which does allow for Saturday evening celebrations.

"However, this decision had its own set of pitfalls since it removed the ceremony from the couple's local parish and meant that the priests of the local parish, who had prepared the couple for marriage, would also have to travel to New Orleans if they wanted to officiate at the wedding of their own parishioners," Ducote said. "At the same time, some priests are understandably reluctant to embrace this new policy since it interrupts the focus on the celebrations of the liturgical year and adds to the overall demands on the priest for the weekend. To respect these concerns, the bishop has wisely allowed pastors the discretion to decide if this policy is appropriate for their individual parish."

"Pastorally speaking, these objections may be offset by the fact that these accommodations for expanded times for weddings could also have a positive effect on the life of the church in our diocese," he added. "Giving couples more options for marriage in church provides parishes with more opportunities to renew or deepen the faith of these young

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DID YOU KNOW

St. Joseph's silence

Considered the “strong, silent, type,” much press is given to the fact that we never hear a word from St. Joseph, spouse of the Virgin Mary and foster father of Jesus, in the Bible. But as we approach the principle day of the Year of St. Joseph, the feast day of St. Joseph on March 19, there are many high ranking, saintly friends who have lots to say about how he inspired them.

St. Francis de Sales, a doctor of the church and founder of the Order of Visitation of Holy Mary, was a faithful devotee of St.

Joseph. St. Francis named at least one parish in St. Joseph's honor and called him a model for the interior life and contemplative prayers.

Carmelite mystic and reformer St. Teresa of Avila sang the praises of St. Joseph in her autobiography:

“I took for my patron and Lord the glorious St. Joseph and recommended myself earnestly to him. I saw clearly that both out of this my present trouble, and out of others of greater importance, relating to my honor and the loss of my soul, this my father and Lord delivered me and rendered me greater services than I knew how to ask for.

“I cannot call to mind that I have ever asked him at any time for anything which he has not granted; and I am filled with amazement when I consider the great favors which God hath given me through this blessed saint; the dangers from which he hath delivered me, both of body and of soul.”

Venerable Margaret of the Most Holy Sacrament loved to contemplate on the Holy Family. She encouraged people to venerate St. Joseph as the worthy spouse of the mother of God and the guardian of the “Immaculate Word.” She wrote to a fellow woman religious:

“I am delighted to find you installed in your present post. I conjure you to unite yourself to our dear and amiable child Jesus, who, in St.

Joseph's workshop, did not consider himself the master but merely as an assistant. Unite your labors to those of that blessed child: accustom yourself to look upon the sister whom you have been appointed to assist, in the same light as that in which he considered St. Joseph. I am also an assistant to one of our sisters, and I will endeavor to be faithful to the practices

which I now recommend to you.”

St. Faustina Kowalska wrote in her diary that St. Joseph appeared to her and urged her to have a special devotion and pray three prayers to him every day (Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be) as well as the Memorare. The Memorare she had the sisters of her congregation pray each day was:

“Remember, O most pure spouse of Mary, and my dearly beloved guardian, St. Joseph, that never was it known that anyone who invoked your care and requested your help was left without consolation. Inspired with this confidence, I come to you and with all the ardor of my spirit I commend myself to you. Do not reject my prayer, O Foster Father of the Savior, but graciously receive and answer it. Amen.”

If you thought St. Joseph probably has “nothing to say” regarding an important situation or decision you have to make in your life, pray to him and seek his advice. According to some of his friends in high places, and as shown by his obedience when God spoke to him through dreams, he's a good listener and will likely have the “right words” for you.



For God so loved the world

By Dina Dow

The final weeks of Lent are upon us. As we approach Holy Week we see many opportunities to realize the riches of God's kindness and mercy. Hopefully by now you have received or made plans to receive the sacrament of reconciliation, where the grace of God flows as our tears fall in what St. Ambrose describes as “a conversion of repentance” (Catechism of The Catholic Church 1429).

The 4th and 5th Sundays of Lent Mass readings invigorate our call to be rid of sin and receive God's greatest promise of salvation: a promise of love for the entire world. This love is not an emotion. God's love for his creation is made known through a person, the person of Jesus Christ who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, opens the gates to eternal life with mercy and love.

A chance to come home (2 Chr 36:14-23)

We read in the Second Book of Chronicles of the invitation to the exiled nation of Israel to come home. Before their expulsion, the Israelites ignored the call of the prophets to turn away from wickedness and return to God. Their offenses were so great that God allowed external nations to conquer his people and send them away from their home, their temple, their community, their way of life. Yet, God never abandoned his people, for during the time of exile prophets arose with messages of hope, renewal, conversion and restoration. This time the people listened.

The prophet Jeremiah foretold of a New Covenant between God and the chosen people. The restoration would be centered on the human heart, that place of restlessness and peace, of joy and suffering, of fullness and loss. Yes, God's law is placed in the human heart whereby they shall know God, and they will be his forever, even to the point where they will not have to teach it for all will know it by their life. Hence the psalmist writes, “Create a clean heart in me, O God” (Ps 57).

Restoration also came through the decree of the Persian king, Cyrus, who conquered the land, reinstated religious freedom and gave the exiled a chance to come home. Those once suffering can now renew. They can re-

build and rededicate themselves as a community to God, remnants of their ancestors, yet grateful to God's abundant kindness and mercy. From suffering came new hope, new awareness, new life.

Mercy for all (Eph 2:4-10)

The fulfillment of the New Covenant once promised is Jesus Christ. In him, St. Paul writes, God's great love and mercy brings us new life.

Jesus calls us away from our transgressions and raises us to new ways, new hope, new demands, new love, new life. Our ways are Jesus' ways. Our hope is received in the graces that pour forth from the cross, as his blood and water wash away the sins of the world and not only restore our mortal bodies but also our souls. This is the heart of our faith. This is a gift from God.

A gift from God (Jn 3:14-21)

St. John eloquently writes of the profound love of God for the world, so much so that in order for us to be free from the bondages of sin, he sent his son, Jesus, to not only show us the way but to be the way of salvation, so that we may not die but rather have eternal life. He came not to condemn but to save us from ourselves, from death, from darkness, from evil. We, on our part, are called to believe in the hope that Jesus gives us so that, like the Israelites, we can repent, ask for mercy and return to the Lord with clean hearts. As sin wraps us in a mantle of darkness, the love of God poured out from Jesus Christ wraps us in a mantle of light, a light so bright that we are transformed to radiate the same light to others. “But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God” (Jn 3:21).

Most importantly we are to remember, GOD LOVES US FIRST. We read in St. John's First Letter, “In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his son as expiation for our sins” (1 Jn 9-10).

So great a love

In his book “The Life of Christ” Archbishop Fulton Sheen writes, “History shows a number of people who claim to be from

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CORRECTIONS

The 19th Annotation is typically an eight-10-month exercise.

Vaccines present moral struggle for some

By Richard Meek

The Catholic Commentator

Vaccines intended to stem the global coronavirus pandemic have created a moral conundrum among some Catholics, especially the use of the recently approved Johnson & Johnson vaccine. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, along with the Holy See, agree on the moral difficulties presented by the J&J vaccine but note that it can be taken when no other options are available.

Fueling the controversy is the question of fetal line cells.

“The moral question arises given that (all three) vaccines have some kind of very remote, historical connection via cell lines to abortion. What are those who are opposed to abortion to do?” said Dr. John Meinert, associate professor of theology at Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University. “Can we do this in good conscience? Is it somehow scandalous?”

Meinert explained the cells were originally taken from the kidney and lungs of aborted babies in the early 1960s, 1966 and 1973.

The cells are kept in labs and can be split and duplicated, he said. Cells taken from a cell line can also be sent to other labs where they are kept and used for many other types of testing.

“The cells are cultivated so it becomes an independent cell line and is widely used in medical research and vaccine development,” Meinert said. “For example, Tylenol is tested on a fetal cell line. It is used for testing or development in some cancer treatments and other areas because we need some scientific way of finding out how certain medications interact with human cells.”

He said the use of fetal cell lines is not limited to COVID-19 vaccines, but they have also been used in other vaccines, including the MMR vaccine administered to young children.

Meinert is uncertain as to what has caused the recent uproar given that Catholics have a consistent and magisterially taught position on the use of the cell lines.

Meinert said the caveat separating Johnson & Johnson is the company uses the cells in vaccine development and production while Pfizer and Moderna limit the use of the cells for testing only, a critical distinction for some.

“If for any reasonable circumstance you are only able to receive the vaccine from Johnson & Johnson, you should feel free to do so for your safety and for the common good,” Bishop Michael G. Duca said.

“Part of the difficulty with this is that all of the considerations for using the vaccines or not are circumstantial: it could appear to be scandalous, leading people to believe that abortion is not a big deal, consent for medical research is not im-



The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, along with the Holy See, agree on the moral difficulties presented by the J&J vaccine but note that it can be taken when no other options are available. Photo provided by Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center

portant, the fetus is not a person, or (as Catholics) we will be less likely to work against abortion,” Meinert said. “I agree with Bishop Duca. I don’t think that the chance of these is high because the connection between using the cell line and ongoing abortion is very tenuous, at best. And I don’t think that anyone really is going to believe the church doesn’t think abortion is a big deal.”

In statement released March 1 Bishop Duca acknowledged COVID-19 continues to ravage populations, claiming more than 2.5 million lives worldwide and a death total nearing 10,000 in Louisiana.

“Thankfully, vaccines have been developed to reduce the spread and effects of this virulent killer,” the bishop said.

He noted that he had previously determined the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines to be “justifiable and morally acceptable ways to help end this pandemic.”

He acknowledged the moral concerns Johnson & Johnson presents but the bishop quoted from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which affirms that a “serious health danger could justify use of ‘a vaccine which was developed using cell lines of illicit origin, while keeping in mind that everyone has the duty to make known their disagreement and to ask that their healthcare system make other types of vaccines available.’”

Bishop Duca said that given the current circumstances and to protect ourselves and one another, his guidance to the faithful is to accept as their first choices the vaccines created by Pfizer and Moderna.

“But if for any reasonable circumstance you are only able to receive the

vaccine from Johnson & Johnson, you should feel free to do so for your safety and for the common good,” the bishop said. “In addition, I have consulted with Catholic health care representatives, and I understand and appreciate their serious challenges as to the acquisition and equitable distribution of all three vaccines. I therefore support their policy of administering any of the vaccines as circumstances require.”

Our Lady of the Lake Medical Center in Baton Rouge, in a response to a ques-

tion from The Catholic Commentator, welcomed Bishop Duca’s prayerful guidance and leadership regarding COVID-19 vaccines as justifiable and morally acceptable ways to end the pandemic.

“Because of the common good associated with vaccine use and the serious health danger of COVID-19, the Catholic Church has permitted the use of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine while advocating for an end to this method of vaccine development and manufacturing,” the statement said. “(Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Health System) is currently using the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines as they are available and in addition will receive the J&J vaccine as part of our equitable and comprehensive response to the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Louisiana Right to Life Executive Director Benjamin Clapper urged Catholics to help seek a solution to this dilemma by calling for the development of better cell lines.

“Moving forward, on behalf of concerned citizens in Louisiana, we implore leaders in government and science to pursue 100% ethical vaccines that do not use these abortion-derived cell lines either in the development or production of vaccines,” Clapper said in a statement March 2.

Meinert said he believes most people likely will not have a choice as to what vaccine they will be administered.

Bishop Duca encouraged the faithful of Baton Rouge “to take this moral evaluation to heart as you make your decision to receive the coronavirus vaccinations as they become available. Being vaccinated should be considered as an act of charity toward others in our communities.”



SACRED HEART STUDENT HONORED – Sacred Heart of Jesus School in Baton Rouge eighth-grader Alex Stewart has been selected as a winner of the St. Joseph’s Academy 1868 Award. She is one of 10 students selected for the award. The SJA 1869 Award provides \$1,868 toward tuition in the student’s freshman year at SJA. Selections are based on a 250-word essay about a specific gift the student has a passion for and a recommendation letter submitted on her behalf. The award celebrates the achievements of young women in an area or activity of particular interest to them. Photo provided by Wendy Milam | Sacred Heart of Jesus School

Pro-life advocate recalls anguish of abortion

By Richard Meek

The Catholic Commentator

A dark, dreary sky greeted Jeanie Holmes in the early morning hours of Jan. 27, 1991.

Little did Holmes realize that those clouds of darkness would forever remain a part of her own personal horizon.

It was on that cold morning when Holmes was accompanied by two friends from Hammond to the Delta Women's Clinic in Baton Rouge. Hours later she would emerge from the clinic after having an abortion, the remains of her child stowed away in a medical container as part of the day's trash.

Thirty years later, to the day, Holmes sat in the popular Hammond restaurant she owns showered with peace, but acknowledging those dark clouds are never far away.

"The evil lie of abortion is that it's just like that, it's over and you move on, that it is a clump of cells," said Holmes. "That is a lie because you can't live with it in yourself, it is going to come out, you are going to hurt like hell. One day somewhere,

somehow, some way you are going to have to face it."

Holmes, a native of Hammond who attended Holy Ghost School and Holy Ghost Church, recalled at how at the age of 19 she became pregnant while a freshman at Southeastern Louisiana University. Distraught after having learned of her pregnancy, she confided to her close friend, who told her, "Don't worry, you can have an abortion. I had one and it's no big deal."

Holmes contacted the child's biological father who showed no emotion and told her "to take care of it. That was further humiliating."

Although raised in a close-knit Cath-



Jeanie Holmes addresses a crowd gathered for a pro-life rally on Jan. 23 at Mater Dolorosa Church in Independence. Holmes has become a visible presence in the pro-life movement, even speaking on the steps of the United States Supreme Court in 2020. Photo by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator

olic family, Holmes admitted the "worst thing would have had to tell my parents about it."

"(Satan) really helped facilitate the idea in my mind that it would have made more sense to go have an abortion than sit down and talk to my loving, amazing, supportive parents."

So on that foggy morning she walked into the abortion clinic, head down, taking what she says "were the heaviest, hardest steps I ever

took. Just the fact that I went that way to this day just staggers me. I was desperate."

She was eventually ushered into a room with five or six other young women, Holmes said the doctor went down the line, one by one, squashing life as if on a production line.

During the procedure, Holmes recalls saying over and over, "Jesus Christ is my Lord and savior. I was so afraid I was going to die there and go straight to hell."

"It angered the paid executioner (doctor), and he told the nurse to 'shut her up.'"

Less than 10 minutes later, the procedure was over, although the mental anguish was just beginning. Her behavior pattern dramatically changed, to the point nearly a year later she was confronted by her mother, who asked what was wrong.

"I just burst it out that I had an abortion," Holmes recalled. "My mom's face, it was like sticking a knife in her heart. That is a pain no parent deserves."

Her parents sought counseling for her with Father Jeff Bayhi, who was assigned to St. Jules Parish in Belle Rose at the time. Holmes recalls with great affection how Father Bahyi absolved her and told her that she needed to get on with life, saying that is "what Jesus wanted me to do."

Two years later, she gave birth to the first of her three children, a son Brennan who is now 28 and a staunch pro-life advocate. Brennan was born Jan 28, two years and one day after his older sibling was aborted.

But more sorrow was to come, and Holmes would once again become pregnant, and have a second abortion.

"One of the things I've learned is if you have an abortion once there is a high chance you will abort twice," Holmes said. "If you abort twice you will abort three times. I thank God I was finally able

to get out of that cycle."

As the years passed, she would settle down, get married and welcome two more children into the world. But a simple question to Brennan ten years ago would trigger a turning point in her life, one that would eventually take her to the steps of the Supreme Court.

When Brennan returned from the annual March for Life rally in Washington D.C., Holmes asked him what made the biggest impact on him.

Holmes said seeing the ladies stand on the Supreme Court steps with a red rose and a sign that says, "I Regret My Abortion."

It was then, 11 years into her marriage, that she felt called to take her story public. She immediately sent her story to Silent No More, an awareness campaign that encourages those hurt by abortion to reach out, educate and share their personal testimonies to help others avoid similar pain. Since that time, she has told her story countless times, including on the steps of the Supreme Court in January 2021.

"There is anxiety and apprehension leading up to telling the story but I knew I had to tell all or I could never be free," she said. "As hard as it is, it would be harder to keep it a lie."

Holmes said the Lord has used her in a number of ways during the past decade, including sidewalk counseling that has led to success stories. She always wears her "I Regret My Abortion" T-shirt and puts herself in a position where she is visible.

Her voice dripping with emotion, she recalled one success story where a young girl originally planning to have an abortion changed her mind and chose life. Ultimately, the baby was named after Brennan.





"I got to hold that baby boy," she said. "That was a highlight of my life."

Holmes admitted that she is "incredibly concerned" about the Biden administration reversing the progress that has been made in recent years toward the potential elimination of Roe vs. Wade. She wonders why Democrats who are pro-life would "continue to align yourself with the party of death." She has even confronted Gov. John Bel Edwards and other local politicians regarding their own beliefs.

"It is a very slippery slope and we are on it," Holmes said. "You decide who lives and who dies and apparently any reason is good enough."

But 30 years after the most regretful decision of her life, Holmes remains committed to doing everything she can to save the lives of the unborn, advocating for life where there is death.

"Abortion is a money making industry and it is blood money," she said. "I will never shut up, I will stay in prayer and ask the Lord to direct me."


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Bishop Duca releases statement regarding Phase 3

Bishop Michael D. Duca released the following statement March 4 regarding the state's transition to Phase 3 in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

To the Clergy and Faithful of the Diocese of Baton Rouge:

"Given Governor (John Bel) Edwards' recent announcement and changes to COVID-19 guidelines in the state of Louisiana, a variety of questions have arisen because he has lifted the capacity limits for houses of worship (even though he has done so with the understanding that physical distancing and the wearing of masks will continue). Despite these new recommendations from Governor Edwards, it is my desire that our current protocols regarding pastoral life and worship remain the same. These include continued adherence to mask wearing, practicing physical distancing (accomplished by using every other pew) and retaining current protocols for hand and building sanitization as has been done over the course of this past year.

"These measures that have been in place in different aspects of parish life since March 2020 have been instrumental in providing safe places for worship and parish community life within our diocese. It is my hope that with a declining spread of the virus and the growing number of parishioners receiving a vaccination, we will continue to lessen our restrictions for all church gatherings so that these protocols will no longer be needed.

"This time of transition that we are beginning will be a bit complex since it will probably not have a defined moment of ending and beginning. I have chosen a more conservative path for the diocese and its institutions at the beginning of this new phase, aware that some parishes and parishioners are struggling with the requirements of wearing masks and physical distancing. I also know that many ARE coming back to church because of these practices. We need to move forward together. I encourage our clergy to continue with our present protocols for a few weeks to determine if changes are needed or warranted.

"I thank our priests and deacons for their hard work and diligence in this difficult time; I thank the faithful of Baton Rouge diocese for their continued fidelity to our church and their cooperation in this ever-changing climate with news protocols. Let us work together for the health and safety of us all!

"Hope in the Lord!"

LOL President, Scott Wester receives national award

Special to The Catholic Commentator

Our Lady of the Lake President Scott Wester received the American College of Healthcare Executives Senior-Level Healthcare Executive Regent's Award.

The award was bestowed on Wester by Diane Yeates, FACHE, ACHE's Regent for Louisiana and Chief Operating Officer at Terrebonne Medical Center in Houma. The Senior-Level Healthcare Executive Regent's Award recognizes ACHE members who are experienced in the field and have made significant contributions to the advancement of healthcare management excellence and the achievement of ACHE's goals.

Members are evaluated on leadership ability; innovative and creative management; executive capability in developing their own organization and promoting its growth and stature in the community; contributions to the development of others in the healthcare profession; leadership in local, state or provincial hospital and health association activities; participation in civic/community activities and projects; participation in ACHE activities; and interest in assisting ACHE in achieving its objectives.

Wester has served as president and CEO of Our Lady of the Lake since 2008. Prior to this role, he served as president and CEO of St. Francis Medical Center in Monroe. He has been part of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Health System since 1993 when he began his healthcare career as an administrative fellow.

Wester, a native of Cincinnati, Ohio, holds a Masters of Hospital and Health Administration from Xavier University in Cincinnati. He also holds a bachelor of science degree in chemistry and a bachelor of arts degree in classical humanities, graduating magna cum laude from St. Louis University.



Scott Wester

He is a member of the

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No alleluia/Leaving early

Recently our pastor mentioned that during Lent we bury the “A” word. What does that mean?

Burying the “A” word means that during Lent, we fast from saying or singing “Alleluia.” It disappears completely from the Mass and our liturgy.

“Alleluia” is a Hebrew word meaning “praise the Lord.” It is a joyous word where we praise God for establishing the kingdom of heaven for us. Lent is a time for repentance and looking forward to Christ rising from the dead and opening up the gates of the kingdom of heaven for us, a kingdom that is to come, not one that has already come. So, we bury “alleluia” until it rises again on the night of the Easter Vigil.

During Lent, the Gospel acclamation of “alleluia” is replaced. At Immaculate Conception, we sing “Praise to You, Lord

Jesus Christ, King of Endless Glory” to introduce the Gospel during the Lenten days leading up to Easter.

Fasting from “alleluia” creates an anticipation for us, an anticipation for the coming of Christ at Easter, similar to the verse in the song “How Can I Keep From Singing:”

“Through all the tumult and the strife, I hear that music ringing
It finds an echo in my soul
How can I keep from singing?”

In some places, the word “alleluia” is actually buried in the ground

honoring a centuries’ old tradition. In 15th century France, a board or banner with the word “alleluia” beautifully written on it was actually buried in a coffin only to be resurrected at Easter.

Here is the procedure found in a book from Toul, France during that time period: “On Saturday before Sep-

tuagesima Sunday (the ninth Sunday before Easter) all choir boys gather in the sacristy during the prayer of the None, to prepare for the burial of the alleluia. After the last Benedicamus Domino (i.e., at the end of the vespers service) they march in procession, with crosses, tapers, holy water and censers; and they carry a coffin, as in a funeral. Thus they proceed through the aisle, moaning and mourning, until they reach the cloister. There they bury the coffin; they sprinkle it with holy water and incense it; whereupon they return to the sacristy by the same way.”

“Alleluia”... we will see you again at Easter.

Why should I stay to the end of Mass?

There are many reasons to stay to the end of Mass and the final dismissal. Here are a few:

- Do you really want to join in the Judas shuffle? At that first Mass on that first Holy Thursday night, Judas was the first to leave before it was over, and we know what

happened to him. Be like the other apostles – stay to the end. They are all saints.

- Mass is not an event that you attend just to check off something on your to-do list. You should come to Mass to strengthen your relationship with Jesus. He gave everything for us; just look at the crucifix. Give those last few minutes back to him.
- Leaving Mass early can be distracting to those who are praying after receiving Communion. You should be considerate to them.
- Before the final blessing and dismissal, the priest may have some final words. Don’t miss them.
- Take advantage of that final blessing by the priest. I don’t know about you, but I need all of the blessings that I can get.

Keep this in mind. Don’t judge those who leave Mass early. They may have a good, valid reason.

DEACON HOOPER is a deacon assistant at Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs. He can be reached at ghooper@diobr.org.



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Deacon George Hooper

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Calandro's
Carpenter House
Catholic Art and Gifts
Central Plumbing
Charlie T's (barber)
Circle K
Cracker Barrel
CVS
Delmont Garden's Library

Dixie Maid Drive In
Express Mart
Family Dollar
Fresh Pickins
Goodwood Hardware
Hi Nabor Supermarket
Jefferson Manor
Lake Sherwood Village
Mail Bag
Matherne's
Mercedarian Sisters (Sr. Dulce)
Municipal Building
Old Jefferson Comm Care
Ollie Steele Manor
OLOL College
OLOL Medical Center
OLOL Physicians Group
Red River Bank
Reeves
Rite Aid
Rouse's Market
St. Clair Manor
St. Mary's Bookstore
St. Vincent DePaul Stores
St. Vincent DePaul Dining Room
Shell Station
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Rouse's

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HAMMOND

Rouse's
St. Vincent DePaul Store

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Zachary Manor

Family brings special meaning to Lent

By Debbie Shelley

The Catholic Commentator

The children of John and Brittany Mahoney of Denham Springs go to the whiteboard in their family's dining room and proudly dab a rubber stamp engraved with a flower design in ink and press it to a drawing of a crown of thorns, consoling the heart of Jesus.

Far from expecting an additional reward for their self-denial, at the dinner table they are the ones who are likely to remind their parents about the sacrifices they decided to make as a family during Lent. This is one of many signs of a family which embraces Lent as a special time and who flows along with the rhythm of the liturgical seasons of the church.

"That's our team," announced Brittany about her children, twins Michael and Agnes, 7; Isaac, 5; Dominic, 4; Louisa, 2;

and Vincent, five months. Far from being somber, shy or reserved, they were joyful and playful. Vincent had sparkling eyes and bounced with infant gleefulness.

The Lenten pillars of prayer, sacrifice and almsgiving are spread throughout the day. Instead of reading traditional story books at breakfast, Brittany will read spiritual-based books such as "My Path to Heaven" by Father Geoffery Bliss SJ. The book is based on a St. Ignatius retreat and covers such essentials of the faith as God's will, angels, heaven and hell, the fall of man, the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation, the Nativity, the passion, salvation, the sacraments, faith, hope, love and contrition and of these truths in their lives and in the decisions they make. Brittany noted that the book is interesting for children while challenging to adults.

"Their attention is good, they

ask good questions," said Brittany.

For almsgiving the family collects canned goods and cleans out their closets to help a family in need they know.

At bath time or when they brush their teeth, instead of listening to their traditional song list, the children listen to spiritual songs such as "Do Not Fear" and "Wood and Nails."

Fish sticks are staples in the Mahoney's freezer, because the family abstains from meat every Friday throughout the year. On Friday nights during Lent it's time to pile up in the family car, sing the Divine Praises and "go see Jesus" at the outdoor Stations of the Cross at Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs.

"We know Jesus is waiting to see us," said Brittany.

They also take time to visit Jesus during eucharistic adoration in the church.

And when St. Agnes Church in Baton Rouge had a Lenten evening of reflection with Msgr. Robert Berggreen, the Mahoneys were there.

A daily examination of consciousness is also another way in which the family "checks in" to see what they did well, where they did not do well and how they can do better.

According to Brittany, the best way to "keep Lent" is to keep it simple, family-oriented and centered on Jesus.

"It flows together and it feels all natural. This makes it a family event," she said.

Both John's and Brittany's



Michael Mahoney, 7, left, helps his brother Dominic, 4, stamp a flower on a drawing of a crown of thorns. Photos by Debbie Shelley | The Catholic Commentator



Agnes Mahoney colors from a liturgical coloring book.

GOSPEL ▼

From page 2

God. There is uniqueness which sets Christ apart from all others."

Archbishop Sheen goes on to describe one of the several distinctions being, "... every other person whoever came into this world came to live. Jesus came into it to die." Further, he writes, "In the person of Christ, it was his death that was first and his life that was last."

Life being the resurrection.

Death entered the world through sin. We experience death when we sin, as our relationship with God and others

is broken. Yet, Jesus knew his purpose was to destroy death and restore our life. Since only God can destroy sin, he sent his son, Jesus, whom we know as Emmanuel, the word made flesh, the second person of the Trinity, the Lamb of God, a man like us in all ways except sin, to accomplish such an act of great love. The one without sin, one who offered himself as a sacrifice for our sins, died to self for us whom he loved FIRST so that we would have new and everlasting life.

As St. Paul writes, "God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with

Christ – by grace you have been saved – raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:4-7).

The Year of St. Joseph

We ask for the intercession of St. Joseph, whom God entrusted his son, Jesus Christ, under his care and protection, to protect us from all evil and strengthen our path towards holiness. Amen.

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

families grew up making sacrifices. John attended the Latin Mass at St. Agnes, so it's natural to raise the children attending the same liturgy.

This special preparation helps boosts the children's excitement about the upcoming Easter celebration. They normally attend the Easter Vigil, except last year because of

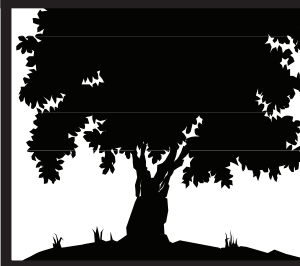
COVID-19.

"We made a bonfire outside and read pieces of the liturgy," said Brittany.

This year's celebration will be even more joyous, because in May, Michael and Agnes will receive their first Communion at St. Agnes.

"I can't wait," said Agnes with a gleam in her eye.

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Rice Bowl helps feed impoverished families worldwide

By Richard Meek

The Catholic Commentator

A popular Lenten program that has been providing relief to the needy worldwide for more than four decades is now in full swing.

CRS Rice Bowl launched at the beginning of Lent and will conclude Easter Sunday, said Catherine Weidert, communications coordinator for Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, which facilitates the local Rice Bowl drive.

"If you put a dollar a day (into the Rice Bowl box) for the 40 days of Lent you can provide one month of food for a family or two years of seed for a farmer," Weidert said.

She noted that 75 percent of the money collected goes to Catholic Relief Services but emphasized that 25 percent

stays locally. She added the majority of the local dollars is used to fund Sanctuary for Life, a CCDBR program which provides housing for pregnant women who are at least 18 years of age.



"When we help others in need we are caring for Jesus," Weidert said. "We need to help those who are less fortunate and those most in need.

"Lent is a time of prayer, fasting and

almsgiving, and it is a great time for focusing on that and bring it back to what it is all about."

Weidert said the iconic Rice Bowl boxes are available at churches and several schools also distribute them through the students. Churches also will often place a bulletin announcement and the pastor will use the homily to discuss the drive.

Weidert said CRS Rice Bowl also encourages families to pray together. She said the Rice Bowl website offers various activities and prayers that families can participate in together.

"It's all about coming together through prayer, almsgiving and being grateful for what you have and realize how you can help those who are less fortunate," Weidert said.

Rice Bowl began more than 40 years ago when Catholics in the United States organized relief efforts to respond to famine in Africa. The help came in the form of a small cardboard box in 1975, which was the genesis of Operation Rice Bowl, in church parishes in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops adopted Operation Rice Bowl in 1976 and one year later made the decision to make it an official program of CRS.

In its first 40 years, CRS Rice Bowl has generated more than \$250 million in donations.

Additional resources for families, dioceses, educators, parish leaders and young people can be found on the crsricebowl.org and crsplatodearroz.org websites.

"I'm excited to see the Catholics in the community come together and help people across the world fight hunger, malnutrition and poverty," said Weinert, who was recently hired at CCDBR and is coordinating her first Rice Bowl campaign.

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St. Joseph Altar traditions postponed

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Count St. Joseph Altars as another south Louisiana tradition fallen victim to COVID-19.

Churches throughout the Diocese of Baton Rouge have been forced to either cancel or at least postpone the popular altars, which have now joined festivals, athletic events and the aggrandized Mardi Gras as cultural icons snuffed out by the novel coronavirus.

"It was a sad but easy decision to make, since the guidelines given by the chancery for in-person gatherings and food service would so limit the possible excessive numbers, safe seating and distancing, and food-handling that it really is not possible for us to comply," said Father Paul Counce, pastor at St. Joseph Cathedral in Baton Rouge.

The cathedral's elaborate altar, affectionally known as a "meal for all downtown," is a popular stopping off point on St. Joseph's Day."

Father Mathew Graham, pastor

at Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs, called the decision to at least postpone the altar "common sense."

"For me, after talking to a few people, even those in charge, it was a simple decision," he said. "A lot of people who prepare the food are not comfortable getting together or taking food from other people's houses. Most people are not comfortable in our kitchen (close together) to make cookies."

He said the uncertainty of being able to display the altar that paralleled the uncertainty of people of people being able to visit played a role.

"There were no hurt feelings," Father Graham said.

But at least there is hope, hope that if conditions continue to improve the parish can potentially host an altar during the summer. He said that in some ways everyone was mutually agreeable that with 2021 being the Year of St. Joseph a votive Mass could potentially be celebrated during the summer followed by the St. Jo-

seph's Altar.

"We are trying to use common sense at the moment but hopeful we can do something like that later this summer," Father Graham said, adding that any such event would depend on the state guidelines as well as those set by Bishop Michael G. Duca.

Father Graham, who was installed as pastor in September, said the parish has been able to hold its annual Lenten meals, which he said have been "very successful. I'm excited about that."

He added the postponement was especially disappointing because as a "brand new pastor you hear about all of the things that happen (throughout the year) and it's just another thing we can't do."

"I have not experienced a fall festival yet, or programs for learning center that bring excitement and enthusiasm," he said. "A lot of things as a new pastor you want to see the fullness of that first year, to get an idea what do you do, expand upon and what can you change if I still have to wait."

St. Joseph Altar

March 20 & 21
St. John the Evangelist Church
Knights of Columbus Hall
58715 Price Street, Plaquemine
March 20: 4 p.m. Mass in honor of St. Joseph at the church
March 21: 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. serving of the altar at KC hall
Betty Aucoin 225-687-2111
Rosemary Cox 225-687-6160
Louise Dugas 225-659-2371

St. Margaret, Queen of Scotland
30300 Catholic. Hall Road, Hammond
(Albany exit I12)
St. Thomas Chapel
32191 Hwy. 22, Springfield
After each weekend Mass each parishioner will receive a bag containing a St. Joseph prayer card, rosary, fava bean and St. Joseph bread.
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Lanie Borum 225-567-3573



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Gatherings help faith flourish among young people in East Central Deanery

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Church

Faith flourishes for Catholic youth when they can come into an environment where they are supported, spurred on to “go deeper” spiritually and meet youth who have the same, or maybe even very different experiences, yet have a common love of the Catholic faith.

The youth groups in the East Central Deanery of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, have been collaborating to do this during events that have caught on with the young people in that area.

When Brady Munn became youth formation coordinator at St. John the Evangelist Church in Prairieville a couple of years ago he saw initial efforts had been made to bring the youth of the East Central Deanery together for events focused on praise, worship and evangelization. This fueled his desire to help make this a reality.

“One of the most beautiful things about the Catholic Church is that it is universal. The best way to share that unity is to bring the youth of our parishes together to experience it,” said Munn.

He noted that Michael Parker, deacon candidate intern and



The first East Central Deanery event for 2021 was, “Ignite,” was held at Holy Rosary Church in St. Amant on Jan. 9. Photo provided by Deacon Candidate Intern Michael Parker

youth minister at Holy Rosary Church in St. Amant, had already jump-started efforts and the two have since worked together.

Munn and Parker said those involved in organizing the events, which rotate among the parishes in the deanery, are intentional about its format.

“The goal is to make sure that each event has a specific theme that is practical and relatable to their age group,” said Parker. “The talks that are given are set to bring about a connection to those in attendance and show that it culminates with a rela-

tionship with Jesus.

“By ending the night with adoration and reconciliation and praise and worship it gives us the opportunity to not only share our faith but to express our love of Catholicism and the environment.”

Deacon Mark Reynaud, director of religious education at St. Mark Church in Gonzales and who also helps organize the events, noted one benefit is supporting youth who may have limited involvement with peers who share their faith.

“(At St. Mark) there’s only a few of the youth that go to Catho-

lic high schools; they go to public schools. These youth are not necessarily supported in their faith,” said Deacon Reynaud.

He said the collaborative approach is geared toward the development of their faith life as well as knowledge of the faith.

“Even though you are a cradle Catholic and you were catechized, you may not adopt the faith as your own,” said Deacon Reynaud. “It’s better to come from more than just catechizing and what the church teaches, but it’s an invitation and people saying ‘This is what it means to me, and you won’t regret it.’”

Elijah Kehn, a parishioner at St. Mark Church in Gonzales, said the events have taught him the importance of keeping his faith at the center of everything he does.

He attended a combined live and virtual pro-life event in January at St. John. He has not been on the actual diocesan-wide trip to Washington, D.C. for March for Life each January but it has increased his desire to do so in 2022.

“It’s given me a new perspective on how to talk to people and how to invite people into conversation,” said Kehn, who is considering becoming a teacher and possibly a priest.

For Nora Klibert, who attends Holy Rosary Church, the Holy Spirit moved her as the youth of various backgrounds shared their own life experiences and how their faith impacted the way they live.

“It’s really good to meet people and learn how they express their faith,” said Klibert, who plans to attend LSU and become actively involved at Christ the King Church and Catholic Center. “When you have people who go to adoration or go to Bible studies and things, you find there’s a lot of things you can do as a high schooler.”

Biden hails Pope Francis’ ‘historic’ trip to Iraq

See related story, page 20

WASHINGTON, D.C. (CNS) – President Joe Biden stated his admiration for Pope Francis on March 8, after the pontiff’s four-day visit to Iraq.

“Pope Francis’ visit was a historic and welcome first for the country,” Biden stated. He noted the trip “sent an important message, as Pope Francis said himself, that ‘fraternity is more durable than fratricide, that hope is more powerful than death, that peace more powerful than war.’”

Pope Francis completed his visit to Iraq on March 8, the first-ever visit to the country by a pope. During the March 5-8 trip, he met with political and diplomatic leaders and Catholic bishops, priests and laypeople.

The pontiff also met with leading Shiite cleric Ayatollah Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and took part in an ecumenical meeting at the home of Abraham in Ur. At the meeting, Pope Francis appealed for peace, saying “let us affirm that God is merciful and that the greatest blasphemy is to profane his name by hating our brothers and sisters.”

At a Mass before 10,000 attendees in Erbil, Pope Francis praised the generosity of Iraqi Christians “even amid great poverty and difficulty.”

“Today, I can see at first hand that the church in Iraq is alive, that Christ is alive and at work in this, his holy and faithful people,” Pope Francis said.

Pope Francis also visited Mosul, once the second-largest city in Iraq, which was occupied by ISIS from 2014 until 2017. Biden noted the “depravity and intolerance” of ISIS in the city.

The U.S. in 2016 had declared that ISIS had committed genocide in Iraq and Syria against Christians, Yazidis and Shi’a Muslims and Christians had reported horrific atrocities committed by ISIS in Mosul; the accounts included murder, rape, destruction of churches and selling Christians into slavery. The Syriac Catholic Patriarch of Antioch reported 500 people killed by ISIS when they invaded Mosul.

Biden is just the second Catholic U.S. president. While leading U.S. bishops have commended some of his policies on immigration and fighting poverty, they have also condemned his support for taxpayer-funded

abortion and gender ideology.

On March 8, he stated his admiration for Pope Francis “for his commitment to promoting religious tolerance, the common bonds of our humanity and interfaith understanding.”

Other U.S. offices and Catholic leaders hailed the papal trip. The Office of International Religious Freedom at the U.S. State Department commended the visit, calling it “a momentous opportunity to advance interfaith dialogue and harmony in Iraq and throughout the region.”

“His holiness Pope Francis’ visit shows his solidarity with the Iraqi people, including vulnerable members of religious minority groups, who have suffered under the brutality of ISIS,” the office stated.

Cardinal Wilton Gregory of Washington, D.C. said the trip was a reminder of “hope.”

“His journey to Iraq reminds the entire world that hatred can never be the final word spoken only the word hope. May he succeed in his efforts so that peace and friendship are given a rebirth,” the cardinal wrote in his Sunday column for the archdiocesan paper.

The voice of St. Joseph heard at men's conference

By Richard Meek

The Catholic Commentator

St. Joseph's voice was silent in the Bible but his actions spoke with clarity and obedience to God.

He was a father, a husband, a provider and a loving servant of his Lord, setting an example for all men to emulate. Living the life of St. Joseph was a message resonating throughout the Men of the Immaculata Conference on Feb. 20.

More than 300 men gathered at St. George Church in Baton Rouge and hundreds more virtually for the annual conference, which for 2021 featured the theme "St. Joseph: Pillar of Families, Protector of the Church and Terror of Demons."

Three speakers delivered inspirational addresses during the daylong conference. Bishop Michael G. Duca was insightful in his homily during Mass and Chef John Folse, as is his custom, delivered an entertaining talk.

Todd Peltier, attending his fourth conference, was accompanied by his 6-year-old son.

"I want him as a teenager, as a young adult, I wanted to teach him so that is part of his normal way of life," Peltier said. "Following St. Joseph in his silence, particularly (with his son) is more important than what I say."

Best-selling author Dr. Allen Hunt, an Atlanta resident and a former Methodist pastor who is a convert to Catholicism, led off the conference by discussing St. Joseph being Protector of the



Father Chris Decker enthusiastically greets more than 300 men in attendance at the opening of the annual Men of Immaculata Conference on Feb. 20 at St. George Church in Baton Rouge. Photos by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator

Church. He captivated the audience with his entertaining delivery, blending in own personal experiences with his dry wit and sense of humor.

He used the analogy that Catholics have forgotten how to fish, explaining that for the better part of two centuries Catholics were accustomed to having people come to the faith through immigration, the expansion of families and marriage.

But today "none of those are streams are filled with fish."

He said that during the coronavirus pandemic people have been scared about going out in public or attending Mass, and churches have had to adapt. He said churches are also concerned what will happen when society reopens on a grand scale.

"People will start asking, 'Are we ready when they come back?' That's the wrong question," Hunt said. "The question is 'How are we going to get them back?' We are not going to magically re-open society and all of sudden people are going to fill the pews."

"There are lot of people whose habits have been broken. You and I have the opportunity through the intercession and help of St. Joseph to learn how to fish."

He admonished the crowd to quit playing defense, saying "we got used to playing defense, got used to being timid, got used to anti-Catholicism, gotten used to people questioning our faith, gotten used to people wondering why we do what we do as Catholics."

"Now is the time for offense."

Now is the time to go into society and share the good news because the beautiful thing about the faith is the faith is meant to be shared."

He said that can only happen through evangelization, which he defined as "one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread."

Father Reuben, pastor at Mater Dolorosa Church in Independence, said that when discussing spiritual warfare, the focus should always be on the Lord, adding there should always be a sober awareness of the kingdom of darkness but not to be fascinated with it.

"The Lord is the one I want to be seeking," he said. "But I need to not have my head buried in the sand. I must know his tactics so that I can counter so I don't trip up as I continue to follow Christ."

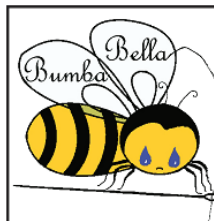
"If I am not in a state of grace, walking in union with the Lord, then I become a sitting duck, vulnerable to further attacks of the enemy."

He said St. Joseph was a just man, and he lived in accordance with the word of God. He said St. Joseph was also faithful in his vocation, which the terror he installed in the demonic world primarily came from obedience to the Lord.

"That is something we want to look at and remember as well," Father Dykes said. "Each and every one of us is meant to be a terror to demons. Nobody is excluded from that who is part of the body of Christ."

"As soon as I am baptized in Christ I am enlisted into his army. Whether I like it or not, I am armed and equipped to fight."

SEE CONFERENCE PAGE 14



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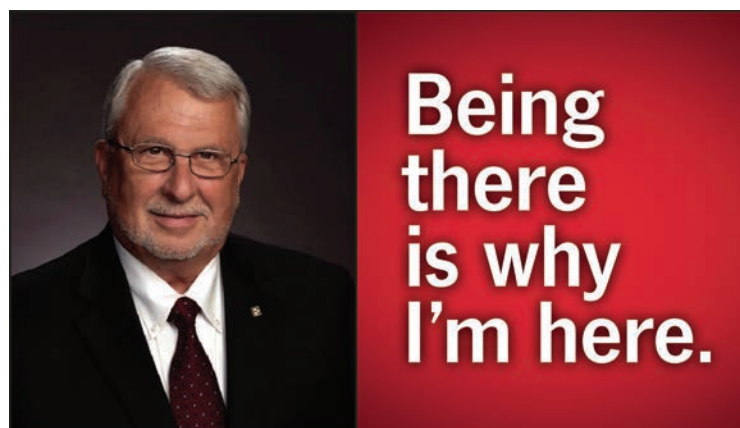
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Father Reuben Dukes address the conference discussing the topic "St. Joseph: Terror of Demons." "The Lord is the one I want to be seeking," Father Dykes said.



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LCCB voices opposition to Equality Act

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

The Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops is calling on voters to voice their opposition to the Equality Act, a call that has taken on more urgency since

the House on Feb. 25 passed the act.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has warned the bill would trample religious freedom protections while codifying gender ideology in federal law.

In its Feb. 24 statement, LCCB said that everyone deserves to be treated with respect and dignity and the Equality Act “does the opposite.” The statement went on to say that instead of respecting differences in beliefs about marriage and sexuality, the Equality

Act would discriminate against people of faith.

According to the LCCB statement, the Equality Act:

“• Punishes faith-based organizations, such as charities and schools who serve everyone in their communities, simply because of their beliefs about marriage and sexuality;

“• Forces girls and women to compete against boys and men for limited opportunities in sports, and to share locker rooms and shower spaces with biological males who identify as women;

“• Risks mandating taxpayers to fund abortions;

“• Forces people in everyday life, and especially health care workers, to support gender transition; and

“• Expands what the government considers a ‘public’ place, forcing even some congregation halls to host functions that conflict with their beliefs.”

By a vote of 224 to 206, the House passed the Equality Act only six days after it was introduced on Feb. 18. The legislation sponsored by Rhode Island Rep. David Cicilline recognizes sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes under civil rights law and forbids discrimination on the basis of those classes in a number of areas.

The USCCB has opposed the legislation, saying it upholds gender ideology and the redefinition of marriage and frames gender as simply a “social construct.” Furthermore, it would “punish” religious groups opposed to these beliefs, the conference warned.

Through the bill, Congress is forcing “novel and divisive viewpoints regarding ‘gender’ on individuals and organizations,” stated a Feb. 23 letter by five USCCB committee chairs to members of Congress.

The bishops were Bishop Michael Barber, SJ of Oakland, chair of the USCCB education committee; Archbishop Paul Coakley of Oklahoma City, chair of the USCCB domestic justice committee; Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York, chair of the bishops’ religious liberty committee; Bishop David Konerla of Tulsa, chair of the marriage subcommittee; and Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City, chair of the USCCB pro-life committee.

The act, they said, “includes dismissing sexual difference and falsely presenting ‘gender’ as only a social construct.”

They warned that the bill could force church halls to “host functions that violate their beliefs.” Women would have to share shelters, sports and locker rooms with biological males identifying as transgender females. Religious adoption agencies would have to match children with same-sex couples or possibly face closure.

The legislation prevents religious freedom claims from being made by individuals and groups under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. The landmark 1993 law has been invoked by many as a defense against various government mandates, but the Equality Act would override those religious freedom protections.

During House debate over the legislation, Missouri Rep. Vicky Hartzler said the bill “dismantles Title IX” protections for girls’ sports. Religious adoption agencies in several states have already been shut down because of mandates that they place children with same-sex couples, she said.

“The Equality Act stipulates that religious beliefs and faith no longer matter in the Democrats’ new world order,” Hartzler said.

The bill would override conscience protections for health care workers, said Rep. Yvette Herrell of New Mexico. The act would “force both people and organizations in everyday life and work settings to speak and act in support of gender transitions, including health care workers and licensed counselors, even when it’s against their professional judgement,” she said.

Under the act, “it is Washington, D.C., that ultimately decides the morality of our children and our churches,” Herrell said.

Pro-life groups have also warned that the legislation could expand taxpayer-funded abortion, as it amends civil rights law to forbid “pregnancy” discrimination. Thus, they say that women seeking abortions under the law could claim discrimination if they are denied an abortion.

“Tragically, this act can also be construed to include an abortion mandate, a violation of precious rights to life and

SEE LCCB PAGE 19



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**OUR LADY OF THE LAKE
ROBOTIC SURGERY INSTITUTE**

Roaming Mars began with the dream of a red wagon

By Debbie Shelley

The Catholic Commentator

As Earth's closet neighbor Mars fascinates many people, is the subject of countless science fiction novels and movies and poses the seemingly elusive question: Is there life on other planets?

Putting aside images of green aliens flying UFOs, Dr. Keith Comeaux, deputy chief engineer of NASA's Mars 2020 Perseverance landing, said the mission seeks signs of past microbial life and is possibly preparing for future human missions.

As a child who grew up in the Sherwood Forest area of Baton Rouge and attended St. Thomas More Church, Comeaux said he was fascinated with aircraft rockets and spaceships.

"I can remember as a kid watching the Apollo 11 moon landing. It was very early on (in my life) for me," said Comeaux, a 1985 Catholic High School in Baton Rouge graduate and a 2013 Distinguished Graduate.

He remembers pretending his little red wagon was a space capsule. When his parents attended LSU football games his grandfather would pull him in his "capsule" from the back of his house to the front stoop.

They would watch the streetlights come on and stargaze together. His grandmother told Comeaux that he would live on the moon one day.

As the first Skylab experimental space stations missions began, Comeaux remembers cheering at the successes, including astronauts spending months in space and the splashdowns.

"Those moments really captured my imagination," he said.

Comeaux was also interested in building model airplanes and had dreams of becoming a pilot.

His parents encouraged his interest by introducing him to model airplanes and other science related "toys" at Christmas, including a telescope, microscope, chemistry set, electronics set and optical kit, among others. Summer vacations included visits to the Pensacola Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida as well as Johnson Space Center in Houston.

"By the time I was in high school, I put it all together – I was good in math, interested in science, loved airplanes – I was going to be an aerospace engineer and perhaps a fighter pilot or astronaut," said Comeaux.

His hopes of becoming an Air Force pilot were dashed by falling short of the required 20/20 vision. Yet, he clearly envisioned a mission to help with space exploration.

He graduated from LSU with a degree in mechanical engineering and physics and then attended Stanford University, where he received his master's and doc-



Keith Comeaux found a way to celebrate Mardi Gras during NASA's mission of sending the rover Perseverance to Mars. Photos provided by Keith Comeaux

torate degrees in astronautics and aeronautics.

After college he went to work for Hughes Aircraft, which was a major American aerospace and defense contractor founded in 1932 by Howard Hughes. It was there he became fascinated with working on the development of new satellite equipment. This is where he also met fellow Hughes employee, and now wife, Cecilia. They have twin children Evie and Max.

In 2006 Comeaux was working for Hughes, now part of Boeing Company, when he received a call from a former colleague who had left Hughes for NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) and worked with the Spirit and Opportunity Mars exploration rovers. He told Comeaux, "Come work with me, there's a new land rover and we're going to Mars with it."

"It was crazy, it was too good to pass up," said Comeaux. "This job led to (my role in) the landing of the Curiosity rover."

He said his "inner tiger" roared in jubilant celebration as Curiosity gently touched down on the surface of Mars.

That success led him to becoming chief deputy engineer for the Mars 2020 Perseverance rover mission.

One of the most remarkable elements about Perseverance's touch down on the Red Planet on Feb. 18 is the preparation was carried out in the midst of the pandemic, said Comeaux, who worked from his beachside home in Redondo Beach, California on the project.

There was a lot of intense testing and analysis to see if Perseverance, nicknamed Percy, could handle the realities of landing on the varied, rough terrain on Jezero Crater, he said.

"Really it's one of the hardest things we've done so far since we've gone to Mars," said Comeaux.

Tucked in Perseverance's belly was Ingenuity, the first helicopter to go to Mars. Ingenuity, nicknamed Ginny, will scout targets of interest on Mars and help plan the best driving routes for future Mars rovers.

Perseverance will search for signs of ancient microbial life, which will advance NASA's quest to explore the past habitability of Mars. Perseverance will also

test technologies to help pave the way for future human exploration.

Comeaux conceded it takes patience and perseverance as engineers and scientists work together for the mission's success.

"The scientists remind us that we are going there to study the rocks. And the engineers remind the scientists that if we don't land successfully there is no mission," said Comeaux. "We have a relationship, we need each other. We find a way to combine the interests of science and engineering to safely explore these danger areas."

Comeaux said it's interesting to learn about the study of rocks, such as geological history and what generated the rocks.

Even returning the rocks to Earth speaks of an international interest in exploring Martian territory. In 2020, spacecraft from three nations were launched for Mars: NASA's Perseverance Rover, China's Tianwen-1 and the United Arab Emirates' Hope.

This brings competition but also possibilities for corroboration. NASA and the European Space Agency are collaborating on a concept to build and launch a lander that will send a small fetch rover to collect tubes of rocks left by Perseverance to bring them back to the lander.

Even with his sites heavenward, Comeaux remains connected to his faith, family and Baton Rouge. His parents and family still live in Baton Rouge, and he is a member of the LSU Dean's Circle, LSU Engineering Hall of Distinction, LSU College of Science Hall of Distinction and LSU Alumni Hall of Distinction.

"I usually get back for crawfish season and at least once for LSU football season," said Comeaux.

Reflecting on his career, Comeaux said, "Now that I think of it it's been very, very, rewarding, even more so than if I were an astronaut or pilot."

"We're rewriting the textbooks by what our missions have been able to discover."

Even more exciting for Comeaux than what the current Mars missions will discover is inspiring young people to write the next chapter in space exploration.

"So many kids have an interest in doing what we do," he said. "Whether they are able to become astronauts or planetary scientists, that spark of curiosity I think can stay with them no matter what their endeavors are."

"When I was at LSU, landing rovers on another planet was not even conceivable to me. Kids today will one day help shape our future in ways that we cannot yet imagine. I am humbled to know that I may have a small part in nudging a few of them in that direction. And the advice I share based on my own experience is this: 'Shoot for the stars, but always follow your curiosity. If you get lucky, instead of a star, you may land on Mars.'"



Keith Comeaux (forefront) and members of NASA's engineering team.

FranU receives \$100,000 gift dedicated to School Sisters of Notre Dame

Special to The Catholic Commentator

Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University received a \$100,000 gift from the Edward L. Rispone Family Foundation to create The School Sisters of Notre Dame Endowed Scholarship in Theology, which will provide scholarship support for theology majors, especially those interested in teaching theology in Catholic schools.

The Edward L. Rispone Family Foundation created the endowment to honor the School Sisters of Notre Dame, who educated Eddie Rispone and thousands of other students at St. Gerard Majella Elementary School and Redemptorist High School, both in Baton Rouge, from 1945-1985.

Describing the motivation for this gift, Rispone explained, "Just as the School Sisters of Notre Dame educated and formed Catholic students from across Baton Rouge, graduates of the theology program at FranU will go on to teach the Catholic faith to the next generation of students in

our diocese and our community. Scholarships for a student in the theology program at FranU are vitally important to assuring we remove financial obstacles that will allow them to complete their degree and continue the mission and legacy of the School Sisters."

Sister Gloria Cain SNDS shared her appreciation to The Edward L. Rispone Family Foundation that established an endowed scholarship at FranU to honor their legacy.

"The School Sisters of Notre Dame have a long history of service and ministry in the Baton Rouge community and congregation and extends the educational vision and legacy of the School Sisters of Notre Dame into the future for all who are



Catherine Blanchard

the surrounding area. For us, education means enabling persons to reach the fullness of their potential as individuals created in God's image and assisting them to direct their gifts toward building the earth. We educate with the conviction that the world can be changed through the transformation of persons. By doing so, The Edward L. Rispone Family Foundation exemplifies the mission and charism of our

served by his generosity," she said.

The yearly gift will support students in the theology program and will be awarded to a student or students in the FranU theology program meeting specified criteria. Individual awards will be determined by student need and circumstances, but the scholarship will primarily support students who desire to teach religion in a Catholic school.

Professor of Theology David Whidden concluded, "The School Sisters of Notre Dame have left an enduring legacy in the lives of the many students who they that taught about the Catholic faith. Through this generous gift, The Edward L. Rispone Family Foundation honors that legacy by helping train the next generation of teachers who will pass along the faith in our Catholic schools. Scholarship support for these students allows them to choose lives of service to others, just as the School Sisters did for decades in Baton Rouge."

Catherine Blanchard is the first recipient of the Sisters of Notre Dame Scholarship.

CONFERENCE ▼

From page 11

He emphasized that one comes an effective soldier of Christ through prayer and reception of the sacraments.

"Sacraments are the powers that flow from the body of Jesus Christ," Father Dykes said. "The more I am faithful with the Lord

and keep with the sacraments the more I am building up the presence of this power within me."

In a powerful talk, noted television host and author Deacon Harold Burke-Silvers, who showed why he is affectionally known as the "Dynamic Deacon," said St. Joseph is who all men need to get themselves

back to thinking deeply and intimately about what it means to be father in a family. He said there are too many men doing nothing while Satan takes families.

"Strong men, strong families; strong families strong church," he said. "That is why St. Joseph is so important during the pandemic."

He said men must insure stability and harmony in the family, be men of prayer and working at a job that will not cause a division in the family.

"Do you think your job is so important," he said. "Try this: die. (Employers) will mourn you for three days and then hire somebody to take (your) place."

"Where somebody can't take your place is in the house with that time with your wife and kids, time you never get back."

In his homily Bishop Duca explained St. Joseph "is our guide."

"Share your faith, get up and do it," the bishop said. "Be a man who lives the Gospel, a just man. Avoid sin."

"Trust in the Lord, hope in the Lord and follow the examples of St. Joseph."

University High School student Chris Sherman, who was attending his fifth Immaculata



Noted speaker Dr. Allen Hunt used his wit, sense of humor and entertaining delivery to inspire the men during the conference.



Deacon Harold Burke-Silvers energized the crowd at the Men of the Immaculata Conference on Feb. 20 at St. George Church with his energy, passion and enthusiasm. Photos by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator

conference, said he returns not only for the speakers but for the sense of community that all of the men of the group share.

"I look to the future, maybe

a relationship with my future spouse," he said. "I'm learning how to better now so I have those skills now and to be a better person in the future."

'I am his bride'

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

A radiant, late spring sun painted a stunning vista as Sister Alexandrine Rosoanirina SOM settled into a comfortable chair at Metanoia Manor, a residence offering a safe haven to human trafficking victims.

Sister Alex's vocation is not easy but where others see despair, she sees hope, where others see sadness, she looks into the eyes of those young girls whose scars of unspeakable horrors veil a joy yearning to surface.

Nearly 10,000 miles and an ocean away from her native Madagascar, Sister Alex's life is an answer to a call she first heard at the age of five, when she would watch nuns from two separate congregations prepare the altar for Sunday Mass.

"They would bow and show reverence," Sister Alex said. "I told my mom I wanted to be like them one day. She said you have to study hard to become (a religious)."

But hers would be a vocation requiring as much patience as prayer, including a detour from the church that would last several years. Approximately a year after informing her mother of her wishes, Sister Alex's parents had a disagreement with their parish priest and stopped attending Mass, meaning their children were also estranged from the church. The chasm occurred as Sister Alex was preparing for her first Communion, a sacrament that would be delayed nearly eight years, when she was 14 years old.

"I had this longing to go to church but I could not go because the church required a 30-minute walk," Sister Alex said, adding that on occasions she would attend a Lutheran church a block away.

"During this time when I did not go to church I forgot about being a nun," she said. "I got distracted just like any other girl."

Fulfilling a promise she had made to her daughter several years earlier, Sister Alex's mother enrolled the third child of her six children in the local Catholic school for eighth grade.

Almost immediately, the stirring for the vocational life resurfaced, a calling that was nurtured by a women religious who Sister Alex befriended. Sister Alex recalled the first piece of advice she received from her "angel" was to pray.

"There were many things I

ing girls not only in an educational sense but also spiritually is a 24-hour a day commitment.

"It's amazing," she said with a smile that rarely leaves her face. "All I can say is God has prepared me. I never thought one day I could be doing some kind of teaching."

"I had a good time with the elderly and preparing them for the future of heaven," she said. "Here, it is the opposite; I am preparing girls for the future of the world."

One of her many joys she finds in the vocational life is to be in touch with the Lord and having that focus. She also enjoys living with her community members.

Sister Alex also points to the impact her vocation continues to have on her own spiritual life and how it has enriched her love of Jesus.

"Once you are open to it, he will give you more and more to do," she said. "For me, it's like a spiritual growing. At this point it does not matter to me where I go or what I do. I am in love with Jesus. I am his bride."

She is often asked how she could leave her family and does she miss them.

"I always answer that I always have my family in my heart," she said. "But if you are married to a guy you really love you will follow him to wherever he goes."

"It's the same with Jesus. I fell in love with Jesus. I left my family for my Jesus, and I surrendered."

Sister Alex was in for another surprise when shortly before the pandemic she was appointed director of vocations in the United States for her order. She is constantly in contact with young girls who are considering a religious life, and Sister Alex's first piece of advice is for the girls to pray, spend at least 15 minutes a day talking and listening the Lord.

"He will lead you," she said. "You may not know how he will lead you where he wants you."

"This is a process of discernment; that is the Holy Spirit."

She also advises the young women to have a spiritual director, someone to walk the journey with them in discernment.

SEE ROSOANIRINA PAGE 19



Sister Alexandrine Rosoanirina SOM

did not understand," Sister Alex said. "I did not know you could pray for clarification, for discernment."

Sister Alex soon received first Communion and while on her knees she remembers seeing Jesus and saying, "Jesus, I am yours forever."

"I do not know if I even understood what it meant at the time," she said. "I think that led to where I am today."

Committed to the vocational life, Sister Alex visited a dozen congregations, learning their charisms. She entered the Hospitaler Sisters of Mercy community at the age of 19 and after studying in Madagascar and Rome was transferred to New Jersey in 2004.

Sister Alex professed her final vows in front of her family in Madagascar in 2008.

While in New Jersey she studied nursing and worked as a nurse at a nursing home her community operated.

"The reason I choose the Hospitaler Sisters of Mercy was their apostolate," she said. "I did not like teaching; I have no patience with the kids, I thought I had patience with the sick."

But God apparently believed otherwise. In 2016, Sister Alex was transferred to the Diocese of Baton Rouge to help found Metanoia Manor, where teach-

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ACROSS

- 1 "We are many parts, we are all one ____."
- 5 "...your rod and your ____ comfort me" (Ps 23:4)
- 10 Discharge of a firearm
- 14 Continental money
- 15 Big name in chips
- 16 Bethsaida, to Philip
- 17 Direction (abbr.)
- 18 Lover
- 19 On the ocean
- 20 Approximate
- 22 "Consider the ____; they neither sow nor reap..." (Lk 12:24)
- 24 ____-high hand
- 25 Illness
- 26 Father of Noah
- 30 Breathe convulsively
- 31 Chew the scenery
- 32 Split
- 33 206, to Nero
- 37 Blind as ____
- 38 Martos' ____ to the Sacred
- 39 Cut of meat
- 40 Eat
- 41 Watchful
- 42 ____ Youth Day
- 43 Lean and sinewy
- 44 Catholic actor of gangster movie fame
- 45 Stephen is their patron saint
- 49 Pouch
- 50 Fate of Jerusalem at the hands of Babylon
- 51 Feature of Psalm 119
- 56 Start of a sphere?
- 57 Brother of Rebekah
- 59 Pledge
- 60 Snare
- 61 Nanette's school
- 62 ____ Minor
- 63 Headwear
- 64 Investigate closely
- 65 Incline

DOWN

- 1 Sydney's first archbishop, John ____ Polding
- 2 Gallic agreements
- 3 Mild oath
- 4 Teammate of Mickey and Moose
- 5 Book of the Old Testament
- 6 US government obligation
- 7 "Hey, don't look ____!"
- 8 Charge
- 9 St. Dorothy is their patron saint
- 10 Remove hair
- 11 First of the twelve Minor Prophets
- 12 Auguries
- 13 Tantalize
- 21 Clublike weapon
- 23 Viper
- 25 Milk store
- 26 "____, Kindly Light"
- 27 Both (prefix)
- 28 Grumble
- 29 Rock add-on
- 30 "____ be to the Father..."
- 32 Flies high
- 33 Overfill
- 34 Maize
- 35 Objectionable
- 36 Annual race, familiarly
- 38 Lessens
- 42 City in central Texas
- 43 "____ to you, scribes and Pharisees..." (Mt 23:13)
- 44 Catholic actor of "The Honeymooners" fame
- 45 ____ of the firstborn (plague)
- 46 Beyond what is usual
- 47 Target
- 48 Horse sounds
- 49 Parboil
- 51 "____ Ben Adhem"
- 52 Spirit
- 53 Noxious weed
- 54 "____ Small World"
- 55 Chinese detective, Charlie ____
- 58 Tread the boards

Solution on page 14

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Positive fasting in a time of COVID-19

The first part of Lent seemed filled with ice and bad weather, leaking pipes and roofs. We were reminded that we are dust and will return to dust, however, I never thought that it would be by freezing in Louisiana. I hope that many of you were as lucky as I to find a friend who hadn't lost power and took me in. For a while there, Lent looked like it might truly be a time of suffering beyond self-imposed penances.

Lent is traditionally a time when we change our usual routine of life to eat differently, pray more and be more generous in our almsgiving to the poor. We try to cut down on our excesses in food, drink, entertainment and, being Louisianans, general gregariousness. We end that with the great big-bang of Mardi-Gras. This year, however, COVID-19 put an end to all of that many months ago. It truly seems like we have had a year-long Lent that began with Ash Wednesday 2020.

No wonder many of the Catholic publications I have

been reading tried to put the Lenten season into a more positive light. One I regularly read, National Catholic Reporter, has a series about Lent during a time of pandemic. The first commentator they featured was Father Dan Horan. He made

some good points about God accompanying us in our struggles. God is patient with us. We have to be patient with others and ourselves. Our hunger may not be from seeking food, but rather to get on a list to receive a vaccine, and then once on a list to wait in long lines to actually get the shot. God is patient, we must be too. It helps to remember what

God told the prophet Hosea "I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hos 6:6).

The knowledge of God in part of Hosea's revelation could be fulfilled by setting aside some time each day to read the Bible and pray over what we read in Scripture. The purpose of prayer, fasting and almsgiving is to redirect our attention

and priorities from worldly distractions to things that can transform us spiritually. We have been forced during the pandemic to not socialize as much as we would like. However, God is always present to us. As St. Augustine said, "God is closer to us than we are to ourselves."

Prayer is simply communicating with God, talking, not to ourselves, but to the Spirit of God within us. By practice we learn to pray better. The pandemic does give us time for more than bingeing on TV. Lent is a time for conversion, a time for turning towards Christ and the Gospel.

Many people in these pandemic times are hurting financially. It is a good practice to carry a few dollars in our pockets for those who stop us in the parking lots of supermarkets. They seem to have multiplied these past 12 months. As St. John wrote, "those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen" (1 Jn 4:20). From the letters I have received, the Food Bank of Greater Baton Rouge has also seen a substantial increase of demand for food for the poor. Supporting them with money is feeding the poor. It is another

form of almsgiving.

Another good source for Lenten spiritually is Bishop Robert Barron and his Word on Fire Institute. You can find it on Google. Bishop Barron is an excellent spiritual guide and teacher. As he points out, "Compassion is key to Christian ethics, learning to suffer with and feel with the other. This is precisely why the two

"Compassion is key to Christian ethics, learning to suffer with and feel with the other."

Bishop Robert Barron

commandments are so tightly linked: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart ... and love your neighbor as yourself.' In loving God, you feel the feelings of God, and God is compassionate to the poor and oppressed. That's all the argument that a biblical person needs."

The last good advice came to me from a religious sister with whom I work on a foundation that supports Catholic missions. She herself is a missionary in the Dominican Republic. Her name is Sister Bernadette Mackay. She wrote, "I received this message today ('Do you want to fast this Lent? Words from Pope

Francis') and for me it is such a positive way to think of Lent. I see in this message a challenge to leave aside the gloom and doom approach to Lent, to embrace a Lent that is outward bound, that invites me to bring the others along on the journey and to celebrate goodness and positive engagement for the next several weeks."

"Do you want to fast this Lent?

"Fast from hurting words and say kind words.

"Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude.

"Fast from anger and be filled with patience.

"Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.

"Fast from worries and trust in God.

"Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.

"Fast from pressures and be prayerful.

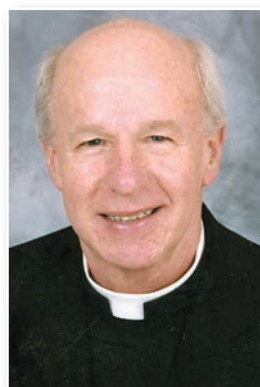
"Fast from bitterness and fill your heart with joy.

"Fast from selfishness and be compassionate.

"Fast from grudges and be reconciled.

"Fast from words and be silent so you can listen."

FATHER CARVILLE is a retired priest in the Diocese of Baton Rouge and writes on current topics for *The Catholic Commentator*. He can be reached at johnny.carville@gmail.com.



Another Perspective
Father John Carville

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor should be typed and limited to 350 words and should contain the name and address of the writer, though the address will not be printed. We reserve the right to edit all letters. Send to: Letters to the Editor, The Catholic Commentator, P. O. Box 3316, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-3316, or to tcc@diobr.org.

Mission Statement

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

PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PRAY FOR US

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

Mar. 18 Rev. Joey F. Angeles
Dcn. W. Brent Duplessis
Br. Alan Drain SC

Mar. 19 Rev. Arockiam Arockiam
Dcn. Jeff R. Easley
Sr. Anija Jacob CMC

Mar. 20 Rev. Jaime Arrambide CSsR
Dcn. Natale (Nat) J. Garofalo
Br. Carl Evans SC

Mar. 21 Rev. Raphael Asika MSP
Dcn. Edward J. Gauthreaux
Sr. M. John Janet MC

Mar. 22 Rev. J. Cary Bani
Dcn. Steven C. Gonzales
Br. Harold Harris SC

Mar. 23 Rev. Frank B. Bass
Dcn. Richard H. Grant
Sr. M. Jesusla MC

Mar. 24 Rev. M. Jeffery Bayhi
Dcn. Ronald J. Hebert
Br. Ray Hebert SC

Mar. 25 Rev. Mark B. Beard
Dcn. Clayton A. Hollier
Sr. Julie Kraemer CSJ

Mar. 26 Rev. Robert H. Berggreen
Dcn. George Hooper
Br. Dwight Kenney SC

Mar. 27 Rev. Donald V. Blanchard
Dcn. Micheal J. (Shelley) Joseph
Sr. Adele Lambert CSJ

Mar. 28 Rev. Jules A. Brunet
Dcn. John A. Jung Jr.
Br. Clifford King SC

Mar. 29 Rev. Richard O. Buhler SJ
Dcn. Robert J. Kusch
Sr. Frances Landry CSJ

Mar. 30 Rev. Gerald H. Burns
Dcn. Chris Landry
Br. David Landry SC

Mar. 31 Rev. Joseph M. Camilleri
Dcn. Albert Levy III
Sr. Rita Lanie FMOL

Walking the walk, in deeds and in truth

For five years, FG LA LLC sometimes known as Formosa has been working to bring a new industrial complex called The Sunshine Project to St. James Parish's West Bank. Our project, being constructed on the banks of the Mississippi River in an area specifically designated for industrial use, will have significant economic impacts locally and across Louisiana.

Once operational, the project is expected to generate \$33 million annually in state and local taxes. The total project investment is more than \$12 billion, creating 8,000 jobs during peak construction and 1,200 permanent jobs once operational. Local spending is estimated at \$500 million. This project is the largest economic generator in the area; products shipped per year from this facility will equal roughly \$5.6 billion, constituting 2% of Louisiana's entire volume of shipped products. This is a significant and necessary investment for St. James Parish, the river region and Louisiana.

The Sunshine Project will make building blocks found in everyday products that help make our lives safer, healthier, cleaner and more efficient. Things like car casings, infant seats, N95 medical masks and other supplies that improve and protect our health. Demand for these products is expected to increase over time, and our project will help meet that demand while upholding our commitment to operate safely and in a manner that protects employees, community and environment.

Shortly after announcing the project in April 2018, FG began reaching out to stakeholders and the local community. In June 2018, FG held an open house to seek input and answer questions and address concerns from residents. FG has worked diligently to keep the community informed and updated on project progress. We maintain open communication with local project stakeholders, parish residents, ministers, educators, workforce leaders and others to seek feedback and address questions and concerns as the project moves forward.

We designed our project with the safety of our employees and community in mind. FG's operational process will use the latest process technology that captures and reuses process materials to reduce emissions to the maximum extent possible. To address community concerns and as part of FG's land use ordinance with St. James Parish, FG will place air quality monitors along its eastern property boundary to provide data on air emissions. FG will also comply with multiple laws, regulations and permits designed to protect public health.

Opponents of our project have questioned FG's respect for cultural resources in the area. The fact is FG is now, and has always, been respectful of the remains dis-



Building Bridges

Janile Parks

covered on its property and is committed to the St. James community and to preserving its rich history and cultural resources. The company has taken great care to protect the only remains found at the Buena Vista site, located on the border of FG's property. FG properly and in a timely manner investigated and disclosed information about potential burial sites on the property.

In 2017, the same year it acquired the property, FG initiated an archaeological assessment. When FG learned of remains at the Buena Vista site through its own archaeological investigation, FG immediately coordinated with the appropriate authorities the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (Corps) archaeologists and at SHPO's direction, fenced in and protected the area within the boundary

of its property. FG's archaeologists identified through historic maps only two potential unmarked burial sites on the property. At one of these sites the Buena Vista site four sets of human remains were found. The second site was the Acadia site. After two rounds of investigation, no evidence of burials was found at the Acadia site. It is important to note that despite assertions made by outside groups about ancestral ties to the site, no archaeologist has been able to confirm the identity, ethnicity or race of the remains discovered on FG property.

FG is now, and has always been, fully transparent and fully cooperative with the St. James Parish Council and with all state and federal agencies, including those charged with oversight of cultural resources and burial sites. FG's archaeological investigations of the site have been transparent and are matters of public record, having been submitted to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ), and SHPO. Public comments about possible cemeteries and remains on the property were received as far back as December 2018 during the Corps and DNR public comment periods. When the land use approval was granted in January 2019, the St. James Parish council confirmed that the project met all requirements set forth in the land use ordinance. FG plans to construct the facility in accordance with all federal, state and parish regulatory, permit, and land use requirements.

FG has followed the law from day one with regard to The Sunshine Project. The land FG purchased St. James Parish had been used as agricultural fields for decades, if not a century. Those working against our project have referred to "other possible cemeteries" on the property, but these are anomalies like a tree, for example on historic aerial photographs that have never been shown on any historic map as a possible cemetery. They are simply anomalies, which are defined as anything inconsistent

with agricultural use. Moreover, as part of our diligence on the property and with oversight by the SHPO, we have done thousands of shovel tests on the property many of which were done in the areas of or near these claimed anomalies, and no remains have been found other than at the Buena Vista site. Rest assured, we will continue to invite and defend truth, convey project facts, respect cultural resources and embrace the spirit of community cooperation we all so desperately need right now.

FG's unwavering commitment to St. James Parish remains constant. We don't just talk about making a difference and supporting our neighbors, we are making a difference. In May 2018, we began investing in local initiatives that uphold our company pillars of education, health, safety and environment. Our community programs reflect needs expressed by residents, schools, churches, senior centers, businesses and others. In 2019, before construction even began on our new facility, FG's more than 20 active local programs impacted nearly 10,000 residents more than a third of the parish. FG recently completed needed roadwork in the parish at its own expense. We worked with local partners to design, construct and improve Louisiana Highway 3127 widening the roadway to four lanes, adding two new travel lanes and implementing drainage improvements. The company undertook this work voluntarily and employed local contractors and businesses to get it done.

In addition to hiring qualified local residents and businesses, FG is coordinating with education leaders to prepare the local workforce for future job opportunities with The Sunshine Project through creation of the FG Workforce Academy. Project jobs include operators, technicians, maintenance, administration and more. The academy will connect residents with resources to help them obtain the training, skills or education needed to work with the project.

Further, our "Think Local" policy solidifies our commitment to hire local residents and use local businesses as much as possible throughout construction and operation of The Sunshine Project. Currently, 93% of our construction workforce is from Louisiana, many local to the area. We hope our commitment and actions speak for themselves.

Throughout the development of The Sunshine Project, FG has listened to and invested in the community and found success through cooperation. Though there are some who may not appreciate the local benefits and investment this project will bring to families and communities in St. James Parish and throughout Louisiana, FG will continue to invite cooperation and truth as we listen to and work with the community to address real concerns.

Get the facts: SunshineProjectLA.com

PARKS is the Director of Community and Government Relations for Formosa.

DUCA ▼

From page 1

was developed using cell lines of illicit origin, while keeping in mind that everyone has the duty to make known their disagreement and to ask that their healthcare system make other types of vaccines available." Congregation for the

Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction (Dignitas Humanae), no. 35.

Given our present situation and the need to protect ourselves and one another from this virus, my guidance to the faithful of the Diocese of Baton Rouge is to accept as your first choices the vaccines created by Pfizer and Moderna, but if for any reasonable circumstance you

are only able to receive the vaccine from Johnson & Johnson, you should feel free to do so for your safety and for the common good. In addition, I have consulted with Catholic health care representatives, and I understand and appreciate their serious challenges as to the acquisition and equitable distribution of all three vaccines. I therefore support their policy

of administering any of the vaccines as circumstances require.

Again, as I have stated in my original letter to the Diocese, "I encourage all of the faithful of the Diocese of Baton Rouge to take this moral evaluation to heart as you make your decision to receive the coronavirus vaccinations as they become available."

WEDDING ▼

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parishioners.”

Ducote said that recent studies indicate that Catholic weddings have decreased by 60% since 1972. A poll conducted by CARA (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate) found that less than 20% of adult Catholics attend Mass once a week.

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, in their 2012 survey, found that the fastest growing denomination in the U.S. is made up of the “nones” that is, those who responded to the question about which religious denomination they belonged to answered, “none.”

“Some may argue that many young couples seek to be married in church simply because the church building provides a beautiful backdrop for their wedding

ceremony,” Ducote said. “In other words, they are coming for the setting rather than because of their strong conviction of faith. At the same time, we have to acknowledge that the Holy Spirit has played a role in bringing them to us.”

Therefore, he said, the church has an opportunity to take advantage of the presence of these young couples to instill or deepen their faith. It is also an opportunity to not only prepare them for married life, but to prepare them for discipleship.

Ducote is optimistic that expanding the opportunities for weddings in a Catholic church could lead to expanded opportunities for evangelization.

Father Jamin David, Episcopal Vicar for Strategic Planning, also noted that the bishop’s decision fits nicely into the overall plan to renew and revitalize dimensions of ecclesial life. He pointed out that the new legislation should not be

considered cumbersome for clergy, but that priests and deacons approached by the faithful should use prudential judgment to determine their own personal availability for a wedding date or location based upon the reality and limitations of their own ministry.

“This decision will create much dialogue between the church and young Catholics about more ways that we can exhibit flexibility and prove our desire to be a welcoming church simply by making the sacraments more readily available” said Father David.

CLASSIFIEDS

HELP WANTED

HELP WANTED

Diocese of Baton Rouge

Principal Opening

2021-22 School Year

St. Theresa of Avila School

(EA/EI Partnership)

Gonzales, Louisiana



St. Theresa of Avila School, currently serving 340 students in Grades 4 - 8, seeks a principal with a strong Catholic identity, commitment to growth, collaborative spirit, and strategic vision. With approximately 30 professional staff members on site, St. Theresa School is part of the East Ascension/East Iberville Partnership with St. John Primary School to serve families in the area. The Partnership serves the following church parishes in the area: St. Anne, St. Anthony, Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, St. Gabriel, St. John the Evangelist, St. Joseph, St. Mark, St. Stephen, and St. Theresa of Avila. St. Theresa School’s mission focuses on striving for spiritual growth and academic excellence.

St. Theresa is part of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, which has thirty schools in eight civil parishes and a strong Catholic identity as the focus in all schools. The district is nationally accredited through Cognia (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools), and standardized test scores are above state and national averages. Catholic schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge

Evangelize Hearts, Educate Minds, Encourage Talent, and Embrace the Future!

Applicants must meet the following criteria:

- Practicing Catholic
- Master’s Degree and able to meet La. Non-Public Requirements for Administration
- Five Years Minimum Experience in Education, Preferably in Catholic Schools
- Demonstrated Leadership Ability, Preferably in Catholic Education
- Must be Available on or before July 1, 2021

Mail resume, copies of all college transcript(s) showing degrees, and three letters of recommendation to

Catholic Schools Office

Attn: St. Theresa School (EA/EI Partnership) Principal

P.O. Box 2028

Baton Rouge, LA 70821-2028

Deadline for Application: March 15, 2021

The schools of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, admit students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at its schools. They do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national and ethnic origin in administration of educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school administered programs.



CATHOLIC DIOCESE
of
BATON ROUGE
Office of the Bishop

DECREE

Abrogation of the Particular Law Regarding Saturday Evening/Sunday Weddings in the Diocese of Baton Rouge

In the Name of God. Amen.

Whereas the Church exists on earth as a visible society, which must be well and lawfully ordered in order to manifest the Lord’s presence to the world effectively;

Whereas several members of the faithful and members the presbyterate of Baton Rouge have inquired whether some particular laws have become obsolete with the passage of time including the prohibition of weddings and convalidations on Sunday and holy days of obligation;

Whereas after consulting the Presbyteral Council of Baton Rouge and having received their counsel and recommendation they too agree with my decision to abrogate this diocesan statute currently in force; and

Whereas previous legislation in the Diocese of Baton Rouge prohibited weddings and convalidations on certain days and times;

I, the undersigned Bishop of Baton Rouge, conscious of my right and duty to exercise legislative power in the governance of the Church entrusted to me (cf. c. 391), hereby abrogate the following diocesan law as found in the *Pagella and Policies* of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, namely:

“In the Diocese of Baton Rouge, weddings and convalidations are not permitted on Sunday or on holy days of obligation. Neither are these, even without the nuptial Mass, permitted after 3:00 p.m. on Saturday or days preceding holy days of obligation.”

Pastors are now given the discretion in the Diocese of Baton Rouge to schedule weddings and convalidations on Saturday evenings, Sundays, or even on holy days of obligation, if necessary. Proper liturgical laws should be observed for any of these ritual celebrations.

I order the promulgation of this decree through its publication in *The Catholic Commentator*, upon which publication the decree will take immediate effect (cf. c. 8 §2).

Given at the Chancery of Baton Rouge on this 23rd day of February, in the year of our Lord 2021, the Memorial of St. Polycarp.

+ *Michael P. Duca*
Most Reverend Michael G. Duca
Bishop of Baton Rouge

Ann T. Boltin
Ann T. Boltin
Chancellor

P.O. Box 2028, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-2028 | 225-242-0247 | 225-336-8768 (Fax) | bishop@diobr.org

LCCB ▼

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conscience,” the bishops wrote in their Feb. 23 letter.

The pro-life Susan B. Anthony List called the bill a “Trojan horse” that upholds “a ‘right’ to abortion,” as it “equates abortion with pregnancy and childbirth.”

The president of a Catholic college also warned that, under the legislation, professors could be censored for teaching the truth about marriage and sexuality.

“It doesn’t ensure equality for our faculty, who would not be allowed to pro-

claim the truth about human dignity and sexuality,” Father Dave Pivonka TOR, president of the Franciscan University of Steubenville, said of the act.

President Joe Biden promised to sign the act within his first 100 days in office. The bill now moves to the Senate for consideration.

LCCB is asking those opposes to the legislation to click the link below and send a message: <https://www.votervoice.net/BroadcastLinks/2c6xORxNvJ-Zvc2ljDFnxw>.

(Catholic News Agency contributed to this report.)

ROSOANIRINA ▼

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On occasion Sister Alex invites young ladies to spend a month, three months or even six months at a time at sister’s community house in the Baton Rouge area. She said that experience is an excellent way for young women to decide if that is

their calling.

For Sister Alex, there is no doubt.

“I am always happy,” she said. “There is a challenge. But I have an understanding that wherever you are in life there is challenge. This is the choice I made; this is God calling me.

“And that’s the commitment of fidelity.”

Pope Francis meets Iraqi Catholics where 48 died

(CNA) – Pope Francis met Iraqi Catholic leaders in Baghdad on March 5, in a cathedral where 48 people were martyred during a 2010 terrorist attack.

The meeting with bishops, priests, religious, seminarians and lay catechists took place inside the Syriac Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Salvation.

The pope spoke to the church leaders on the first day of his historic three-day trip to Iraq, praising them for their faithful witness to Christ amid years of adversity.

“May your witness, matured through adversity and strengthened by the blood of martyrs, be a shining light in Iraq and beyond, in order to proclaim the greatness of the Lord and to make the spirit of this people rejoice in God our Savior,” he said.

Pope Francis was in Iraq March 5-8 on a trip intended to strengthen the hope of the country’s persecuted Christian minority and foster fraternity and interreligious dialogue.

On his flight from Rome to Baghdad, Pope Francis, the first pope in history to visit the Middle Eastern country, called the journey “emblematic” and said “it is a duty to the land that has been martyred

for so many years.”

After landing just before noon local time, he met with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi at the airport before visiting Iraqi President Barham Salih at the presidential palace, where he addressed civil authorities.

In the afternoon, Pope Francis met around 100 local Catholic leaders, including Syriac Catholic Patriarch Ignatius Joseph Younan and Chaldean Catholic Patriarch Louis Raphaël Sako, at the Syriac Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Salvation.

The cathedral, also known as Sayidat al-Nejat, was the site of a 2010 suicide attack by the Al Qaeda-affiliated Islamic State in Iraq.

At an evening Mass on Oct. 31, 2010, six terrorists entered and seized the church, killing two priests and taking more than 100 hostages. During the four-hour attack, the militants massacred the Christians inside the church, firing guns, tossing grenades and detonating explosives strapped to their chests.

Fifty-two people died before Iraq’s Counter-Terrorism Service stormed the church with the support of U.S. forces.

The attack at the Cathedral of Our

Lady of Salvation remains one of the single deadliest assaults against Christians in Iraq since the start of the war in 2003.

The beatification causes of the 48 Catholics who died inside the Cathedral of Our Lady of Salvation in 2010 advanced from the diocesan phase to the Vatican in October 2019.

When the cathedral was restored after the attack, a red carpet was placed down the center aisle in memory of the blood shed at the site.

In his speech in the cathedral on March 5, Pope Francis recalled the men and women who died in the attack more than 10 years ago.

“We are gathered in this Cathedral of Our Lady of Salvation, hallowed by the blood of our brothers and sisters who here paid the ultimate price of their fidelity to the Lord and his church,” he said. “May the memory of their sacrifice inspire us to renew our own trust in the power of the cross and its saving message of forgiveness, reconciliation and rebirth.”

Remembering all victims of violence and persecution, regardless of religion, he said that the deaths of the 48 servants of God killed in 2010 were “a powerful reminder that inciting war, hateful atti-

tudes, violence or the shedding of blood are incompatible with authentic religious teachings.”

“For Christians are called to bear witness to the love of Christ in every time and place,” he continued. “This is the Gospel that must be proclaimed and embodied in this beloved country as well.”

Pope Francis encouraged Iraqi clerics, religious and lay leaders in the “daunting pastoral challenges” they faced daily.

“All of you share in the joys and sufferings, the hopes and anxieties of Christ’s faithful,” he said.

Despite the additional difficulties caused by the pandemic, he said that what “must never be locked down or reduced, however, is our apostolic zeal, drawn in your case from ancient roots, from the unbroken presence of the church in these lands since earliest times.”

“Hardships are part of the daily experience of the Iraqi faithful,” the pope acknowledged.

He thanked the priests and bishops for being close to their people and being peacemakers.

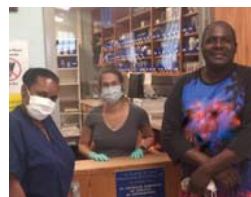
Pope Francis urged them to foster unity and fraternity among the different Christian churches in Iraq.

Two Ways You Can Help the Needy This Lenten Season!



much more than faceless numbers. They are people just like you and me, with one exception: They are sick and can’t afford their life-sustaining medications. We see the fear, the worried expressions and, quite often, the shame at having to ask for help. The St. Vincent de Paul Community Pharmacy isn’t about numbers; it’s about people helping people, and you don’t have to be a doctor or pharmacist to help fill a prescription. For so many, our pharmacy is the answer to their prayers.

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



During this ongoing pandemic, help us to save lives! WBRZ-Channel 2, Pat Shingleton, and the Baton Rouge Clinic have come together to ask you to fill a prescription for the needy. You can save someone’s life by filling out this form and mailing it in, or by making a gift online at svdpbr.org.



St. Vincent de Paul Community Pharmacy

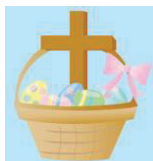
Any amount is a blessing! \$28 fills one prescription. How many can you fill?

Yes, I want to help! My name is: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

I am prescribing a financial gift of \$_____ to Fill a Prescription for the Needy. Take as many doses of God’s love as needed for a speedy recovery. (Cut out and send your gift to St. Vincent de Paul Community Pharmacy, P.O. Box 127, Baton Rouge, LA 70821.)

Build A Basket For Needy Kids



During this pandemic, families are struggling to survive, just paying the rent and putting food on the table is difficult. Needy children learn at an early age that there’s nothing in the budget for extras. Things like Easter baskets are luxuries their families simply cannot afford. Last year, our *Build a Basket* campaign was a tremendous success and reached so many children in need.

Join us in providing Easter baskets for hundreds of needy children. You can actually build a basket yourself or make a contribution to the effort online at www.svdpbr.org, and we will build it for you and give it to a needy or homeless child. This is a great project for church groups, schools and clubs. For more information, visit us at svdpbr.org or call us at (225) 383-7837. Bring Christ into the lives of those in need!

