Happy New Year!

The Catholic Lighthouse

The Cradle of Texas Immigration

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www.victoriadiocese.org

January 2023

March for Life happens Jan. 26

The annual Candlelight March for Life in Victoria, which has always taken place on the Thursday on or near the anniversary of the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision, happens on Jan. 26 this year.

This is the 36th year for the event, which begins at 6:30 p.m. at DeLeon Plaza. Once gathered, the group will pray and walk to Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Church for a presentation.

This year, Heather Gardner, executive director of the Central Texas Coalition for Life, will be the speaker.

Gardner holds a degree in sociology and is pursuing a certification in Theology of the Body. She began her pro-life work in college and now trains volunteers, including sidewalk advocates locally, nationally and internationally.

An internet profile of Gardner states, in her words, “We can look at our culture

The second annual Let’s Taco ’Bout Babies bingo night fundraiser will take place Feb. 23 at Club Western. Details will be coming soon to www.victoriagabrielproject.org.

The first event last year helped raise funds for mother and baby services provided in a 10-county area. Tickets purchased covered the taco bar meal, drinks and a set of bingo cards for the games.

The ministry considers this its largest fundraiser of the year. The Lighthouse will publish more details in the February edition.

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See March for Life, pg. 5

Save the date for Taco 'Bout Babies

JANET JONES
The Catholic Lighthouse

Crisis pregnancy ministries trying to bolster visibility, support

JANET JONES
The Catholic Lighthouse

When Roe v. Wade was struck down recently, pro-lifers rejoiced, but the backlash was ugly in some places in the U.S. where pro-life maternity centers were defaced or even destroyed.

Thankfully, the Diocese of Victoria has been spared those types of acts, but the pro-life workers here (and everywhere) know that victory was just one hurdle, albeit a big one, and now that it has been cleared, the work has just begun. Many have accused pro-lifers of caring only about babies being born, and not helping thereafter, yet there have been dedicated volunteers all along working to find solutions for mothers who need help.

And now that abortion has been curtailed somewhat, it may be time for more pro-life advocates to put their money or time where their mouths are. Or, in the spirit of the “Walking with Moms in Need” incentive promoted by the USCCB, start walking.

The Gabriel Project of the Crossroads is the main resource to support women in a crisis pregnancy, helping them bring their babies into the world joyfully, knowing that they have someone walking with them.

See Crisis pregnancy ministries, pg. 16

The three moms at the Bethlehem Maternity home hold their recently born babies. Each one found herself with no family support and in need of stable housing during their pregnancy. All have been working or pursuing their educations so they can have what they need to provide adequately for their families. (Janet Jones/The Catholic Lighthouse)
I’m keeping my eyes ‘fixed on the star’

By Bishop Brendan Cahill

As spiritually I’ve been trying to keep my eyes fixed on the star, the image of Mary as the Stella Maris keeps coming up. “Star of the Sea” is an ancient title of Mary – going back to the 400s. Back then, storms on the sea were particularly dangerous and frightening. Whatever storm we face, we can turn our eyes to Mary and trust in her motherly intercession. She always can bring us safely back to the 400s. Back then, storms on the sea were particularly dangerous and frightening. Whatever storm we face, we can turn our eyes to Mary and trust in her motherly intercession. She always can bring us safely back to her Son, Jesus.

I could go on for days offering gratitude. I’ll close this article with a thank you for all those across the diocese who are praying the Rosary regularly. Sometimes, when I arrive at a church early, I’ll hear the voices of the community praying a rosary – the voices united in prayer are deeply inspiring.

May God bless you and your families with love, peace and hope in this season, and may you especially know the tender love of her Son, Jesus.

Let’s keep each other in prayer.

+Brendan

U.S. votes against worldwide ban of death penalty

CAROL ZIMMERMANN
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — When the U.N. General Assembly passed a resolution Dec. 15 to establish a worldwide “moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty,” the United States continued its practice of voting against it.

The U.S. was joined by 36 other countries in opposing a resolution that comes up every two years. This year, 125 countries voted in favor of it and 22 countries did not vote. “It is past time that the U.S. join the supermajority of countries who vote in favor of a universal death penalty moratorium,” said Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy, executive director of Catholic Mobilizing Network, noting that overall support for this action has “grown consistently over the years.”

“Disappointingly, the U.S. retained its historical vote of ‘no,’” she said in an email to Catholic News Service.

“We have work to do in the United States,” she said, regarding the continued use of the death penalty amid calls to end capital punishment that reflect “a growing consensus -- not just among Catholics, but among all people of goodwill -- who recognize that capital punishment is irreparably broken.”

Vaillancourt Murphy pointed out that the Vatican “has long supported a U.N. death penalty moratorium.”

She said Pope Francis has consistently spoken about it and in September, he announced the global abolition of the death penalty as his official prayer intention for the month.
Mass and reception to celebrate consecrated life Feb. 5

World Day for Consecrated Life will be celebrated in the Church on Thursday, Feb. 2, and in parishes over the weekend of Feb. 4-5. Bishop Brendan Cahill will celebrate the 9 a.m. televised Mass at Our Lady of Victory Cathedral on Sunday, Feb. 5. That Mass will be followed by a reception at the Our Lady of Victory school cafeteria. Families, and especially young adults, are encouraged to attend both the Mass and reception.

In 1997, Pope Saint John Paul II instituted a day of prayer for women and men in consecrated life. This celebration is attached to the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord on Feb. 2.

This feast is also known as Candlemas Day, the day on which candles are blessed symbolizing Christ who is the light of the world. So too, those in consecrated life are called to reflect the light of Jesus Christ to all peoples.

The celebration of World Day for Consecrated Life is transferred to the following Sunday in order to highlight the gift of consecrated persons for the whole Church. We pray that many more women and men respond to the call to Consecrated Life.

Join in listening to Bishop Brendan Cahill every third Tuesday of the month at 6:30 a.m. on Relevant Radio Morning Air with John Morales. Listeners can call in with questions or comments. You can listen to past podcast online.

Relevant Radio® has been helping people bridge the gap between faith and everyday life through informative, entertaining, and interactive programming twenty-four hours per day, seven days per week. The Relevant Radio network is currently serving the Church with 127 stations reaching 39 states, with a potential listening audience of 133 million people. Programming can be heard worldwide via streaming audio at relevantradio.com and on the mobile app.

Visionary from Ecuador to visit El Campo church

EL CAMPO – Patricia Talbot of Cuenca, Ecuador, will speak after 6 p.m. Mass on Feb. 8 at St. Robert Bellarmine Catholic Church, 512 Tegner St. The talk will be for English and Spanish speakers.

Talbot will share “her experience of faith and the desire of the heart of Mary Mother Guardian of the Faith to live a life of true conversion,” according to an announcement sent from the church.

Talbot’s story of her encounter with the Blessed Virgin Mary is available online at www.piercedhearts.org.
Please remember in prayer the priests of the Diocese of Victoria, who were ordained during the month of January:

- Rev. Dominic Trung Nguyen 01/04/2003 Our Lady of Lavang Quasi Parish, Palacios
- Rev. Nelson Gonzalez-Nieto 01/23/2004 St. Anthony Church, Columbus
- Rev. Richard Barfield 01/08/2022 Our Lady of the Gulf Church, Port Lavaca
- Rev. Tran Dinh 01/08/2022 St. Mary Church, Victoria

“Let us pray for more vocations to the priesthood”

Please remember in prayer the priests of the Diocese of Victoria, who died during the month of January:

- Rev. Wolfgang Mimms, O.Ss.T. 01/02/2008
- Rev. Jerome Stryk 01/05/1999
- Rev. Msgr. Gino Bernasconi 01/31/2006

For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s. (Romans 14:8)
Robert and Bernie Seale are two of Victoria’s faithful pro-life advocates who are part of the Society of Saint Gianna, a group with a mission to “promote holiness in the family and respect for the sanctity of all human life.”

In October they attended an Alliance for Life meeting in Austin to discuss pro-life priorities now that Roe v. Wade has been overturned. Robert said he believes the focus now needs to be on adoption and making it more feasible for mothers in crisis pregnancies and families who are waiting to adopt babies.

The Seales have been involved in organizing the Candlelight March for Life in Victoria, which takes place Jan. 26 this year. Ending Roe v. Wade has been the top of the prayer list for the 35 walks that have come before. That goal has been met, but the need to convert hearts and minds is as big as ever.

“They are still allowing abortion. It probably won’t ever go away completely,” said Robert. He added that abortion centers also can distribute pills that end pregnancies and will help women seek abortions in other states with more liberal laws.

Bernie and Robert say it is going to be important for pro-life advocates to support pro-life ministries. “We need to keep that presence,” continue spreading a pro-life message and backing it up with the science of reproduction, Bernie said.

Lisa Hudson, director of the Bethlehem Home for mothers in crisis pregnancies, knows all about being in a crisis pregnancy. She said she was pregnant as a teenager and could not fathom bringing her baby into the abusive environment she grew up in. She managed to find her way to a pregnancy center that helped arrange adoptions. She gave birth to a healthy boy who was adopted by a loving couple.

When that baby grew up, they eventually met, she said, and her biological son and his adoptive parents expressed how grateful they were that she chose to give him life and the chance to grow up in a loving home.

She said she was grateful for the adoptive parents who made it possible for her to bring a new life into the world and love that child enough to give him a better life than she could have provided as a teenager.

Now, in her current role at the Bethlehem Home, she can use the insights from her experience to help other young women who need someone to walk with them as they prepare to bring new life into the world.

According to Amy O’Donnell, communications director for the Texas Alliance for Life said Texas Legislators have “done a lot to help women in our state” by supporting maternity resources. She said about half of the births in Texas are covered by Medicaid, and the state has put $100 million in its Alternatives to Abortion Program. Part of that does go to promoting adoption, but that’s just a small part of the work they are doing.

“Going forward, we need to keep educating,” O’Donnell said, holding on to the gains made and energize pro-lifers to keep working to save lives.

Resources:
www.walkingwithmoms.com
www.texasallianceforlife.org
www.respectlife.org

A Prayer for Pregnant Mothers

O Blessed Mother, you received the good news of the incarnation of Christ, your Son, with faith and trust. Grant your protection to all pregnant mothers facing difficulties.

Guide us as we strive to make our parish communities places of welcome and assistance for mothers in need. Help us become instruments of God’s love and compassion.

Mary, Mother of the Church, graciously help us build a culture of life and a civilization of love, together with all people of good will, to the praise and glory of God, the Creator and lover of life. Amen.

Prayer cards can be ordered through www.walkingwithmoms.org, or you can print the prayers from a downloadable PDF.

March for Life happens Jan. 26

Continued from pg. 1

over the last 60 years or so and see that abortion does not solve any of the social problems we have, but rather it only ensues them. It’s like adding gasoline to the fire. There are numerous abortion doctors, abortion clinic workers, and radical pro-choice advocates that have had the shields removed from their eyes and have become pro-life (Dr. Bernard Nathanson, Abby Johnson, Star Parker, to name a few). We can learn (and we have learned) so much from their perspective! The pro-life movement is only growing stronger (by the Grace of God!), and we see a constant shift in pro-choice arguments and “logic” all the time. As science becomes more and more advanced, abortion advocates’ arguments crumble. When you follow pro-choice rhetoric through, it is obvious that there is no sensible basis for it. … For anyone reading this, do not wait any longer to take action and be a voice for the voiceless. We are living in a modern-day holocaust, and it is only when God’s people rise up that we are able to end the injustice. We must honor and respect the dignity of every human life, and we must respond out of love and humility. We must pray, unceasingly. God be with all of us!”

On the following Saturday, Jan. 28, a Lavaca County Rise Up For Life rally will take place starting at the post office in Hallettsville and process to the courthouse. It begins at 8:30 a.m. Organizations and individuals are asked to bring their signs and lawn chairs for the assembly at the courthouse. More information about the pro-life efforts in Lavaca County can be found at www.facebook.com/RiseUp4LifeLavaca.

Crisis Pregnancy Ministry

Providing help, hope & healing to pregnant women in a crisis pregnancy

20th Anniversary & now serving 10 counties!

Offering:
+ Mother/Baby Services
+ Bethlehem Maternity Home

The Gabriel Project

To learn more visit: victoriagabrielproject.org
(361) 576-1156

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Members of Beta Sigma Phi Sorority Laureate Theta Epsilon 2497 of Part Lavaca donated to the Bethlehem Maternity Home funds raised by sorority members at the Calhoun County Fair in October. From left are Fred and Barbara Williams of the Gabriel Project, Lisa Howard, Bethlehem Home director; Barbara Koldzgie, sorority chapter president; Nancy Thompson, Calhoun County Gabriel Project coordinator; Frances Aviles, sorority chapter recording secretary; and Linda Palmer, Gabriel Project’s new executive director. (Contributed Photo)
KJT gives to IWBS
VICTORIA – KJT Society No. 115 officers presented a check to the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament Sisters for their medical needs and future sisters in training. Presenting the check are, from left, Robert Stryk, KJT secretary, Donald Dusek, KJT president, Sister Kathleen Goike, Sister Stephana Marbach and Joe Pustka, KJT treasurer. (Contributed Photo)

Seeing climate change through a faith lens

EDITOR’S NOTE: Sister Marian Sturm, IWBS, guest columnist to The Catholic Lighthouse, has written a series of articles on climate change. This is the first in the series that will appear monthly. Contact Sister Marian at maristurm@yahoo.com.

Having been a biology teacher, studying the origin of the universe, its processes and shape, along with being a theology teacher, believing in God as the Creator of the universe, these two disciplines complemented each other for me.

Prior to Copernicus and Galileo, little attention was given to science. Christians thought the earth was the center of the universe, while God dwelt above in heaven with earth and hell below. However, after Copernicus, and the discovery of more galaxies, scientists saw that humans are only a small part of a much bigger ecosystem and universe. At that point, religion and science largely took separate directions. Accepting the truth of science meant rejecting the truth of God for many people. Only later were many religious scientists throughout the ages appreciated. Beatrice Bruteau (1930–2014) wrote: “We need a new theology of the cosmos, one that is grounded in the best science of our day . . . so that all the world turns sacred again . . . ”

For this reason, and because my interest blossomed as a result of participating in a spiritual program called JustFaith, I am concerned about what is happening to our natural environment or God’s creation. Today, a growing number of people are beginning to articulate how science and faith can be reconciled. Various Christian denominations have recognized publicly that climate change is a fact and serious change is needed in our relationship with the environment. Faith and conscience to be faithful stewards of creation have come from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (1993), the United Church of Christ (2007), the Southern Baptist Convention (2016), the United Methodist Church (2016), the Presbyterian Church (USA) (2016), the Quakers (2017) and the American Baptist Churches USA (2018). The Catholic tradition has published several statements. Among them is Laudato Si (2015), on the environment and human ecology, linking the care of the environment to stewardship and social justice. Earlier, the World Day of Peace Message #15 (1990) stated, “Christians, in particular, realize that their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith.” Statements from the Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu traditions exist as well. In 1992, Interfaith Power and Light, was founded by an Episcopal priest, the Rev. Sally Bingham. Its membership consists of Protestant ministers, Episcopal and Catholic priests, Jewish rabbis, Muslim imams, Evangelicals, Mormons and Hindus. This group inspires and mobilizes people of faith and conscience to be faithful stewards of creation. They aim to protect the earth’s ecosystems, safeguard the health of all creation, ensure sustainable energy for all and support changes in environmental public policy. They are connected to 14,000 houses of worship in 40 states, including Texas. All these churches and faith traditions identify climate change as taking place in the U.S. and the world. As people of faith, they desire to make a difference in caring for the life of the earth. In following articles, I want to continue to explore the biblical notion of stewardship regarding climate change and our challenge to become stewards of God’s creation individually and in community.

KC's give to Gabriel Project
HALLETTSVILLE — Grand Knight Rick Steffek along with other members of the Hallettsville Knights of Columbus Council present a check for $6,500 to Gabriel Project representatives Linda Palmer and Barbara Williams. This money was raised from generous membership donations in conjunction with the council’s baby bottle campaign, which began in September. The council officers are the Rev. Monsignor John Peters, chaplain; Grand Knight Rick Steffek; Tommy Grahmann Jr., Jim Bujnoch, Dale Sykora, Mike Wick, Frank Chovanetz, John Henke, Jed Henke, Chase Svetlik, Jason Haas, Phillip Steffek, Dave Halata and Chuck Pavliska. (Contributed Photo)

Catholic Daughters donate
Linda Palmer, executive director of the Gabriel Project of the Crossroads, left, receives a donation from Jocelyn Kozelsky of the Edna Catholic Daughters of the Americas. (Contributed Photo)

Lunch with the judge
BAY CITY — Six students from Holy Cross Catholic School were honored recently by Bay City Municipal Judge Suzan Thompson. “Lunch with the Judge” was the prize for winning a coloring contest that the Municipal Building staff put together in November. (Contributed Photo)
EDITOR’S NOTE: The following sermon was written for the third Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle A, and Father Kram titled it, “Christian Service.”

The world is full of places and people dedicated to serving others. There are service stations for our cars, hospitals and clinics for our health care, political institutions for public service and many more. All of these require people willing to serve.

Where Jesus is concerned, his own special purpose was to serve. In the modern world, too, there are many opportunities for us, his followers, to serve.

When discussing Christian service, we tend to think mostly of the things we do in church. Of course there are now many opportunities for the average Catholic to take a direct part in Church work, such as distributing Holy Communion, reading at Mass, teaching CCD, and such things as that, but we usually overlook the fact that many of the ordinary things we do every day can be made into a fine way of Christian service to others.

Suppose you are a child and your mother is tired after supper. Surprise her by leaving the TV and offering to clear the table and do the dishes. Why wait to be asked or told? You could consider doing favors for family members as your special home ministry.

Or suppose a brother or sister or classmate of yours is doing poorly in school. Studying with him and encouraging him can be a loving Christian service.

If you are a teenager or young adult, how about helping others to resist peer pressure. Take a firm stand for self-discipline and good moral values. You will be teased and criticized, but you are the one to whom others will later come for support: “I’m in trouble; please help me.”

Good examples and strong moral principles can go a long way in serving others.

In the adult world, also, there are many ways to serve. Of course, there are endless opportunities around the family and the home, and this can be a full-time job off the job, but there are also many fine opportunities on the job.

For example, a man who is supervisor at a large company recently told me that, where he works, there are too many goof-offs who, once they get on the payroll, can’t be counted on. On the job, resisting the pressure to loaf or to steal from the company can be a fine workmen’s ministry.

And at election time, encouraging others to vote and helping them to get to the polls or to vote absentee can be a patriotic and Christian thing to do.

It is said that virtue is its own reward. Of course it is true that the warm feeling of satisfaction in having done something worthwhile makes us want to do more, but it goes much further than that. Once we have crossed over into eternity, we will see very clearly how far a lifetime of serving others has brought us.

Jesus taught that those who aspire after greatness in his kingdom must serve the needs of all. We Christians serve, not to achieve rank and recognition for ourselves, but to promote the good of others. We strive to serve with love and with a personal touch.

Something that Sister Anthony taught us as juniors and seniors 50 years ago still sticks with me today: She encouraged the personal touch by teaching us to dedicate our individual good deeds to Jesus by saying, “This is for you, Jesus.” This is a way to give every little thing a purpose.

So often we base our decisions about what to do and what to avoid on the question, “Is it a sin or not?” A much better attitude for us as servants of the Lord Jesus would be, “What would he want me to do?” It’s like saying on the one hand, “Do I have to?” and on the other, “What else do you have for me to do?”

According to the scriptural account of the last judgment, we will all be judged on how well we have served our neighbor. For in serving our neighbor, we serve Christ.

As in everything else, repetition builds habits, and serving others can become the most Christian habit of all.

Lord Jesus, thank you for coming to serve and for showing us how. Help us to remain always faithful in serving you. Grant that our example of service may inspire many others to do the same. Amen.

OPEN HOUSE

Sunday, January 22, 2023 • 1:30 p.m. Cathedral Center
RSVP: ourladyvictory.org • 361-575-5391

Discover QLV School

Our Lady of Victory Catholic School • Pre-K3 through 8th grade

TV Mass support

VICTORIA — KJT St. Joseph Society No. 115 officers present a donation for the TV Mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Victory in Victoria. From left are Joe Pustka, KJT treasurer; the Very Rev. Kirby Hlavaty, pastor/rector of Our Lady of Victory; Donald Dusek, KJT president; and Robert Stryk, KJT secretary. (Contributed Photo)
Spreading Christmas joy
PORT LAVACA — Rhonda Cummins, who operates the Point Comfort Seafarers Center as part of the Apostleship of the Sea, far left in back, receives gifts gathered by the Our Lady of the Gulf Student Council. Those gifts, along with hundreds of others collected for the seafarer’s ministry will be given to the crew members of ships stopping at our port during the Christmas season. The Christmas at Sea project is to show appreciation to the seafarers who often spend many months away from their families and to let them know they are not forgotten.  (Contributed Photo)

Bishop Brendan Cahill, Sister Rosario Resendez, IWBS, and others helped load 120 beautiful gifts for the seafarers. The Chancery Office was one of the many drop off locations this year. In total there was nearly 1,100 gifts collected.  (Contributed Photo)

Journeys of Faith with Ceci
WEIMAR — James Janda, right, was named the Weimar Knights of Columbus Council 2152 “Knight of the Year” for 2022-23 in recognition of outstanding service, loyalty and devotion the Weimar Knights of Columbus. Delphin Bartek, Grand Knight, is pictured with him.  (Contributed Photo)

WEIMAR — Eugene Kainer, an Honorary Life Member of the Knights of Columbus, recently celebrated his 88 birthday with his family. They presented him a new Weimar Knights of Columbus cap and on behalf of Weimar Council 2153 his 50-year service pin.  (Contributed Photo)

Join us on a journey to Italy with Father Gabriel Bentil September 1 - 10, 2023
Join Father Gabriel Bentil on an Italy Pilgrimage that starts in Assisi, home of St. Francis and St. Claire, Cascia and view the incorrupt body of St. Rita, Saint of Impossible Causes, the Holy House of Blessed Mother in Loreto, the beautiful town of Siena where we see the relics of St. Catherine, Orvieto to see the Eucharistic Miracle of Bolsena in the beautiful Cathedral, and ROME, where we attend the Papal Audience, tour the four Basilicas, the Colosseum and have a free day to explore on your own!  Registration online (or by paper form) is open!

Holy Land Pilgrimage with Father Oscar Amos November 10-20, 2023
Pilgrimage to the Holy Land is an experience of a lifetime! Can you imagine walking in the footsteps of Our Lord…to see and touch the places of His birth, life and death? How will you feel as you walk the road of His passion to the place of His resurrection? Join us and see the Gospels come to life!  Registration online (or by paper form) is open!

Save the Date!
Pilgrimage to Mexico City with Bishop Cahill, October 24 -30, 2023. Details coming in January!

Information and online fliers are found at www.selectinternationaltours.com or contact me at ceci.triska@gmail.com and I will email it to you
The ending of the Mass is just the beginning

At Your Service

By Deacon Michael Tamberley

“This reflection is being written at the end of one calendar year but will be published (and hopefully read) in the beginning of a new year. It has a “goodbye” quality … a sense of “stop and start.” The timing is appropriate since this last installment in this series on the liturgy of the Mass focuses on the Concluding Rites, which themselves finish and begin.

It is unfortunate that these rites (the greeting of the priest, the final blessing and the dismissal) are often given little regard. Even worse, they might be avoided altogether by leaving Mass after receiving communion. Despite the few words (36 at most) and the less than 30 seconds it takes to say them, the Concluding Rites deliver a rich message: they announce the end of Christ’s actions in the liturgy of the Mass, but also pronounce the start of our Christ-like actions of charity and service.

In this series, I have attempted to reveal the manner in which the liturgy of the Mass provides the pattern for our Christian lives. Woven throughout the fabric of our sacred liturgy are the invitations and the opportunities from God to share in His divine life, to enter into a relationship of receiving, responding, and returning and to participate in His plan for our salvation and the salvation of others. The Concluding Rites -- the overlooked treasure of the Mass -- speaks to these themes, beginning with the priest’s greeting:

“THE LORD BE WITH YOU.”

This is not an everyday greeting of “hello” or “good morning” dressed up in biblical words. This liturgical greeting confirms the presence of God that has biblical roots in both the old and new testaments. This phrase is offered four times during Mass: in the introductory rites, before the proclamation of the gospel, before the preface of the Eucharistic Prayer and in the Concluding Rites. With the words “The Lord be with you,” the priest (or deacon at the gospel) is reminding us that the dynamic activity of God’s spirit is at work in the present as He was when He spoke to Moses (Exodus 3:12), and to Moses’ successor Joshua (Joshua 1:5; 3:7), saying, “I shall be with you.”

As our Holy Mother was assured by the words of the angel Gabriel, “The Lord be (is) with you,” (Luke 1:28), so too, we are assured. We are receiving the same message that Jesus spoke to His disciples in Galilee: “… and, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20) The words in this liturgical greeting are not the words of wish but of divine promise -- the promise of God’s continued presence in our lives.

In the midst of His presence, we are now prepared for the final blessing:


Two things of note regarding this blessing:

1. The priest is not asking for or wishing that God bless His people. He is effectively transmitting the blessing of Christ, as Christ in persona Christi. In other words, if you are properly disposed, you can be confident that you ARE receiving the graces of God’s blessing.

2. This blessing is not a reward for attending the Mass. It is not a grace granted for what we have done, but a grace that prepares us for what we are to do. That directive comes in the words of dismissal:

“GO IN PEACE, GLORIFYING THE LORD BY YOUR LIFE.”

There are four optional phrases of dismissal. None are simple refrains akin to “Have a nice day,” or “Thanks for coming, we’ll see you next time.” The very nature of the dismissal and the words used in it are packed with significance. In fact, the dismissal gives the liturgy its name. The word “Mass” comes from the Latin word, missa. At one time, the people were dismissed with the words “Ite, missa est,” roughly meaning “Go, she -- meaning you, the Church -- has been sent.” This word, missa, is also related to the word “missio,” the root of the English word “mission.” In other words, the very name for the Mass is tied to the fact that, at the end, you and I are sent forth on a mission.

This dismissal is an invitation (and our calling) to participate in the divine economy of salvation in that we receive our identity and our commission as disciples: “Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:15)

After Jesus turned the few fish and loaves into more than enough to feed the 5,000, he did not wave his hands to place the food before each of the hungry (as he certainly could have); instead, “… he gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people.” Likewise, after we are fed from the altars of the Word and of the Eucharist at Mass, we are to take that food out into the world “to distribute to the people.” When we do so, we find ourselves encountering Christ in those we served. Changed by those encounters, we return to another Mass to be fed and nourished again … and sent on mission again … over and over until one day we might all be in attendance at the wedding feast of the Lamb.

The liturgy of the Mass is intimately united to our Christian life; to our identity as children of God; to our mission as disciples. We are not offered the body of Christ to dine alone. We are fed so that we can feed others. We are dismissed from one liturgy, the liturgy of the Mass inside the building, so that we can begin another liturgy, the liturgy of love outside the building.

So, when we hear the words of dismissal, “Go in peace glorifying the Lord by your life,” may we be mindful to hear them not simply as words of conclusion that permit us to leave Mass; rather, may we hear them as words of initiation that send us on our mission.
The Epiphany, also known as Three Kings Day, is celebrated on Jan. 6 around the world. It is the day in the Christmas story where we celebrate how a star led the Magi also called the three wise men to visit the baby Jesus after He was born. The word epiphany also means a moment of sudden revelation or insight. In this case, Jesus was revealed as the Christ to the Magi.

The Magi were people of intense study. After all, they were called “wise men” for a reason. They had to spend a lot of time studying the skies and studying written texts to know what the star meant when it appeared. When I think of the word epiphany, I also think of the word discernment.

Many times when we hear the word discernment we think of vocations. Discerning if one should enter the priesthood or religious life, get married or live the single life. Discernment is really the ability to judge well, and we can use that in all stages of our life. The Magi had to discern making the trip when they saw the star. They had to discern the gifts they would take to this newborn king. They had to discern listening to the warning that came in the form of a dream telling them not to go back to King Herod but instead return home a different way.

I believe in the tradition of our faith; discernment requires a lot of prayer. Usually in January, what we hear or read a lot on social media is all the New Year’s resolutions people start making. I knew there would be a lot expected from me and there would be a change in the dynamics of my full-time ministry, as I would have to leave half a day on the Friday of the weekend I would be out. I also had to see if this was something I was being called to. When I mentioned it to several people, I got nothing but support. Then I prayed about it, because I needed to know if this was what God wanted me to do.

I define discernment as holding onto God’s hand and allowing Him to lead me to where He wants me to go without resisting or trying to force Him to go another way. I have come to believe that if I allow myself to be docile in the hand of God, my life goes much smoother than when I try to pull Him to where I want to go. Obviously I cannot force God to go where I want Him to go, so what happens when I am stubborn enough to do it my way? I let go of His hand and head off in that direction. What happens after that? I usually end up either flat on my face or sinking in a sea of overwhelmness, and He has to come and show me that His hand is still there outstretched waiting for me to take it again.

While I was praying whether or not to enter this program I had several people come ask me to be their spiritual director because they thought I was one already. When I told them I was just about to begin taking the courses, they asked me to remember them when I begin to accept directees. I took that as a nod from God to enter the program. I am now in my second year. We recently had a retreat on discernment for us to decide if we wanted to remain in the program. What I’m trying to convey is that there is always something to discern. Always something that we should take to prayer.

Maybe what we are discerning is whether...
The wise men’s journey is an example for our Eucharistic Revival

By Very Rev. Jacob Koether

To what lengths are you willing to go to worship Jesus? This question is put before us this month as we celebrate one of the biggest feasts after Christmas – Epiphany.

As a child, the thing I remember the most about Epiphany was the decorations – the little statues of the three wise men who were moved through the church sanctuary during the days after Christmas to signify their journey to the location of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem at the Nativity scene.

I would wonder, “Who were the magi from the East? How long was their journey? What did they experience along the way? What did they leave behind? What was it like to finally arrive at their destination?”

This year I’m thinking of it in another way: As we implement the National Eucharistic Revival, how can the magi teach us to grow in our devotion to the Eucharist? Or, like I posed above, to what lengths are we willing to go to worship Jesus?

Just to give a bit of background, last June on the feast of Corpus Christi, or the Body and Blood of Christ, the United States bishops launched a multi-year Eucharistic Revival to be completed with a National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis in 2024 and a Year of Mission lasting until 2025.

Why?

Because they acknowledged what many of us have seen for a long time, namely, that our friends, family members, parishioners, church leaders, politicians, an alarmingly large number of young people, and, if we’re honest, we ourselves are lacking in faith in the Eucharist. To address these issues, the bishops are encouraging increased Eucharistic devotion through personal conversion, catechetical efforts, renewed commitments to evangelization and service and a rediscovery of traditional Eucharistic devotional practices.

The hope is that renewal in the Church’s Eucharistic spirituality will mean a renewal in the Church’s explicit commitment to Christ and lead to a broader revival in faith in our nation and beyond.

So, what do the wise men teach us about the Eucharist in the feast of the Epiphany? For me, I see them illustrating for us the lengths we should be willing to go for worship. The magi, scholars suggest, were astronomers from the area of modern-day Iran who most likely were aware of a little-known prophecy that was first proclaimed in the time of Moses and circulated in the East: “I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not near: A star shall appear from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel. . .” (Numbers 24:17).

Recognizing the possibility of this prophecy’s fulfillment, they began a 1,500-mile trek to do homage to the new king. Imagine how disrupted their lives had to have been. Their normal routine, their jobs, time, money, family, friends, recreation -- everything was made second to their trip.

Imagine the risk and dangers they would have faced in the weeks and weeks of journeying on foot – bandits, wild animals, the challenges of finding food and water. Imagine the intense focus of their commitment to keep moving forward and the deep level of trust in God that would have been necessary.

Why did they do all of this? Because they wanted to worship and adore Jesus. It must have been important to them.

Is worship and adoration of Jesus that important to us?

In every Mass, we are invited to relive (in a much simpler form, of course) the magi’s journey to give up regular routines, to trust God, to sacrifice, to humble ourselves and to worship. We’re also challenged to believe that the One we journeied for is who He says He is. I wonder if, when the magi finally arrived in Bethlehem, they would have been surprised to find a normal looking child in a manger surrounded by a poor family in humble conditions. Is this the Almighty Lord that was prophesied? We could ask ourselves a similar question when gazing on the humble consecrated bread or participating in a Mass in a humble church that can only provide seemingly poor-quality worship. Is the Almighty actually in this place? Is He actually in that host?

The wise men’s actions tell us how we should answer those questions: “They prostrated themselves and did him homage. [T]hey opened their treasures and offered him gifts. … [and then] they departed for their country by another way.”

Safe Environment

Reporting Procedures for Suspected or Known Sexual Abuse of a Minor (person under 18 years of age) or Vulnerable Adult by a Member of the Clergy

Contact:
- The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, within 48 hours, at (800) 252-5400, www.txabushotline.org, or local police department.
  If person is in immediate danger call 911.

and

- Shannon Thomas, LMSW, Coordinator of Pastoral Care and Outreach, Diocese of Victoria, (361) 827-7186, pastoralcare@victoriadiocese.org.

or

- Bishop or Chancellor of the Diocese of Victoria, (361) 573-0828

Written allegations can be mailed marked “Personal and Confidential” to: Office of the Bishop P.O. Box 4070 Victoria, TX 77903

If sexual abuse by a member of clergy has occurred in another diocese, the Diocese of Victoria will help bring your concerns to church officials. For assistance contact Shannon Thomas at (361) 827-7186 or pastoralcare@victoriadiocese.org.
Mis ojos están fijos en la estrella

Queridos hermanos y hermanas,

El año pasado celebré Misa en la Catedral en la Fiesta de la Epifanía. Algo de la homilía que dio el padre Kirby Hlavaty ese día se quedó conmigo durante todo el año y hasta hoy. Si no recuerdo mal, me ofreció la imagen para mantener mis ojos enfocados en la estrella para llevarme a Jesús. Es posible que haya tenido una experiencia como esta antes.

No estoy seguro de que eso sea exactamente lo que dijo el Padre Kirby, pero es lo que escuché en mi corazón y me ha dado mucha esperanza en el último año.

Ahora que comenzamos un nuevo año, doy gracias a Dios por los sacerdotes que ofrecen los sacramentos y celebran la Misa en nuestra diócesis todos los días. Incluso durante los pores días de COVID, cuando me sentí confundido y en conflicto con tanta información, sabía que había sacerdotes en nuestra área ofreciendo el sacrificio por el perdón de nuestros pecados y estando tan presente para la gente como les permitía.

Doy gracias a Dios por las religiosas de nuestra diócesis que son testigos de la luz de Cristo en su servicio de enseñanza, edificación y sanación. He sido muy bendecido de poder celebrar Misa y visitar diferentes conventos en nuestra diócesis cada mes. Compartir las comidas con las Hermanas jubiladas ilumina especialmente el día con la fuerza de su Espíritu.

En las páginas del Catholic Lighthouse, durante el año pasado y ahora en 2023, he podido leer y ver el trabajo de tantas personas llevando la luz de Cristo a situaciones muy difíciles. En las prisiones, en la frontera, en los barcos con personas sin hogar, estamos allí con la luz de la esperanza en los desafíos que enfrenta la gente. Nuestros diáconos han estado presentes con nosotros en cada una de estas circunstancias, cumpliendo el antiguo llamado a ser testigos de servicio y caridad pastoral.

En este número, destacaremos nuestra presencia en las familias jóvenes que necesitan asistencia, literalmente ofreciendo espacio en nuestro lugar para que las madres puedan dar a luz y criar a sus hijos. Todas las personas que apoyan el Proyecto Gabriel traen la luz de Jesús y ayudan a otros a saber que Jesús escucha y se preocupa.

Mientras espiritualmente he estado tratando de mantener mis ojos fijos en la estrella, la imagen de María como Stella Maris sigue apareciendo. “Estrella del mar” es un título antiguo de María, que se remonta a los años 400. En aquel entonces, las tormentas en el mar eran particularmente peligrosas y aterradoras. Sea cual sea la tormenta a la que nos enfrentemos, podemos volver la mirada a María y confiar en su intercesión maternal. Ella siempre puede llevarnos a salvo a su Hijo, Jesús.

Podría seguir durante días ofreciendo gratitud. Cerraré este artículo con un agraciamiento a todos aquellos en la diócesis que rezan el rosario con regularidad. A veces, cuando llego temprano a una iglesia, escucho las voces de la comunidad rezando el rosario; las voces unidas en oración son profundamente inspiradoras.

Que Dios los bendiga a ustedes y a sus familias con amor, paz y esperanza en esta temporada, y que en especial conozcan el tierno amor de Jesús por ustedes en cada momento de la vida. Mantengámonos unos a otros en oración.

+Brendan

La Eucaristía debe ser signo de comunión

PADRE NELSON GONZALES
Especial para The Catholic Lighthouse

Desde los comienzos de la vida cristiana en los encuentros en torno a la eucaristía, se ha dado la dificultad para dar razón de lo que se celebra. En el entorno de la celebración de la “cena del Señor” San Pablo se encontró en Corinto con una comunidad dividida entre los pudientes de la comunidad que se emborrachan por llegar primero; mientras que los pobres, por compromisos temporales llegaban tarde quedándose sin cenar.

La inequidad de la sociedad hacía estragos en la Eucaristía, Pablo les dijo: “Porque cada uno se adelanta a consumir su propia cena y mientras uno pasa hambre, otro se emborracha. ¿No tienen sus casas para comer y beber? ¿Qué puedo decirles?, ¿voy a alabarlos?; en esto no. Porque yo recibí del Señor lo que les transmití: que el Señor, la noche que era entregado, tomó pan, dando gracias lo partió y dijo: Esto es mi cuerpo que se entrega por ustedes. Hagan esto en memoria mía. Y así, siempre que coman este pan y beban esta copa, proclamarán la muerte del Señor, hasta que vuelva (1 Cor 11:20-26).

En el ámbito de la nutrición hay una cierta jerarquía vital porque el vegetal asimila al mineral, las plantas al agua y las sales; los animales se nutren de los vegetales; con Cristo y por consiguiente entre nosotros. Una dimensión más profunda de comunión se da con el alimento que nos nutre, porque la comida llega a ser carne de nuestra carne y sangre de nuestra sangre. ¿Y qué ocurre en la eucaristía eucarística? Jesús dice: “Yo soy el pan vivo que ha bajado del cielo … mi carne es verdadera comida … el que come este pan vivirá para siempre”.

No podemos hacer comunión con Cristo si hay división entre nosotros: “El pan es uno, y así nosotros, aunque somos muchos, formamos un solo cuerpo, porque comemos todos del mismo pan”. “Si yo me dedico a los pobres y los atiendo, es porque acabo de comulgar”, decía la madre Teresa de Calcuta.

Se vive biológicamente de comer y beber; se vive humanamente de comer y beber en comunidad; se vive como cristiano de recordar comer y beber como lo hizo Jesús en la multiplicación de los panes; la multiplicación de los panes, es un signo de compasión humana y solidaridad, para realizar este milagro Jesús entrega a los discípulos, Iglesia, lo que había, pidiéndoles que primero organizaran a la gente en grupos y sentados en el prado; dando como resultado que se saciaron todos y sobraron doce canastos, pidiendo que no se fueran a perder.

Donde no hay solidaridad abunda la inequidad, pero donde existe la solidaridad sobra y lo que se arruina es la inequidad para con los pobres de la menta, donde existe la solidaridad sobran doce canastos, pidiendo que no se fueran a perder.

En la narración humana el amor se llama perdón, hasta con lo mínimo que son las excusas para mantener la comunión; nunca por ser diferentes nos podemos tratar como enemigos.

Que la Eucaristía nos una en todo momento en comunión más sólida con Cristo y nuestros hermanos. * Padre Nelson Gonzales

La Eucaristía debe ser signo de comunión

In the discernment process

Continued from pg. 11

or not to move to another city. Maybe it’s changing jobs. Maybe going back to school to get that degree we always wanted. Maybe it’s a decision to begin to live a healthier lifestyle. Maybe it’s realizing that some people come into our lives for a season and we have to let them go.

No matter what we may be discerning in our life, let us remember that if we hold onto God’s hand and allow Him to lead us we will find peace and happiness. Now that’s a good New Year’s resolution: Hold onto God’s hand and don’t let go, no matter how wild the ride may get.

“Discernment is that reflection of the mind, of the heart, that we have to do before making a decision. Discernment is demanding but indispensable for living. It requires that I know myself, that I know what is good for me here and now. Above all, it requires a filial relationship with God. God is Father and He does not leave us alone, He is always willing to advise us, to encourage us, to welcome us.” – Pope Francis, General Audience Speech, Aug. 31, 2022
A Prayer for Candlemas Day
(February 2)

LORD Jesus Christ, You are the true Light enlightening every soul born into this world. Today we celebrate the feast of Candlemas. Before Holy Mass, the priest blesses the candles, whose wax is the humming summer’s work of countless bees. The flames of these candles will shed their light upon the altar at the Holy Sacrifice.

Help us to realize, this day and every day, that our own humdrum daily work, if it is done for love of You, and in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, will be a supernatural work, and will shine brightly before You for all eternity. Help us realize, too, each time we see the blessed candles at Holy Mass, or at the bedside of the sick, that they are a symbol of Yourself, the Light shining in the darkness of this world.

Help us to live in that Light, to make it our own, and to kindle it in the souls of others, increasing the area of light and lessening the darkness in the World. Help us do, through the merits of Your own dear mother, Mary, who did everything for love of You, from the moment she brought You into this world till the day she joined You in the realms of light at her death.

Then we, too, working for You, shall be light-bearers who will help to spread Your kingdom on earth, and increase the number of those who dwell in heaven, the city of eternal light. Amen.

From www.catholicrurallife.org.

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All High School Students are welcome to attend!

10:00AM - Doors open
10:30AM - Opening Mass
4:30PM – Event Concludes

Early registration deadline: 02.10.23
$20.00 – Youth Fee
$17.00 – Youth Fee with Group of 8+
$10.00 – Adult Fee
$25.00 – Late Registration Fee
Registration with parish only.
Fees must be received by the office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry by 02.10.23

Event T-Shirts available!
See website for more information.
For adults in their 20s and 30s, single mothers’ group at the Cathedral of the Assumption will meet at 6:30 p.m. on the first Thursday of the month. For information, contact Rev. Jerry Tanny, 361-522-5308.

**ACTS Retreats** – Anyone needing any information regarding ACTS retreats in the diocese should e-mail dovactschapter@victoriadiocese.org.

**Catholic Family Services** – To find Catholic organizations that focus on family, visit the Catholic Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers at http://www.nacflm.org.

**Courage** – Ministers to persons with same-sex attractions and their loved ones. The ministry also has an outreach, EnCourage, which ministers to relatives, spouses, and friends of persons with same-sex attractions. It is a Roman Catholic Apostolate endorsed by the Pontifical Council for the Family. For information, visit http://www.courage.net.

**Crisis Pregnancy Center of Victoria** – A sister organization to the Gabriel Project staffed by volunteers who offers help to girls and women who find themselves in a difficult situation due to an unplanned pregnancy. Office located at 1501 E. Red River, is open 1-4 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Free pregnancy tests offered and medical referrals are made for prenatal care. New volunteers are welcome. For information call 361-576-6171.

**Emmanus Center** – Offers individual, couple, family, adolescent and children’s counseling, as well as specialized support groups. Spiritual direction is also available if requested. (361) 575-0828 or visit http://www.victoriadiocese.org.

**Gabriel Project of the Crossroads** – Helps women experiencing a crisis pregnancy as an alternative to abortion. Our mission is to protect the unborn by providing spiritual and emotional support as well as supplies. We provide housing through the Bethlehem Maternity Home and have an outreach ministry that visits pregnant women in our community. Our services cover Victoria, Calhoun, Colorado, DeWitt, Fayette, Goliad, Jackson, Lavaca, Matagorda and Wharton Counties. For more information, please contact our helpline at 361-576-1156.

**Grief Ministry** – Are you an adult, 18 years or older experiencing the death of a loved one? Grief Group meets on the 1st and 3rd Thursday evenings from 6:45 to 8 p.m. at Holy Family Catholic Church. Please call Sharon at 361-578-7572 before attending.

**Grief Ministry** – For parents whose children have died meets on Aug. 9 at Assumption Church parish hall, 108th St., in Ganado from 6:30 to 8 p.m. For more information, please call Pat Holscher at 979-257-9984.

**Ld9:16 Ministry** – For adults in their 20s and 30s, single or married. Held at Holy Family in Victoria every first Thursday of the month. Starts with 6 p.m. Mass followed by dinner and a talk live streamed from the headquarters in Michigan and fellowship. It is open to all young adults of the diocese. For information, or to RSVP for events, e-mail id916victoria@gmail.com.

**Incarnate Word Prayer Group** – Praise and worship Thursday 7:30-9 p.m. Mondays in the auditorium at Incarnate Word Convent, 1101 N.E. Water St. For information, contact Sister Louise Marie Jones at 361-575-7111 or e-mail amormeus@yahoo.com.

**Mothers of Grace** – A mothers’ group at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Victory. For information, contact Leslie Book at book.leslie@gmail.com or visit their Facebook page at www.facebook.com/MothersofGraceolv/.

**Natural Family Planning** – NFP is the only church-approved form of family planning. For the CREIGHTON MODEL Fertility Care System (CrMS) featuring NaPro TECHNOLOGY™ contact Susanne Koch in Wharton at 505-710-0903 or mailto:susannekoch614@gmail.com. Also in the Cuero area contact, Ashley Rodriguez at 361-293-0700 or e-mail ashleyfay09@gmail.com.

**Raphael’s Refuge** – Raphael’s Refuge is the home of the Monument to the Innocents which honors babies who have died (from conception to one year). We are a non-profit organization located outside of Flatonia, Texas. Peer counseling is available for those suffering the loss of a baby due to miscarriage, stillbirth, infant death or abortion. For information, call Therese at 361-258-1514, e-mail raphaelsrufge@att.net, or visit http://www.raphaelsrufge.org.

**Retrouvaille** – Retrouvaille, meaning “rediscovers,” is a marriage-healing ministry offered in the diocese to couples in difficult marriages. Contact John and Jennifer Vincent at jvivov@sbcglobal.net or 361-580-2770; or call 800-470-2230; or visit http://www.helpourmarriage.org
Crisis pregnancy ministries trying to bolster visibility, support

Continued from pg. 1

Barbara Williams, one of the founding members of the Gabriel Project here, who remains a board member, said the organization is trying to focus on the counties outside of Victoria. “We have a presence, but we’re not all active,” she said.

Even many who are aware of the ministry don’t realize that they cover the 10 counties that make up the Diocese of Victoria. Williams said one way to change that is to find churches or businesses willing to erect one of the Gabriel Project signs, which is the most powerful tool they have.

“There are two main ways moms find out about us -- that is either word of mouth, or they see the sign on the church grounds,” Williams said. “If nothing else, put that sign up. You don’t realize how big of an impact you’ll make.”

This year, the Gabriel Project asked the community for items for their Helping Hands Christmas Program campaign to continue to support women they have served. Their goal was to give each mom a package of essential home and baby items.

“The generosity of this diocese has blown us away,” said Linda Palmer, the new executive director for the Gabriel Project. Because of the amount of items collected, the agency spent less than $100 making the packages for the moms.

She gave this report at the Gabriel Project’s end-of-the-year Christmas meeting, adding that volunteers are walking in, too. The organization connects with the women and volunteers, called “angels,” serve as mentors, giving support and encouragement and helping them access items they need to care for their babies.

They recently advertised that they wanted to start gathering more men to be “Michaels,” a counterpart to the “angels” that can help with some of the heavy lifting that needs to happen sometimes.

Palmer said they got a good one who dropped in the office recently. “He said, ‘I’m here, I’m trained, I’m background checked and I’m ready’.

She was talking about Gerardo “Jerry” Guajardo, who moved to Victoria in 2020 bringing a lot of experience with pro-life work he did while living in Austin. He helped with the St. John Paul II Life Center, which is affiliated with the Vitae Clinic, where women can get a sonogram to see the reality of the baby inside of them.

Guajardo said there came a time when the clinic’s ratings on Google and other social media was suffering because of protesters who stood outside of the clinic bringing a message that it was a “fake clinic.”

“I offered to go and pray the rosary while that group was standing outside on the sidewalk,” he said. “So I did that for 15 months, every Thursday, rain or shine.”

The protesters and the pro-lifers “kind of knew each other,” Guajardo said, but never spoke. And the protesters quit coming 15 months after he started praying outside of the clinic.

He said there are several men in the area who are devoted to helping the pro-life ministries. “There are a whole lot of other guys who have done a whole lot more than I have,” It is important for women in a crisis pregnancy to see men helping. “It takes three to conceive a baby,” Guajardo said. “A male and a female and God. Anytime a young lady has an abortion the father is affected.”

Guajardo said he believes educating people about the reality of pregnancy could go a long way in saving the lives of the unborn. “One of the things that I think would be helpful is to address a bunch of these issues before a young lady gets pregnant,” he said. The Vitae Clinic shows sonograms and its physicians explain the growth of the child. He said a particularly powerful demonstration helped stimulate conversations with young people and parents. They saw models of the babies “no bigger than your pinkie” and were told, “You were once that small.”

Ledi Cheramie is one of the “angels” who works with the Gabriel Project and has for at least four years. “I was trying to find something I could help with that I was passionate about,” she said, and saw the call for help in the church bulletin.

She still recalls the first mom she helped and that mom’s child, “baby Rose,” who she got to see come into the world. “Because our ministry stepped up, she had that hope that they were going to be OK,” Cheramie said.

Gilda Miller, a retired neonatal nurse, has been an active angel for a long time as well, “I have seven (moms) right now,” she said. “I try to take all the high-risk moms.”

The reasons women call are sometimes surprising. She remembered answering a call from a mother who already had children and was pregnant again. That mom called the number thinking she was contacting an agency that helped provide abortion. Miller explained to her how they can help, but the woman was adamant and said, “You don’t understand. I cannot feed another mouth.” She was surprised that months later the woman called back seeking support, but this time help in making it possible to keep the child. The mother said she realized how much she valued the lives of her older children and didn’t think it would be right to end the life of the one she was carrying in her womb.

“So we had another baby,” Miller said.

Born in Bethlehem Home

For women who want to keep their babies but are in dire straits because they have nowhere to go, the Gabriel Project opened the Bethlehem Maternity Home. It officially opened its doors in 2021 and has been a safe haven where 13 moms have found a stable place to live when they deliver their babies and get established.

A few weeks away from Christmas, three moms were at the Bethlehem Home, each cuddling a new baby and talking about the circumstances that brought them there. All of them said that family support was missing in their lives. One lost her place to stay when she discovered her pregnancy and the other two left abusive relationships in hopes of finding a peaceful place to start over with their children.

Sabrina, 29, whose baby boy, Josiah, is the newest in the house, said she was happy at Bethlehem Home. She has two other children, ages 3 and 6, and was in an abusive situation for some 10 years. She came to Bethlehem Home from San Antonio but is originally from Michigan.

Julie, 19, was living with family and said she was made to leave school at a young age and work, giving all of her income to her mother. She finally decided it was time to leave and make a better life for herself and she wandered from place to place, she said. When she discovered her pregnancy, she said, “I had a choice early on to get an abortion.” Some encouraged her to do so, she said. But she decided it wasn’t the baby’s fault and chose life. She said her baby’s father is also young. “He wants to be involved; but he doesn’t want the responsibility,” she said.

Julie’s daughter, Ava, is now 3 months old and Julie is working on herself and her education so she can be the one who provides for Ava.

Bianca came from Houston and had her son, Ernias, recently. At two weeks, he already was very focused on his mother’s face as she held him close. She said she didn’t realize she was pregnant for at least three months. When she found out, though, the friend with whom she was living decided she should leave. “I had nowhere to go.”

Bianca said she called and prayed that Bethlehem Home would take her in and her prayer was answered. She said she never considered an abortion because of her Cherokee and Navajo heritage. She believes that she was carrying another spirit from the beginning. She, too, is focusing on her education and has hopes of a future in which she can provide a good life for the two of them. “It’s just me and the baby. I’d rather keep it that way,” she said.