Angels needed, more pregnant women seek aid

JANET JONES
The Catholic Lighthouse

Every baby’s first Christmas should be memorable and joyful. But many women are finding “no room at the inn” as their due date approaches. Hardy a day goes by that a woman isn’t calling the Gabriel Project of the Crossroads for help in a crisis pregnancy, according Linda Palmer, executive director of the Gabriel Project of the Crossroads.

Some of these women are desperate, she said, but have been wait-listed because, as the referrals have gone up, the number of “angels” – volunteers who help these women during their pregnancy and for two months afterwards – is declining. There are currently about 20 mothers on the waiting list.

Palmer said her office began to see a rise in referrals locally about mid-summer, and that rise has been consistent. Until recently, a volunteer “angel” would have a caseload of three or four moms. They have five volunteers who are serving four to five moms. Last year, there were eight angels to help with the caseload.

The moms who are wait-listed are the

See Angels needed, pg. 4

Pray for peace and hope

Pictured here is the Nativity scene from the Cathedral of Our Lady of Victory in 2021. In the town of Bethlehem, according to the Catholic News Agency, Christmas decorations have been dismantled and celebrations suspended because of the ongoing conflict in the Holy Land. This time of year is usually filled with tourists and pilgrims, which is the lifeblood of their economy. Many are having to go without this season and some said they are ashamed to buy gifts for their children when others cannot afford basic necessities. Bishop Brendan Cahill said this is a time when we might all consider enjoying a more simple holiday and stay focused on prayer and sharing the love of Jesus with others. (Lighthouse File Photo/Janet Jones)

2024 Men’s Conference hosts Lou Holtz as keynote

JANET JONES
The Catholic Lighthouse

VICTORIA – The 2024 Men’s Conference, “This is My Body, This is My Blood,” takes place Feb. 17 at Holy Family Catholic Church. Lou Holtz, former football player, coach and analyst, is the keynote speaker this year.

Perhaps best known for his years as the head coach at Notre Dame, Holtz has also gained a reputation as an inspirational and motivational speaker. He has written three best-selling books including, “The Fighting Spirit,” “Winning Everyday: A Game Plan for Success” and “Wins, Losses and Lessons: An Autobiography.”

His most recent book is “A Lifetime of Love: A Game Plan for Marriage and Family Life.” He also has released highly acclaimed motivational videos.

Also speaking at the conference is Justin Reyes, the director of Catechesis and Evangelization for the Diocese of Joliet. Reyes spent the previous three years at the Diocese of Victoria building a family evangelization program, including men’s and women’s leadership teams who organize the men’s and women’s conferences each year.

In a video message, Reyes said he is looking forward to coming back to Victoria for the chance to speak on the Eucharist. “Men, we’re called to protect the Holy Eucharist,” he said. “It’s going

See 2024 Men’s Conference, pg. 3
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On this page you see a mission statement that was prepared earlier this year by workers in the chancery. When the team, who had been working on this statement presented it to the larger group of chancery staff, we approved and received it with enthusiasm.

I’ve now had a few months of reciting this mission and trying to put it into practice each day. This month I’m thinking about it as we prepare for Christmas.

Christmas invites each person to encounter the love of Jesus. In the tiny town of Bethlehem, in a time of political unrest and the violence of war, God so loved the world that He was born of Mary in a manger. From the early times of the Christian Church, the messiness and poverty of the manger represented the messiness and poverty of the world and the struggles each of us experiences in this world.

One of the most beautiful events in human history, the birth of the baby Jesus, occurred in the middle of this mess. Jesus continues to be present to us and bless us. I’m thinking of this in several ways as we prepare to celebrate Christmas in the year 2023.

First, whenever I celebrate the Eucharist and hold the Body and Blood of Christ in my hands, I know that God continues to sustain and hold the world in the palm of His hand. If you have the chance to invite someone to Christmas Mass and take them there, you can invite them into a loving relationship with Jesus. The beauty of the church, the joy of the music and the solemnity of the Liturgy on Christmas help us to realize that the light of Christ shines in every moment of our lives.

Second, the same beautiful Liturgy that we are celebrating in our churches throughout the Diocese of Victoria is being celebrated in churches throughout the world. We can often feel powerless as we consider all the poverty and war in the world today. In each of the areas we see on the news or read about in the paper, the birth of Jesus is being celebrated, and there are Catholics united with us who are feeding the hungry, visiting prisoners, taking care of refugees and bringing the peace of Christ to dangerous areas.

Third, in my own life I know of my doubts and fears, worries and concerns. Jesus promises to be with us on the journey of life. Christian art is so powerful, a person can reflect on the image of the Holy Family by the manger or on the road to Egypt and imagine themselves in the scene. God is with us at every moment of our lives. Especially in the most frightening times, He shows us mercy and love.

May each of you and your families know the love of Jesus personally. May your faith and hope be strengthened in this season. And may all of us help others to encounter the love of Jesus.

Let’s keep each other in prayer.
+Brendan

**Bishop Cahill’s Schedule**

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<th>December</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Noon First Friday Mass at the Chancery</td>
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<td>1:30 p.m. National Catholic Partnership on Disability Theological Symposium; virtual</td>
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<td>6 p.m. Dedication Mass for new altar at St. Aloysius; Westoff</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>11 a.m. OVISS Associates Consecration Mass at Incarnate Word Convent</td>
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<td>9 a.m. Mass for 150th anniversary of St. Joseph Church; Inez</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>12:15 p.m. Mass at UHV</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>9 a.m. Legion of Mary Praesidium meeting; Cathedral Center</td>
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<td>6-7</td>
<td>Catholic Relief Services Board Meeting; Baltimore</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>8 a.m. School Mass and visit with Our Lady of Victory School</td>
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<td>9-10</td>
<td>Noon Mass with Missionary Catechists Communities of Faith meeting</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>6 p.m. Healing Mass and Confessions at St. Rose of Lima; Schenlenburg</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>5:30 a.m. Our Lady of Guadalupe Celebration at Our Lady of Sorrows; Victoria</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>9 a.m. Legion of Mary Praesidium meeting; Cathedral Center</td>
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<td>5 p.m. Holy Sepulchre Social and dinner; Victoria Country Club</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>8:10 a.m. Mass and visit with St. Rose of Lima School; Schenlenburg</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>3 p.m. Lessons and Carols at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Victory</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Noon meal with OVISS Sisters at IWBS Convent; Victoria</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>6:30 a.m. Morning Air Radio interview</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>9 a.m. Legion of Mary Praesidium meeting; Cathedral Center</td>
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<td>21-1/1</td>
<td>Finance Board Meeting; Chancery Building Board Meeting; Chancery</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Chancery Office Closed for Christmas and New Year holidays</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>9 a.m. Mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Victory</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>4 p.m. Christmas Mass for OVISS Healthcare Sisters at IWBS Convent; Victoria</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Midnight Christmas Mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Victory</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>11 a.m. Mass for Holy Innocents at Rafael’s Refuge; Flatonia</td>
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<td>6 p.m. Serra Club Christmas Mass and Dinner for seminarians and those in formation at Holy Family Church; Victoria</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>Noon Jubilarian Mass for Missionary Catechists at Our Lady of Sorrows</td>
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**January**

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<td>1</td>
<td>New Year’s Mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Victory</td>
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<td>2-5</td>
<td>Region X Bishop’s Retreat; San Antonio</td>
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2024 Men’s Conference hosts Lou Holtz as keynote

Continued from pg. 1

to be a day that will change your life.”

Father Demsey Rosales Acosta, SSL, STD, a professor of theology at St. Thomas University in Houston, also will speak. He has a passion for Sacred Scripture and a doctor of sacred theology degree from Gregorian Pontifical University. He also was involved in the Ascension Press’s production of the popular “The Bible in a Year,” and hosted the very popular Spanish-language version.

To read more about all of the speakers, visit www.DOVmen.com/speakers. Bishop Brendan Cahill will celebrate Mass after the registration is complete and lead a Eucharistic procession after Mass. Dr. Michael Fonseca will lead the rosary prior to Mass.

The conference is 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Cost is $60 and includes lunch and snacks. Also, each man who registers can choose a T-shirt or a cap with their registration fee.

Only one floral arrangement is permitted on a grave after one week of the burial. Funeral flowers will be removed when the flowers are wilted. Flowers must be in vases, not put in the ground. Planting of flowers, shrubbery or trees is not permitted. No grave borders, including rocks around marker/monument are allowed. In the flat marker area items must be less than 2 feet tall (24 inches). Items cannot be greater than 3 feet (36 inches) in the upright monument area.

Items to be removed:

- All flowers not in permanent vases or PVC pipe. Also, faded flowers that are in permanent vases or PVC pipe.
- All statues, toys, etc. that are not set on markers or monuments.
- Anything glass, such as vases, etc.
- All wood items, (crosses, plaques, etc.) and any items creating a grave border.
- Balloons, stuffed animals, etc.
- Any items mounted on wood or plastic dowels.

Catholic Cemetery Office Notice

The Catholic Cemetery Office reserves the right to remove any decorations that violate the rules and guidelines described in this document.

Resurrection Cemetery grave decoration rules.

Items to be removed:

- Presentable flowers in permanent vases or PVC pipe.
- Solar crosses, angels and bibles mounted in PVC pipe.
- Shepherd hooks that meet the area requirements, i.e. 2 feet or less in flat marker areas and 3 feet or less in upright monument areas.
- USA flags on staffs 3 feet or less.
- Lighted candles in plastic on 1/4 inch rod.
- Solar lights.

Holiday or special occasion decoration, such as birthdays or anniversaries, are allowed in a confined area to the marker/monument. Such decorations are permitted seven days before and seven days after the holiday or special occasion.

For more information, contact the Catholic Cemetery Office at the chancery building by calling 361-573-0828, Ext. 2233.
The Education of Seminarian Fund is a fund in which all of the monies donated to this fund, as well as the earnings, are available to cover the cost of educating seminarians. The proceeds of the special collection on Holy Thursday are deposited into the Education of Seminarian Fund. Publication of this fund will appear when new contributions are received.

**Donation categories:**
- Lector – $0.01 - $99.99
- Acolyte – $100 - $499.99
- Candidate – $500 - $1,499.99
- Transitional Deacon – $1,500 - $2,499.99
- Priest – $2,500+

Education of Seminarian Fund

The Catholic Lighthouse

DIOCESE

Angel needed, more pregnant women seek aid

Continued from pg. 1

ones calling the Gabriel Project early in their pregnancies. First they take the women who are closer to delivering their babies and seeking services immediately. Palmer said these are the desperate ones “almost as if they continued to hope their economic situation would change before their babies arrive. Both scenarios would have likely been candidates for abortion prior to Roe v. Wade being overturned.”

Something else that happened was a rise in births in Texas since the pandemic. “Births rose about 3 percent in 2022,” Palmer said. She doesn’t know the local statistics, but it is obviously going up here as well.

“The rise is also being seen with the referrals received by the Bethlehem Maternity Home. Currently five moms and six children are being served. Three more babies are expected by February. We have had to turn away so many homeless, pregnant and desperate women,” Palmer said. “This is a statewide phenomenon since May of this year. It is heartbreaking.”

According to Palmer, many women say they learned about the Gabriel Project through women who have been helped in the past, including family members.

For those who have to wait, the ministry has an online program to keep them hopeful and engaged until they can get an “angel” to help them find stability. It’s called the Russell Janecka Learn and Earn Program. Janecka was the board president of the agency until his death in September 2021.

“The moms receive free videos on their phones on topics relevant to their stage of pregnancy and other interests such as finance, job preparation, relationships and infant care and developmental milestones. There are also a variety of spiritual videos that are available to them. When the criteria is met for each lesson, the moms earn points which accumulate and they can ‘purchase’ new items such as car seats, cribs, strollers and other necessities for their babies. This program helps keep the moms connected while they wait, and increases their knowledge about the beautiful miracle that is taking place in their bodies. It also increases their self-esteem because they are actually taking steps to provide for their babies through learning. It helps us stay connected to them, and the moms know they have someone who is praying for them and their babies,” Palmer said.

The Gabriel Project of the Crossroads has a Christmas list for people who want to contribute items to help the moms in need and also offers information on how to volunteer and the difference a volunteer can make in the life of a mother who feels helpless and hopeless.

If you want to help or learn more, visit https://victoriagabrielproject.org/. Or call them at 361-576-1156.

Seminary Endowment Fund

Seminary Endowment Fund (formerly known as Seminary Burses) is a permanent fund used for the education of future priests for the Diocese of Victoria. The goal of each burse is $15,000. The interest from this amount is applied yearly to the education of seminarians. The burses are in memory of or in honor of an individual priest or layperson, living or deceased. Publication of the burses will appear periodically when new contributions are received.

**Donation Categories:**
- Lector – $0.01 - $99.99
- Acolyte – $100 - $499.99
- Candidate – $500 - $1,499.99
- Transitional Deacon – $1,500 - $2,499.99
- Priest – $2,500+

**November 21, 2023**

- **Henry A. Schoenfeld Seminary Burse**
  - Lector
  In memory of Mary Schoenfeld Pitcher by:
  - Anthony and Janice Netek
  - Bob and Joan Black
  - Helen Brown
  - Marian Tachman
  - Alice Michalke
  - Henrietta Cernosek
  - Joan Prihoda
  - Daria Emmel
  - Janet Purdy
  - David and Susie Tachman
  - Mary Jo Rebeck
  - Bernice Ulbricht
  - Bernice Schoenfeld
  - In memory of John Muggli by
  - Bernice Schoenfeld

- **Joseph R. Janak Seminary Burse #2**
  - Lector
  Donation in memory of Joe Janak on the 25th anniversary of his death, 11/30/23 by Rose Marie Janak & Family

**Please remember in prayer the priests of the Diocese of Victoria, who were ordained during the month of December:**

- Rev. Richard Bediako 12/03/11 St. Michael Church, Cuero
- Rev. Elias Patiño-Hurtado 12/01/07 St. Anthony Church, Palacios
- Rev. Alexander Aboagye 12/05/04 St. Rose of Lima, Schulenburg
- Rev. Derek Felix Kwesi Acquah 12/05/04 Our Lady of the Gulf, Port Lavaca
- Rev. Michael Odartey-Lampetey 12/05/04 Sts. Cyril and Methodius Church, Shiner
- Rev. Samuel Kwabenya Owusu 12/05/04 St. Philip the Apostle Church, El Campo
- Rev. Parmenio Flores-Garcia 12/05/98 Our Lady of Sorrows Church, Victoria
- Rev. Gabriel Oduro Tawiah 12/06/97 St. John Nepomucene Church, New Taiton

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

- Rev. Msgr. C.J. Martin 12/01/80 St. Michael Church, Cuero
- Rev. Msgr. Henry S. Herbst 12/07/94 St. Anthony Church, Palacios
- Rev. Joseph A. Koebel 12/12/05 St. Rose of Lima, Schulenburg
- Rev. Msgr. Alex Kraus 12/19/92 Our Lady of the Gulf, Port Lavaca
- Rev. Msgr. Eustace A. Hermes 12/23/16 Sts. Cyril and Methodius Church, Shiner
- Rev. Msgr. Lawrence Matula 12/25/17 St. Philip the Apostle Church, El Campo
- Rev. Joseph Leyva 12/31/83 St. John Nepomucene Church, New Taiton

*Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26)*
John the Baptist lit a lamp so we could see the way

**EDITOR’S NOTE: Father Charles Kram** wrote this untitled sermon for the Third Sunday of Advent, Cycle A.

John the Baptist was in prison now. It had not been safe for him to say so much so bluntly and so fearlessly. It must have been very hard for John to be in prison, because he had been an outdoor type all his life, and now being cooped up in a 2x4 dungeon with a little window too high to see out of must have been a real hell for him. And, besides, he was now a man condemned to death.

Under such circumstances, one must be sure of oneself, for one’s own sake as well as for the sake of one’s followers.

So John sent his followers to Jesus to ask him whether he was the Messiah or whether they should look for someone else.

Perhaps John and his disciples had discussed the Messiah question in prison, and John had advised them to settle their doubts by observing Jesus in action. In other words, John was saying, “I’m not going to debate with you about whether he is or he isn’t. Try him and you will see what power he has.”

Or perhaps John was getting impatient with Jesus. John had said that the Messiah was laying the axe to the root and now nothing was happening, so he sent his disciples to see what was happening.

A third explanation is that John, who had baptized Jesus and had had plenty of time to think about him in prison, now sent his disciples merely to confirm his faith and hope.

When John’s disciples asked Jesus their question, he did not really say, “Yes, I am the Messiah and you need not look any further.”

Rather, he referred them to the fact that his actions were speaking most clearly. It is easy to claim to be the Messiah, but who his actions were speaking most clearly. It was easy to claim to be the Messiah, but who was that Elijah. The Jews are still waiting for the prophet, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.”

John was important. By the personal testimony of Jesus, he was the greatest man ever born until then. He was, therefore, greater even than Moses or Abraham or David.

But John’s message was not a gospel (good news). It was a message of threatened destruction. John knew God’s justice and power but not the fullness of his love. And he did not know the cross.

The greatness of God’s love was revealed only through Jesus and the cross, and so the simplest Christian, knowing what Jesus is like, and knowing the great length he has gone for us, also knows the dimensions of the Father’s love.

This, although by the extinct outmoded standards of old covenant times, John was the greatest man every born, and was so declared by Jesus himself.

Jesus added that the least person born into the Messianic kingdom is greater than John; he was stating the vast superiority of the new covenant over the old.

John was one of those few whose destiny it was to bring others to new and greater things without being able to partake of them himself. Like a certain lamplighter who faithfully lit the lamps every night to help others find their way while he himself was blind.

So today, as we light another candle on the advent wreath and come another week closer to the birthday of Jesus, we admire the providence of God in preparing the way for him through John and his baptism of repentance.

And we greatly rejoice on our good fortune in being baptized into the new covenant of the Messiah with all its blessings – for which all those people of ancient times longed but never received.

How fortunate we are to be Christians.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for being our Messiah. Help us always to appreciate the privileges to which we have fallen heir. Grant that in our own way we might also be prophets, preparing the way for Jesus to come to others. Amen.
Honor guard at Veterans Memorial Mass
PRAHA — The Knights of Columbus, St. Michael 4th Degree Assemblies served as honor guards for Most Rev. Brendan Cahill, Bishop of the Diocese of Victoria in Texas, in celebrating Veterans Memorial Mass at Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Praha. Pictured, from left, are, front row: Frank Janacek of Weimar, Joe Jimenez of Weimar, Herb Ulbrich of Weimar, Benedict Kallus of Hostyn, Mike Dittrich of Hostyn, Rodney Kalich of Schulenburg and Leonard Korenek of Schulenburg; and, back row: Matt Bartek of Schulenburg, James Corey of Schulenberg, Dennice Olsovsky of Flatonia, Harold Fietsam of Hostyn and Delphin Bartek of Weimar. Not pictured is Philip Rocha of Hostyn. (Contributed Photo)

Advent Concert
VICTORIA — David Kauffman, songwriter, musician and recording artist who has written and recorded some of the popular ACTS retreat songs, will perform during a one-night Advent mission at 5 p.m. Dec. 10 at Holy Family Catholic Church, 704 Mallette Dr. It will be an evening of song, story and reflection. (Photo from www.davidkauffman.com)

Little saints
BAY CITY — On All Saints Day, Holy Cross Catholic School first-graders gave a beautiful All Saints Day presentation. Mrs. Brooke Tomek’s first-graders dressed as their favorite saints and read about each of them. (Contributed Photo)

Collection is vital support for religious orders

USCCB Public Affairs
WASHINGTON — On the weekend of Dec. 9-10, participating dioceses will take up the annual collection that benefits approximately 24,000 elderly religious sisters, brothers, and religious order priests across the United States.

Coordinated by the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO), the collection provides qualified religious institutes with financial aid to address retirement necessities.

Traditionally, Catholic sisters, brothers and religious order priests have dedicated their lives to Church ministries such as parishes, schools and healthcare institutions, usually with little to no compensation. Consequently, a significant number currently have insufficient retirement funds, combined with escalating healthcare costs.

Numerous religious communities in the United States are experiencing challenges with providing for their elderly members and are confronting a sizable disparity between available funds and the costs of care.

In 1988, the bishops of the United States established the Retirement Fund for Religious collection to address this serious retirement funding need among U.S. religious orders. In 2022, the NRRO’s annual collection raised $27.6 million.

“Addressing the needs of our aging religious demands substantial financial commitment. We are profoundly touched and blessed by the enduring generosity of the Catholic faithful. Their contributions to this fund are fundamental in aiding our elderly religious,” remarked Mr. John Knutsen, the NRRO’s director. “Through this national collection, we have the privilege to respond to the lifetime dedication of these individuals by ensuring their well-being in retirement,” he further commented.

Per the 2023 statistics collected by the NRRO, a mere 6 percent of religious communities that shared data with the NRRO reported having sufficient retirement funding. Since the fund’s inception, U.S. Catholics have graciously contributed more than $975 million, with almost $842 million has been distributed to support the day-to-day care of thousands of elderly sisters, brothers, and religious order priests. From 2009 onwards, the annual expenses of supporting senior women and men religious surpassed $1 billion.

For more about the initiatives of the NRRO and opportunities to support retired sisters, brothers and religious order priests, please visit retiredreligious.org.
“Otro año ya ha ido; cuantas cosas han pasado; algo hemos aprendido y algo hemos olvidado…” This is a verse in a song that one can hear Mexican artist Marco Antonio Solis singing around this time of year. It’s a Christmas song, but it isn’t a happy one like the one we hear Mariah Carey singing each year. This is a sad song in which he is singing to a love lost. The above verse says, “Another year is gone; how many things have changed; we have learned some things and we have forgotten some things.”

This song hits me a bit differently now. Not only because he was my mom’s favorite singer, but because she is no longer here.

I now sit and think about the number of people who grieve during the holidays. Maybe they lost someone they love or they are grieving a lost job, a change of address, a breakup, or even the loss of a friendship. Many times during the holidays, this weight of grief feels so much heavier.

The month of November is traditionally dedicated in the Catholic Church to honoring the dead and praying for the souls in purgatory. In a way, I feel like this is almost a preparation for the upcoming holidays. We spend almost the entirety of the month praying for our loved ones, remembering them, grieving for them. Near the end of the month, we spend a lot of time that cold night in Bethlehem, there may be something that holds us back from being truly cheerful.

“This is a sad song in which he is singing to a love lost. The above verse says, “Another year is gone; how many things have changed; we have learned some things and we have forgotten some things.”

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Yet the festivities that come with the joyous celebration of Christmas at times can be heavy. While we prepare our hearts to welcome the Lord who pierced through time that cold night in Bethlehem, there may be something that holds us back from being truly cheerful.

“Las lucesitas de mi árbol parece que hablan de ti
Y entre piñatas y sonrisas siento que no estes aquí…”

Llega Navidad y yo sin ti
En esta soledad, recuerdo el día en que te perdí”

Marco Antonio Solis continues singing, “The lights on my tree seem to speak of you, and between piñatas and smiles I sense that you’re no longer here. Christmas is coming, and I am without you. In this loneliness, I remember the day I lost you…”

I want to take this moment to say it’s OK to be sad during the holidays. It’s OK to not put up the Christmas tree or decorate this year. It’s OK to cry and it’s OK to take a step back from the parties. I want you to remember that our Lord loves us, and we do not have to pretend to be happy for Him. He knows what we look like without the mask, so we don’t have to put one on for Him.

Let us remember, when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to ask her to be the mother of God, she had to make room in her life and body for Jesus. There must have been some grieving in letting go of her previous life to this new life with much more responsibility. Joseph, must have grieved when he first thought of divorcing Mary in secret. Then he, too, had to make room in his life for Jesus. Their lives were never easy, but it must have been easier than having to be responsible for the Son of God. Then, imagine their pain when they couldn’t find a place in an inn and the Son of God had to be born into the world in a stable. On the happiest day of the history of the universe, the day salvation came to earth, Mary and Joseph experienced sadness. The sadness was overcome with the joy of the new baby, but the sadness had been there first.

In saying that, one can have joy and still feel sadness, even though that may sound like a contradiction. One can be joyful that our loved one is no longer suffering from an illness they were going through, but still be sad because that person is missed. Joy is more than just a feeling. Happiness comes and goes, but when one has joy, it stays. It is what helps us smile through the pain of sadness when we remember those we love, when we remember the memories that we shared.

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“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16

• Contact Sister Maria del Rosario Resendez by e-mailing her at bishopsecretary.dov@gmail.com.
U.S. bishops’ conference updates and more available online

From the USCCB media relations office

BALTIMORE — The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) gathered November 13-16 for their Fall Plenary Assembly in Baltimore.

News updates, texts of addresses and presentations, and other materials from the 2023 plenary are posted to: www.usccb.org/meetings.

During the plenary, the bishops received updates on the following items: the 2021-2024 Synod of Bishops, the U.S. bishops’ Eucharistic revival initiative and national congress, the Institute on the Catechism, and the recently-launched mental health campaign. They also held a canonical consultation and affirmed their support for the cause of beatification and canonization of Servant of God Isaac Thomas Hecker, priest and founder of the Missionary Society of Saint Paul the Apostle (the Paulist Fathers); and also affirmed their support for a request from the bishops’ conference of England and Wales asking the Holy Father to name Saint John Henry Newman a Doctor of the Church.

The bishops discussed several action items and voted on the following:

• 228 in favor, 7 against, and 5 abstentions to approve the reauthorization of the USCCB’s Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism;
• 231 in favor, 2 against, and 5 abstentions to approve the USCCB’s 2024 proposed budget, presented by the Committee on Budget and Finance.

There were six action items pertaining to liturgical texts from the Committee on Divine Worship, and the Latin Church members of the USCCB voted on the following:

• The U.S. adaptations for the Liturgy of the Hours passed with 214 votes in favor, 3 votes against, and 2 abstentions. The approval of this requires a two-thirds vote of the Latin Church bishops, with subsequent confirmation and recognition from the Vatican’s Diacony for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.
• The bishops voted 222 votes in favor, 4 votes against, and 3 abstentions to authorize an amended process for the approval of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) Gray Book of Supplementary Texts for the Liturgy of the Hours.
• The bishops voted 225 votes in favor, 2 votes against, and 0 abstentions to approve the ICEL Gray Book of The Order of Blessing of an Abbot or Abbess. The approval of this requires a two-thirds vote of the Latin Church bishops, with subsequent confirmation and recognition from the Vatican’s Diacony for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.
• The bishops voted 224 votes in favor, 2 votes against, and 2 abstentions to approve the ICEL Gray Book of The Order of Consecration of Virgins. The approval of this requires a two-thirds vote of the Latin Church bishops, with subsequent confirmation and recognition from the Vatican’s Diacony for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.
• The bishops voted 221 votes in favor, 3 votes against, and 2 abstentions to approve the ICEL Gray Book of The Order of Religious Profession. The approval of this requires a two-thirds vote of the Latin Church bishops, with subsequent confirmation from the Vatican’s Diacony for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

• The bishops also voted 227 votes in favor, 3 votes against, and 0 abstentions to approve the request to inscribe Saint Teresa of Calcutta on the General Roman Calendar as an Optional Memorial on September 5.

During the assembly, the bishops voted for a Conference secretary, as well as chairmen-elect of six Conference committees. The bishops elected will serve for one year as chairman-elect before beginning a three-year term at the conclusion of the 2024 Fall Plenary Assembly.

Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City was elected in November 2023 as USCCB secretary to complete the term left vacant when Archbishop Broglio was elected as Conference president. Archbishop Coakley’s current term concludes in November 2024, and with his re-election during this plenary as USCCB secretary and the chairman of the Committee on Priorities and Plans, he will begin his new three-year term at the conclusion of the November 2024 plenary.

The U.S. bishops approved four U.S. adaptations for the Liturgy of the Hours passed with 214 votes in favor, 3 votes against, and 2 abstentions. The approval of this requires a two-thirds vote of the Latin Church bishops, with subsequent confirmation from the Vatican’s Diacony for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

The U.S. bishops will continue to highlight the threat of abortion as a “preeminent priority” in the introduction to a guide they’ll disseminate to Catholic voters ahead of the 2024 election. That designation, the source of debate among some bishops in recent years, was retained when the bishops voted overwhelmingly (225-11, with seven abstentions) to approve a revised introduction to the guide “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship” at their annual fall assembly in Baltimore.

The bishops also voted to approve several brief excerpts from the guide to be inserted in parish bulletins during the upcoming election cycle. “The threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority because it directly attacks our most vulnerable and voiceless brothers and sisters and destroys more than a million lives per year in our country alone,” the new introduction to the guide says. The new introduction also lists euthanasia, gun violence, terrorism, the death penalty, and human trafficking as “other grave threats to life and dignity of the human person.”

The revised introduction also now states that the “redemption of marriage and gender … threaten the dignity of the human person.”

While the previous version of the guide included language condemning gender ideology, there was no mention of that issue in the document’s introduction. In a press conference after the vote, Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore, vice president of the USCCB, said that while many issues are important, “not all issues are equal.”

“We are called to stand in radical solidarity with women in difficult pregnancies and their unborn children and to provide them with the kind of support and services and public policies that they need,” he explained. “So, it’s not simply a public policy issue. It is a deeply, deeply pastoral issue of loving the moms in need, walking with them, helping them bring their babies to term, and then providing them with what they need to move forward,” he said.

The U.S. bishops first issued “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship” in 2007 and have updated the guide every four years. At last year’s fall assembly, however, the bishops voted to postpone a full revision until after the 2024 election, opting instead to limit revisions in 2023 to the guide’s introduction and “supplemental inserts” disseminated in parish bulletins nationwide.

Pathways with Patti

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Equestrian Order honors members from DOV

OKLAHOMA CITY – Rev. Deacon Richard Evans and Dame Karen Evans received the oath of office and accepted the positions of section representatives for the Victoria Diocese at the Promotion and Memorial Mass of the Southwest Lieutenancy of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, held Oct. 20-21 at the Blessed Stanley Rother Shrine in Oklahoma City.

Also, Sir Joe Morris and Dame Joyce Morris were awarded the bronze Palm of Jerusalem for their 18 years of service and dedication to the order as section representatives for Victoria. The Palm of Jerusalem (of gold, silver and bronze), can be conferred by the Cardinal Grand Master to persons of flawless moral conduct, especially meritorious on behalf of the Order of the Holy Land. Palm leaves are worn in memory of Jesus’ triumphant entry in Jerusalem. Medieval forerunners would have been referred to as “palmers.”

Another Victoria Section member attending was Bishop Brendan Cahill.

The Rev. Stephen Vacek was unable to attend in person but received his promotion to the rank of Knight Commander. Also at the Mass, Auxiliary Bishop Gary Janak was invested into the order for the Archdiocese of San Antonio. The Most Reverend Paul S. Coakley, Archbishop of Oklahoma City was the principal celebrant and homilist for the Promotion and Memorial Mass and His Eminence Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, grand prior and archbishop of Galveston-Houston was the principal celebrant and homilist for the Investiture Mass on Sunday.

The Order of the Holy Sepulchre has existed since the time of the Crusades and exists to sustain and protect the Church in the Holy Land. Those interested in learning more about Equestrian Order can visit www.eohssouthwest.com.

More information is available at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/institutions_connected/oessh/gran_magisterio_en.html

Texas churches targeted by scammer posing as priest

JONAH MCKEOWN
Catholic News Agency

A man calling himself “Father Martin” attempted to infiltrate several Texas parishes last month and reportedly succeeded in stealing several hundred dollars from one Houston parish, with the scam prompting a security warning from one of the state’s dioceses.

On Oct. 25, a person who identified himself as a visiting priest named “Father Martin” showed up at six different parishes in the Diocese of Dallas, according to diocesan spokesman Katy Kiser. “He raised suspicion to our parish staff because we follow a Safe Environment protocol, which requires priests from outside our diocese to come with a suitability letter, but also we work often enough with priests from other dioceses to understand that this didn’t seem legitimate, so these encounters were reported to our Office of Security and Emergency Management at the diocese,” Kiser told CNA.

The diocesan security office subsequently reported “Father Martin” to local law enforcement. Kiser said the Dallas Police Department has “no active investigation” into the matter, however, because the diocese reported no losses, and thus police determined that “no crime was committed.” “Father Martin” succeeded in accessing one private area of a Dallas parish, Kiser said, but she said it was determined “he wasn’t able to gain access to money or valuables” because of locked doors.

In response to the incident, the Dallas Diocese issued a security bulletin that included photos of the fake priest along with a photo and description of his car, a gray Volkswagen Touareg. It also states that another known alias of the man is “Father Guillermo.”

“The Office of Security and Emergency Management is currently working with local, state, and federal law enforcement partners regarding this matter,” the bulletin read.

“During the course of the investigation, we have determined this individual has active warrants issued for his arrest for theft and burglary offenses he has committed across several states.” The Dallas security office encouraged people not to attempt to detain the man if they come in contact with him but rather to contact the police and the diocesan Office of Security and Emergency Management.

Two days later, on Oct. 27, “Father Martin” reportedly stole $500 from a priest’s wallet at the rectory of St. Thomas More Catholic Church in Houston, a Houston Police Department spokesman told the New York Times.

“He claimed he was a visiting priest from Chicago and that he had been staying in the rectory and left his keys in one of the rooms,” the police spokesman told the Times.

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— Donkey Bells, Catherine de Hueck Doherty

Donkey bells, Advent wreaths herald Jesus’ arrival

At Your Service

By Deacon Michael Tankersley

“Advent is a short season, yet it covers a long distance. It is the road of a soul from Nazareth to Bethlehem. It seems such a short distance, as we are accustomed to thinking of distances. Yet it is a road into infinity, into eternity. It has a beginning, but no end. In truth, Advent is the road of the spiritual life which all of us must start if we do not want to miss the way. Let us shake the sleep out of our eyes – the sleep of indifference, of tepidity, of self-pity, of fighting God. Let us arise from that sleep with its dark nightmares, and begin our journey to Bethlehem. But let us understand that this ‘Bethlehem’ we seek is within our own souls, our own hearts, our own minds.”

— Donkey Bells, Catherine de Hueck Doherty

In her collection of Advent and Christmas meditations entitled Donkey Bells, the Russian-born Canadian Catherine de Hueck Doherty (1896-1985) includes a beautiful reflection of her mother’s practice of wearing a bracelet of bells during Advent. Beginning with but a single bell on the first day of Advent, Catherine’s mother would add another bell each week, thereby increasing the sound of her movements until Christmas morning.

The custom was a reminder that Advent is about our preparation for the coming of Christ. For Catherine, the tinkling sounds that entered her ears strengthened the sense of Christ entering her heart. The “donkey bell” tradition harks to the image of the donkey, with bell around its neck (The first church bell?) as it carried Our Lady (The first church?) into Bethlehem. As the donkey came nearer, the people of Bethlehem would hear the sound of the bell growing louder, step-by-step, announcing adventus -- the coming of Christ.

The “enlightened” modernist would dismiss traditions like Advent “donkey bells” as antiquated customs; symbols without substance. But so many of our traditions represent deep truths and serve as aids in our own spiritual growth. If, for example, the Advent wreath is regarded as merely a seasonal ornament, then we miss out on the rich messages it provides: of the evergreen branches that represent the promise of eternal life; of the circular shape of the wreath, with no beginning or end, that speaks to the complete and endless love of Christ Jesus; of the candles which illustrate the Christ who brings light into the darkness of our human lives, adding more light as He draws nearer.

Unfortunately, the competing eye candy in our secular lives can blur the spiritual vision of Advent. If not careful, the Advent call to, “Prepare the way for the Lord,” can be drowned out by the call to prepare for Christmas gifts and guests, to prepare for meals and desserts, or to prepare for company parties and Christmas trips. As the noise and busyness of the season takes favor over quiet and stillness, we can become more attentive to Black Friday sales than to Holy Sunday gospel readings. Sometimes the message of Advent can be diluted by our own complacency – our sense of “having arrived,” of “been there done that.”

It is this sense of complacency, this “sleepy faith,” that can choke out the spiritual life and keep Jesus at a distance. Doherty warned us in her memoir, “Let us shake the sleep out of our eyes – the sleep of indifference, of tepidity, of self-pity, of fighting God. But Jesus cautioned us long before. In the Gospel readings for the first week of Advent, Jesus speaks to the need for attentiveness: “Therefore, stay awake” (cycle A), “Be watchful! Be alert!” (cycle B), “Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy” (cycle C).

If we succumb to the rush of the times or have a faith in hibernation, what is lost is not just customs like donkey bells and wreaths. What is lost is the full sense of God entering into our darkness with His light and of bringing His promise of eternal life into the dead-end of our humanity. What is lost is the reality that He comes to us … that He comes for us.

This Advent season, let us hear in the Advent bells the beautiful song that Christ came … that Christ comes today … and that Christ will come again. This medley of past, present, and future reminds us that He did come in human flesh and bone, that He lived among us, as one of us, and died for us. And because He came into this world once before in the past, He comes to us in the present. He comes in the context of His Church and in the sacraments, in the lives of the saints and in the lives of you and I. And He will come again to open heaven for all the faithful; to come and wrap all His children in His perfect love; to lift us up into the Divine dance of eternal life.

This Advent season may we see in the candlelight of the wreath what the magi saw in the Star of Bethlehem, what Moses saw in the burning bush – a light that came for us, the light that draws us the Him, a fire of love that does not consume.

This Advent, may we remain mindful that we are not yet in Bethlehem and that we are not meant to settle on the outskirts. Rather, we are meant to live a life of Advent, one preparing a “Bethlehem” in our hearts so that Jesus can be born anew … one in which the bells of Christ’s coming ring from our hearts … one in which the light of Christ shines from our faces.

As we sing “O come, O come Emmanuel, and ransom captured Israel,” let us consider those vices that hold us captive. “Let us shake the sleep out of our eyes …” and be alert to the sight and sound of Christ’s coming into our hearts and His presence in the hearts of others. And then, despite the chaos and confusion that might surround us, we will be able to sing from our hearts that, “All is calm, All is bright.”
When I was in seminary, I watched the movie “The Way,” a fictional story about a man who walked the Camino de Santiago in Spain in honor of his adult son who had recently passed away. After seeing the adventure, the challenges, the beautiful scenery and the growth that the characters went through, I was so inspired that I decided to walk the Camino myself the next year. It was a lot harder than the movie made it seem, by the way.

The Camino de Santiago is an ancient pilgrimage route that people have been journeying on since at least the 800s. Though it has many starting points, they all converge at the traditional burial shrine of the apostle St. James, brother of John, in Santiago de Compostela in the northwestern corner of Spain.

My pilgrimage started in a French village in the foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains, and it took 500 miles and over a month of walking to finally get to my destination. I went through mountain passes and down in valleys, enjoyed the sunshine, pushed through rain and mud, and took note of the Eucharistic parallels when I passed the many vineyards and fields of wheat that were scattered throughout the journey. There were days that were easy and filled with light, and there were plenty of days when it took every ounce of strength to keep moving forward.

Everyone walks the Camino for a different reason. Mine initially was to prepare spiritually for my ordination by focusing my intentions. But the journey on the Camino eventually became an analogy for life itself, filled with lessons in all its ups and downs. It was more about allowing the Camino to work on me and teach me. As a volunteer at one of the pilgrim hostels described, “The Camino is a medicine.”

The idea of “the journey” is something that has captivated the minds and hearts of people for generations, being a theme found in many stories and works of literature throughout history. During “the journey,” the main character is usually forced to sacrifice in a variety of ways, grow and adapt, and overcome obstacles that result in flourishing and fulfillment. I think the reason the journey or pilgrimage is so common in the human narrative is that it is such a close parallel to the human experience itself. It’s one of the images that Vatican II used to describe the Church – the pilgrim people of God.

In the Christmas season, we often reflect on the Holy Family, who left home, encountered difficulties, and fled from evil, as an image of all those who are displaced; refugees forced onto a path of unknowns and sacrifice. Although we might not be suffering like the many displaced peoples throughout the world, everyone’s life is marked by transience. Like the Israelites who wandered in the desert on their way to the land “flowing with milk and honey,” we, too, journey through life and push forward to our heavenly homeland, realizing that this life is not our final destination. And like the Israelites who received miraculous bread from Heaven to help them on the way, we are given a better food from Heaven, the flesh and blood of the risen Jesus Christ, who gives us the strength we need to continue.

Taking up this powerful devotion of the pilgrimage and the image of the journeying Church, the National Eucharistic Revival has planned a National Pilgrimage that will begin from four corners of the United States and converge on the Eucharistic Congress in July. Pilgrims chosen by the national committee will walk across America, stopping at points along the way to spread the Good News about Jesus Christ present in the Eucharist. In fact, one of the routes will actually be passing through our diocese May 27-30, giving us a chance to journey with them for a few days.

In these holy days of Advent and Christmas, may we not forget those who have no home, who are or feel displaced, the isolated and lonely, the ones who are wandering, everyone forced onto a road of suffering.

May the Lord put people in their paths to walk with them and help them along. And may the power of the Infant King Jesus lead us all home with Him in Heaven.

Contact Father Jacob Koether at jkoether@victoriadiocese.org.
**Ayuda a otros a encontrar a Jesús esta Navidad**

Queridos hermanos y hermanas,

En esta página puede ver una declaración de misión que fue preparada a principios de este año por los trabajadores de la cancillería. Cuando el equipo que había estado trabajando en esta declaración la presentó al grupo más grande de personal de la cancillería, la aprobaron y la recibimos con entusiasmo.

Ya llevo algunos meses recitando esta misión y tratando de ponerla en práctica cada día. Este mes estoy pensando en ello mientras nos preparamos para la Navidad.

La Navidad invita a cada persona a encontrar el amor de Jesús. En el pequeño pueblo de Belén, en una época de agitación política y violencia de la guerra, Dios amó tanto al mundo que nació de María en un pesebre. Desde los primeros tiempos de la Iglesia cristiana, el desorden y la pobreza del pesebre representaban el desorden y la pobreza del mundo que todos conocemos. A menudo podemos encontrar el amor de Jesús en estos momentos de agitación política y violencia de la guerra, y en este momento en particular, más que en cualquier otro momento.

Primero, cada vez que celebro la Eucaristía y tengo el Cuerpo y la Sangre de Cristo en mis manos, sé que Dios continúa sosteniendo y sosteniendo al mundo en la palma de Su mano. Si tienes la oportunidad de invitar a alguien a la Misa de Navidad y llevarlo allí, puedes invitarlo a una relación amorosa con Jesús. La belleza de la iglesia, la alegría de la música y la solemnidad de la Liturgia de Navidad nos ayudan a darnos cuenta de que la luz de Cristo brilla en cada momento de nuestras vidas.

En segundo lugar, la misma hermosa Liturgia que celebramos en nuestras iglesias en toda la Diócesis de Victoria se celebra en iglesias de todo el mundo. A menudo podemos sentirnos impotentes al considerar toda la pobreza y la guerra que hay en el mundo hoy. En cada una de las áreas que vemos en las noticias o leemos en el periódico, se celebra el nacimiento de Jesús, y hay católicos unidos a nosotros que alimentan a los hambrientos, visitan a los prisioneros, cuidan a los refugiados y llevan la paz a Cristo a zonas peligrosas.

En tercer lugar, en mi propia vida conozco varias maneras en que mis dudas y miedos, preocupaciones e inquietudes, Jesús me escucha a mí y a cada uno de vosotros. Jesús promete estar con nosotros en el camino de la vida. El arte cristiano es tan poderoso que una persona puede reflexionar sobre la imagen de la Sagrada Familia junto al pesebre o en el camino a Egipto e imaginarse a sí misma en la escena. Dios está con nosotros en cada momento de nuestras vidas. Especialmente en los momentos más aterradores, Él nos muestra misericordia y amor.

Que cada uno de ustedes y sus familias conozcan personalmente el amor de Jesús. Que tu fe y esperanza se fortalezcan en esta temporada. Y que todos nosotros ayudemos a otros a encontrar el amor de Jesús.

Manténganos unos a otros en oración.

+Brendan

**Mensaje del Pastor**

By Obispo Brendan Cahill

**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.texabusedline.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.

**Colecta para la jubilación de religiosos es apoyo vital**

WASHINGTON - El fin de semana del 9 al 10 de diciembre, las diócesis participantes realizarán la colecta anual que beneficia a aproximadamente 24,000 hermanas, hermanos y sacerdotes ancianos de órdenes religiosas en todo Estados Unidos. Coordinada por la Oficina Nacional de Jubilación para Religiosos (NRRO), la colecta proporciona a los institutos religiosos calificados ayuda financiera para abordar las necesidades de jubilación.

Tradicionalmente, las hermanas, hermanos y sacerdotes de órdenes religiosas católicas han dedicado su vida a ministerios de la Iglesia en parroquias, escuelas e instituciones de atención médica, generalmente con poca o ninguna compensación. En consecuencia, un número significativo tiene actualmente fondos de jubilación insuficientes, combinados con el aumento de los costos de atención médica. Numerosas comunidades religiosas en Estados Unidos tienen dificultad para mantener a sus miembros ancianos y se enfrentan a una disparidad considerable entre los fondos disponibles y los costos de la atención.

Los obispos de Estados Unidos iniciaron la colecta del Fondo para la Jubilación de Religiosos en el 1988 para ayudar a abordar este déficit en el fondo para la jubilación entre las órdenes religiosas de EE. UU. El año pasado, la colecta anual de la NRRO recaudó más de $28 millones.

“Abordar las necesidades de nuestros religiosos ancianos exige un compromiso financiero sustancial. Estamos profundamente conmovidos y bendecidos por la generosidad continua de los fieles católicos. Sus contribuciones a este fondo son fundamentales para ayudar a nuestros religiosos ancianos”, comentó el Sr. John Knutsen, director de la NRRO. “A través de esta colecta nacional, tenemos el privilegio de responder a la dedicación de por vida de estas personas asegurando su bienestar en la jubilación”, comentó.

Según las estadísticas de 2023 recopiladas por la NRRO, solo el 6% de las comunidades religiosas que compartieron datos con la NRRO informaron tener suficientes fondos para la jubilación. Desde el inicio del fondo, los católicos estadounidenses han contribuido gentilmente con más de $975 millones, con casi $842 millones que se han distribuido para apoyar el cuidado diario de miles de hermanas, hermanos y sacerdotes de órdenes religiosas ancianas. A partir de 2009, los gastos anuales de apoyo a las religiosas y religiosos mayores han superado los 1000 millones de dólares.

Para más información sobre la labor de la Oficina Nacional para la Jubilación de Religiosos y cómo pueden apoyar a las hermanas, hermanos y sacerdotes de órdenes religiosas jubilados, visiten retiredreligious.org.
We remember
PORT LAVACA — The Our Lady of the Gulf Catholic School students and staff lead an annual prayer service of the Living Rosary to honor those who have passed away. The names of the deceased are written on tent cards and placed around the gym in remembrance.
(Contributed Photo)
Elie Mejia’s passion is to continue to spread God’s Word and is delighted to include a monthly puzzle from the Mass Readings. Please mail all completed October puzzle forms to arrive in The Catholic Lighthouse office, P. O. Box 4070, Victoria, TX 77903 by Oct. 31 to be entered into a drawing for a chance to win one of the following books:


To date, Elie has published 20 books. Most of her books can be purchased at www.searching-for-jesus.com, Amazon or by calling 361-648-5832. The prices range from $4.99 and $19.99.

Congratulations to Caroline Jones from Victoria (Member of Our Lady of Lourdes Church) youth winner for September. Frances N. Garcia from Victoria (Member of Our Lady of Sorrows Church) on being our October 2023 adult winner.

December 25, 2023
NATIVITY OF THE LORD: DAY
READING I – ISAIAH 52:7–10

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah: How beautiful upon the mountains / are the feet of him who brings glad tidings, / announcing peace, bearing good news, / announcing salvation, and saying to Zion, / “Your God is King!” / Hark! Your sentinels raise a cry, / together they shout for joy, / for they see directly, before their eyes, / the LORD restoring Zion. / Break out together in song, / O ruins of Jerusalem! / For the LORD comforts his people, / he redeems Jerusalem. / The LORD has hared his holy arm / in the sight of all the nations; / all the ends of the earth will behold / the salvation of our God.

Amor Meus hosts Advent vespers, retreat

VICTORIA — Amor Meus Spirituality Center, located at Incarnate Word Convent, 1101 N. E. Water Street invites anyone who would like to join the Sisters in praying Advent Solemn Vespers on the Sundays of December 3, 10 and 17 in preparation for Christmas.

Solemn Vespers, a part of the Liturgy of the Hours, also known as the Divine Office, is a sung prayer of the Church. Through this prayer, the people of God sanctify the day by continual praise of God and prayers of intercession for the needs of the world, especially now. It gives thanks for the day just past and makes an evening sacrifice of praise to God.

An Advent theme will permeate this prayer to prepare us to celebrate the Christmas season of welcoming the Savior into our lives. A short reflection on the spiritual life in preparation for Christmas will be given by one of the Sisters each Sunday. This prayer begins at 5 p.m. each Sunday, followed by benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

Please enter Incarnate Word Chapel from the entrance side of the convent.

Amor Meus Spirituality Center, is also presenting an Advent Retreat, “How Near the Gift: Praying the Third Sunday of Advent,” on Saturday, Dec. 16 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

This retreat will focus on prayerful preparation for the celebration of Christmas through the readings of the Mass of the Third Sunday of Advent, known as Gaudete Sunday, a day to rejoice since the Gift of Jesus is so near to our world.

This reflection will also impact our spiritual lives for the coming year. The presenter will be Sister Lou Ella Hickman, OVISS.

Sister Lou Ella, a convert to Catholicism in 1966, has been a Sister of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament in Corpus Christi since 1970 and also is a spiritual director. She has a BA in elementary education from Texas A & I University and an MA in theology and scripture from St. Mary’s University San Antonio. She was a teacher and librarian.

She now writes and publishes poetry and articles in journals and magazines. She published her first book of poetry, “she: robed and wordless” in 2015. From it, five poems, entitled “Chavah’s Daughters Speak,” were set to music by James Lee III and performed at a concert on May 11, 2021, in New York City and in Cleveland, Ohio, this year on March 28. She will have some books available for purchase.

Sign in for the retreat is 9:30 a.m. Those attending should bring a lunch and a Bible. Parking is in front of the convent. There is no fee, but a free-will offering will be accepted.

DEAR God, all over the world now, the children of Holy Mother Church are singing: “Send down dew from above, you heavens, and let the skies pour down upon us the rain we long for, Him, the Just One. May He, the Savior, spring from the closed womb of the earth!”

We know, Lord, and we have seen, what drought does to the land. We know, too, and have seen, the ravages of frost and cold. We have walked in barren fields and up dry hills, through dead, silent woods and lifeless valleys, and along thirsty beds of once flowing streams.

We have seen, clearly enacted for us upon the land, what our life would be without You. We can understand, now, how we should long for Your coming. Come, dear Lord and Savior, and do not delay! Rise up in Your power and come!

Let the rain of Your grace water the parched soil of our souls. Let the warmth of Your love thaw the coldness of our indifference. Let the life of Your Body and Blood vitalize our deadened energies, and stir us up to fruitful labor in Your vineyard.

O eternal Father, rouse our hearts out of the sleep of sin, so that we may clear the path of Your Son into our souls. Each year in Advent, You gladden us with the thought of our redemption. Grant us, we pray You, that, as we receive Your Son as our Redeemer now, we may, in the future, gladly and confidently meet Him as our Judge.

Amen.

From www.CatholicRuralLife.org
Lessons and Carols

VICTORIA — People from various Christian denominations applaud as they look up to the choir loft in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Victory following the 2022 Lessons and Carols. Dr. Glenn Hunter, director of music for the Cathedral of Our Lady of Victory, is again coordinating the event, which will take place Dec. 17 at 3 p.m. at the cathedral. It brings together people from many faith backgrounds to prepare for Christmas with carols and readings from Sacred Scripture. (Lighthouse File Photo by Janet Jones)

Advent Vespers

Advent Solemn Vespers on Dec. 3, 10 and 17, in the chapel at 5 p.m. followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Please enter by the side door of the chapel. Solemn Vespers, a part of the Liturgy of the Hours, also known as the Divine Office, is a sung prayer of the Church. Through this prayer, the people of God sanctify the day by continual praise of God and prayers of intercession for the needs of the world, especially needed now. It gives thanks for the day just past and makes an evening sacrifice of praise to God. During Advent there is an Advent theme to the prayers. A brief reflection is also given by one of the Sisters.

ACTS Retreats

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

Catholic Family Services

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.

Crisis Pregnancy Center of Victoria

Crisis Pregnancy Center of Victoria – A sister organization to the Gabriel Project staffed by volunteers that 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 361-575-6171.

Emmaus Center

Emmaus Center – Offers individual, couple, family, adolescent and children’s counseling, as well as specialized support groups. Spiritual direction is also available if requested. To make an appointment, call 361-212-0830.

Engaged Encounter


Gabriel Project of the Crossroads

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

Grief Ministry – Please join Strength for the Journey team for their monthly meeting, 6:30-8 p.m. Dec. 12 in the parish hall at Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Church, 108 6th St. in Ganado. The meeting is open to anyone who has experienced the death of a child at any age. For more information, contact Pat Hoelscher 979-257-9984 or phoelscher@victoriadiocese.org.

Healing Through Grace
grief support group

Healing Through Grace grief support group – Please join us at the Emmaus Center in Victoria on the first and third Wednesdays of each month at 9 a.m. at the Cathedral Center (St. Raphael meeting room). Please call 361-212-0830 for more information and to register.

Incarnate Word Prayer Group

Incarnate Word Prayer Group – Praise and worship 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.

Ministry of Love Caregiver Support Group

Ministry of Love Caregiver Support Group – Come to the Emmaus Center on the first Tuesday of each month at 9 a.m. in the Cathedral Center (St. Gabriel Hall.) Please call 361-212-0830 for more information and to register.

Mothers of Grace

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

Natural Family Planning

Natural Family Planning – NFP is the only church-approved form of family planning. For the CREIGTON MODEL Fertility Care System (CMS) featuring NaPro TECHNOLOGY™ contact Suzanne Koch at 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 raphaelsrsefugee@att.net or visit http://www.raphaelsrefuge.org.

Retrouvaille

Retrouvaille – Retrouvaille, meaning “re-discovery,” is a marriage-healing ministry offered in the diocese to couples in difficult marriages. Contact John and Jennifer Vincent at jbjvjo@sbcglobal.net or 361-580-2770; or call 800-470-2230; or visit http://www.helpourmarriage.org.
C is for Cattle, their manger His bed, there in the trough where He laid His head. “And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger.” Luke 2:7.

H is for Herod, whose murderous scheme was told to Joseph in a nocturnal dream. “The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, ‘Arise and take the young child and his mother and flee into Egypt … for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.’” Matthew 2:13.

R is for Rejoice. The sorrow of sin is banished forever when Jesus comes in. “And you will have joy and gladness; and many will rejoice at his birth.” Luke 1:14.

I is for Immanuel, “God with us,” for Christ brought man back to the Father’s house. “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” Isaiah 7:14.

S is for Savior. To be this He came; the angel of God assigned Him His name. “She will bring forth a son, and you will call his name JESUS, for he will save his people from their sins.” Matthew 1:21.

T is for Tidings of joy, not of danger, telling of Him who was laid in a manger. “And the angel said unto them, Fear not for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.” Luke 2:10.

M is for Mary, His mother so brave, counting God faithful and mighty to save. “And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.” Luke 1:38.

A is for Angels, appearing so bright, telling of Jesus that first Christmas night. “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host.” Luke 2:13.

S is for Seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (piety, fortitude, knowledge, understanding, counsel, fear of the Lord, wisdom). Also it can help us remember the seven sacraments: baptism, Holy Communion, confirmation, reconciliation, matrimony, holy orders and anointing of the sick.