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The Catholic Lighthouse

The Cradle of Texas Immigration

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Megan Schott, St. Joseph High School principal, talks about her journey to becoming a Catholic School principal during the first in-person class of Catholic educators pursuing a master's degree. She is one of the instructors for the Educational Leadership and Supervision degree program at the University of Houston-Victoria. The 11-month degree program has been designed to provide a Catholic perspective for teachers who are dedicated to teaching in Catholic schools. (Janet Jones/The Catholic Lighthouse)

Catholic schools blessed with dedicated teachers

JANET JONES
The Catholic Lighthouse

This is Celebrate Catholic Schools Week (Jan. 29-Feb. 4), a time to honor the students, parents, faculty, parishes, vocations and communities that make Catholic education possible.

The Diocese of Victoria saw at least a 4 percent increase in its enrollment this year, and, according to said Dr. John Quarry, superintendent of the Office of Catholic Schools, the fallout from the pandemic could have

See Catholic schools, pg. 20

Advocacy Day returns March 28

JANET JONES
The Catholic Lighthouse

Advocacy Day at the Capitol in Austin on March 28 is a chance for Catholics in the Diocese of Victoria, and other dioceses in Texas, to stand with the Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops (TCCB) on issues that touch on family life, immigration, education, healthcare and more.

Bishop Brendan Cahill said it is a good opportunity for the Church to let lawmakers know

their concerns. He added that, in his experience, the representatives of this area have been very open to hearing those concerns.

According to Shannon Jaquette, policy analyst for the TCCB, the bishops are hoping that Advocacy Day will return to the numbers it had years back. At one time, she said, there were some 5,000 who showed up for Advocacy Day, but in more recent years, the number has declined to

See Advocacy Day returns, pg. 7



Father Tommy Chen is shown with his "perfect rectory dog," which he refused at first because he was not a fan of dogs. After being worn down a bit, he took the dog in and admits he is a good pet. Father Tommy was chosen as this year's honoree at the Roast and Toast fundraiser for The Emmaus Counseling Center, which takes place May 5. (Janet Jones/The Catholic Lighthouse)

Father Tommy Chen knows you can't fight God's will

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Rev. Tommy Chen will be this year's honoree at the Roast and Toast to benefit the Emmaus Counseling Center on May 5. For those who might not know Father Tommy, the following story is to introduce you to him. If you want to hear more, make plans to attend the Roast and Toast. Details about the event coming soon.

JANET JONES
The Catholic Lighthouse

"We plan, God laughs" is a proverb with which most, if not all, people can identify.

The Rev. Tommy Chen, pastor of Our Lady of the Gulf in Port Lavaca and its missions, knows all about that. At one time he was determined to become a doctor, marry a Catholic girl and have a lot of Catholic children. Obviously, God's will prevailed.

Father Tommy, 44, a native of Taiwan, who has been in the U.S. since age 4, is right at home in Port Lavaca. Calhoun County is where he spent his childhood because his father worked for Formosa.

He was raised Catholic because his mother was Catholic, which is not common among the Taiwanese since the Catholic population in Taiwan is less than 1 percent, Father Tommy said. But his mother was a direct descendant

See Father Tommy Chen, pg. 9



Black History Month a good time to put courage before caution

EDITOR'S NOTE: This column is an edited version of Bishop Cahill's first one published in February of 2016.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

An obituary written in 1994 for Bishop Joseph Durick included the following:

"He was in Birmingham when racial antagonisms and protests came to a boil in 1963. He and a handful of white colleagues called on Dr. King and 'outsiders' to desist and let the courts work toward integration. Dr. King, in jail by then, responded with a long letter to 'my dear fellow clergymen' to explain that blacks could wait no longer. He voiced disappointment in the white priests, ministers and rabbis, saying 'they should be among our strongest allies.' Dr. King wrote: 'All too many have been more cautious than courageous and have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained glass windows.' His 'Letter from Birmingham Jail' has probably been reprinted more than anything else he wrote. ... 'The real message

A Shepherd's Message

By Bishop Brendan Cahill



in the letter didn't hit home until later,' Bishop Durick said in 1969."

The real message did hit home for Bishop Durick, who was to become the Bishop of Nashville, Tenn. After the murder of Dr. King in Memphis, Bishop Durick arranged a Memorial Mass in Memphis and participated in other memorial services with men and women of different denominations, faiths and colors. As we are celebrating Black History Month, I'm thinking this may be a good time to recommit ourselves to our ministerial alliances to promote the dignity of every human person.

One of the strengths of the Civil Rights Movement was that many white priests, rabbis

and ministers became more "courageous than cautious," and joined their African-American brothers and sisters in peaceful protests of unjust conditions. Whether it be for racial fairness, the right to life of an unborn child, or upholding the sacredness and value of the family – there are many areas where we can continue to join arms with men and women of good will.

Also during Black History Month, I think it is good to call to mind the great contribution of so many African-Americans to the Catholic Church. People seem surprised when I mention that there are more than 3,000,000 African-American Catholics in the United

States – more than many other denominations. Especially after the emancipation of slaves, many African-Americans sought to join the Catholic Church. In 1889, Daniel Rudd called together the first National Black Catholic Congress (NBCC), held at St. Augustine Catholic Church in Washington, D.C.

The history of African-American Catholics in Texas includes participation in some of these Congresses in the 1800s – a man named William Easton traveled from Galveston to represent the Diocese of Galveston. This July, I will be traveling with other Texans to Washington, D.C., for the next NBCC. For more information on Black Catholic history, you can go to the website or Facebook page for the National Black Catholic Congress.

May we be courageous in standing up for the rights of the most vulnerable in our society. God bless you and your families. Thank you for your beautiful, strong witness of the Catholic faith.

Let's keep one another in prayer,
+Brendan

Bishop Emeritus reflects on the papacy of Benedict XVI

By TAMARA DIAZ

*The Victoria Advocate
Special to the Lighthouse*

Bishop Emeritus David Fellhauer said Pope Benedict XVI's legacy to the church will be that his decision to retire was "an act of great courage and clarity of mind."

He was the first pope to resign from the papacy in 600 years. Only four of 266 popes have ever left office in more than 1,500 years.

Pope Benedict XVI, was born Joseph Ratzinger in Germany and spent his youth in the powder keg of World War II, even at one point being compelled to join the Hitler Youth. Membership was compulsory for young men in Nazi Germany.

After WWII, he studied philosophy and theology at the University of Munich in Germany and was ordained a priest in 1951, according to a Vatican website.

When he was elected Pope in 2005, he was 78, and he retired in 2013. He died Dec. 31 at age 95.

Fellhauer met with Pope Benedict on more than one occasion.

The future pope was a theologian, Fellhauer said, and his focus was academic in nature.

"His steadiness will be remembered. He was a traditional progressive, an expert in liturgy," Fellhauer said. "He wanted the church to keep up with the times as well as it could. But no church can just go with the flow. He had a firmness in keeping with church dogma."

Fellhauer was appointed bishop of the Victoria Diocese in 1990, and retired in 2015, so he was the bishop in Victoria during the entirety of Benedict's papacy.

While he was bishop, Fellhauer met with Benedict four or five times, before and after he became the Roman Catholic pontiff, he said.

"He was a quiet man," Fellhauer said. "He was reserved -- probably a little bit shy. He was an academic, and that's a world unto itself."

He was a deeply spiritual person, Fell-



A photo of Pope Benedict XVI and then-Bishop David Fellhauer hangs in the former bishop's home in Victoria. (Tamara Diaz/Victoria Advocate)

hauer said, but in a simplistic way, having said many times, "I am no mystic."

"He did not claim to have a direct pipeline to God, if you will," Fellhauer said. "He said his prayers like the rest of us."

Fellhauer said Pope Benedict, though he wanted the Catholic church to keep up with the times, he refused to change church teachings and practices. For example, the pontiff wanted to protect the Catholic sacrament of marriage, decrying same-sex marriage in a June 2005 speech at the Basilica of St. John Lateran.

"Today, the various forms of the erosion of

marriage, such as free unions and 'trial marriage,' and even pseudo-marriages between people of the same sex, are instead an expression of anarchic freedom that are wrongly made to pass as true human liberation," Pope Benedict XVI said.

He stood fast against abortion, women being ordained priests and priests marrying, saying obedience to church teachings was nonnegotiable for the faithful.

"This was his firmness," Fellhauer said. And yet, Fellhauer said, this man who

See Bishop Emeritus reflects, pg. 15



Bishop Cahill’s Schedule

February	
4	Visit with deacon candidates at retreat; Spiritual Renewal Center
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 a.m. Mass for Consecrated Life at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Victory; Victoria • 11:30 a.m. Mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Victory • 6 p.m. Mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Victory
6	12:15 p.m. Mass at UHV; Victoria
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 a.m. Legion of Mary Praesidium meeting; Cathedral Center • 7 p.m. meeting and supper with Mothers of Grace at Our Lady of Victory Annex; Victoria
10	8:15 a.m. school Mass and visit with St. Philip’s Catholic School; El Campo
11	10 a.m. Catholic Rural Life Mass for Blessing of the Seed & Soil; Ganado
12	2 p.m. Confirmation Mass for Our Lady of Victory; The Cathedral of Our Lady of Victory
13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2:30 p.m. Communities of Faith meeting • 5 p.m. Diocesan Liturgical Commission meeting; Chancery
14	9 a.m. Legion of Mary Praesidium meeting; Cathedral Center
15	8 a.m. school Mass and visit with St. Michael’s Catholic School; Cuero
15-17	Dedication Mass for Father Rother Shrine; Oklahoma City
18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mini-retreat at Holy Family Church; Victoria • 5 p.m. Confirmation Mass for Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary; Ganado
19	Youth Spectacular at KC Hall; Hallettsville
20	Noon meal with IWBS Sisters at IWBS Convent; Victoria
21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6:30 a.m. Relevant Radio “Morning Air” interview • 9 a.m. Legion of Mary Praesidium meeting; Cathedral Center
22	12:30 p.m. Ash Wednesday Mass at Victoria College; Victoria
23	8:10 a.m. school Mass and visit with St. Rose of Lima Catholic School; Schulenburg
24	8:05 a.m. school Mass and visit with Sacred Heart School; Hallettsville
25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2023 Men’s Conference at Holy Family Church; Victoria • 4 p.m. Mass 100-year celebration for Hallettsville Knights of Columbus
26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 a.m. Mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Victory • 2 p.m. Rite of Election at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Victory

27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noon Mass with Missionary Catechists; Victoria • 6 p.m. Ministry Appreciation Dinner; Chancery
28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 a.m. Legion of Mary Praesidium meeting; Cathedral Center • 6 p.m. Deacon’s Community Board Meeting; Hallettsville
March	
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noon Audit and Risk Management Committee Meeting; Virtual • University of St. Thomas Board Meeting
4-8	Parish Lenten Mission at St. Edward Catholic Church; Spring

Retreat offers
 silence, solitude

GANADO – The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary parish is hosting a special “Silence & Solitude” weekend retreat March 9-12 at the Spiritual Renewal Center.

This retreat is for men and women ages 20 and up. Cost is \$200 per person, which must be paid by the final day of registration, which is Feb. 17. To secure a place, a minimum non-refundable/non-transferable deposit of \$75 should be mailed to Assumption Catholic Church, P.O. Box 369, Ganado, TX 77962. There also is a registration form that must be turned in by that time.

For more information, or to get the form contact the church office at 361-771-3425, or email churchoffice@abvmganado.org. The registration form is on the church’s website: <https://www.abvmganado.org>.

In Memoriam

Sister M. Rosa Sanchez, IWBS, 97

Sister M. Rosa Sanchez, IWBS, 97, died Jan. 17, 2023. She was known as Sister M. Benedicta Sanchez earlier in her religious life. She was born Aug. 16, 1925, in Mackay, Texas, to the late Diego and Genoveva (Vargas) Sanchez. She was the fifth of eight children, four girls and four boys.



Sister Rosa Sanchez

She received her elementary education at Adams Public School in El Campo and her high school education at Nazareth Academy in Victoria. She entered Nazareth Convent as a postulant in 1945 and made her profession of vows on Sept. 2, 1947. Sister Rosa received her BA degree with a major in English and a minor in Spanish from Incarnate Word College in San Antonio and her MA with a major in secondary education and a minor in sociology/psychology from Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos.

During her 76 years as a member of the congregation, Sister Rosa taught on the elementary and junior high levels and also served as principal in several schools and as a director of religious education in various parishes. Her teaching experiences took her to St. Jerome School in Plum, St. Agnes School in San Antonio, Holy Cross School in East Bernard, Holy Cross School in Bay City, St. Michael School in Weimar, Our Lady of Perpetual Help School in Selma, St. Leo School in San Antonio, Immaculate Conception School in Sealy, St. Ludmila Academy in Shiner, St.

John School in San Antonio, Sacred Heart School in La Grange, Nazareth Academy in Victoria and Blessed Sacrament Academy in San Antonio. As Director of Religious Education, Sister Rosa ministered in Holy Cross Parish in East Bernard, St. Mary’s Parish in Nada, Guardian Angels Parish in Wallis, St. Basil and St. Thomas parishes in Angleton and St. Lawrence and St. Cecilia’s parishes in San Antonio. She ministered as a certified chaplain for pastoral ministry, counselor/chaplain for Family Hospice, Nurses in Touch Hospice and Outreach Health Services in San Antonio.

In 2016, she moved to Incarnate Word Convent Health Care where she entered into her Apostolate of Prayer and Suffering. She enjoyed puzzles, listening to music and spiritual recordings and praying with people. She appreciated God’s wonders in nature and found delight in recalling and sharing God’s blessings to her throughout her life.

Sister Rosa was preceded in death by her parents and all her siblings: Adela, Carlos, Anselmo, Refugia, Jesus, Emilio and Angelita, and their spouses. She is survived by many nieces, nephews, relatives and friends.

The Mass of Christian Burial took place Saturday, Jan. 21. Burial followed at Catholic Cemetery No. 3.

Memorial donations may be made to Incarnate Word Convent, Blessed Sacrament Academy, Nazareth Academy, Hospice of South Texas or donor’s choice. Memories and condolences can be shared at www.colonialfuneralhomevictoria.com.

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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 – \$.01 - \$99.99; Acolyte – \$100 - \$499.99; Candidate – \$500 - \$1,499.99; Transitional Deacon – \$1,500 - \$2,499.99; Priest – \$2,500 >.

Lector

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Dorothy Viktorin

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Victor A. Brenk*

Acolyte

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Candidate

Transitional Deacon

Priest

To contribute to the Education of
Seminarian Fund, send contributions to:

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Education of Seminarian Fund
P. O. Box 4070
Victoria, TX 77903

Please remember in prayer the priests of the Diocese of Victoria,

Heavenly Father, bless Your Church with an abundance of holy and zealous priests, deacons, brothers, and sisters. Give those you have called to the married state and those you have chosen to live as single persons in the world, the special graces that their lives require. Form us all in the likeness of your Son so that in Him, with Him, and through Him we may love You more deeply and serve You more faithfully, always and everywhere. With Mary we ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

Rev. Daniel O'Brien	02/07/2008
Rev. Msgr. Casimir Jarzombek	02/15/2019
Rev. Eugene Janson	02/17/2005
Rev. Brian Crookes	02/23/2003
Rev. Msgr. Vaclav J. Bily	02/23/1990
Rev. Msgr. Victor Schmidtzensky	02/25/2005
Rev. Jerome Caponi	02/27/2009



*"Eternal rest granted unto them, O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine upon them.
May they rest in peace."*

Did you Know?

If you have been thinking about a Place of Rest did you know we have burial plots available at Resurrection Cemetery and at Cemetery 4 in Old Victoria?
We also offer a peaceful setting in our Columbarium for those who plan to be cremated.
For more information, contact
Victoria Catholic Cemeteries, 361-573-0828
We are more than happy to discuss the various options we have to offer.

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 - \$.01 - \$99.99; Acolyte – \$100 - \$499.99; Candidate – \$500 - \$1,499.99; Transitional Deacon – \$1,500 - \$2,499.99; Priest – \$2,500 >.**

January 17, 2023

• General Seminary Burse
Acolyte

In memory of James Prihoda by
Joan Prihoda Family

• Rev. Kristopher L. Fuchs Seminary Burse
Lector

In memory of Leon John Kristynik by
Johnny and Margie Dornak

• Rev. Chase Goodman Seminary Burse
Acolyte

In honor of our son, Rev. Chase Goodman
by Mark and Julie Goodman

• Anthony and Rose Marie Trippodo
Liggio Seminary Burse #2
Acolyte

Donation in memory of Mr. Howard Stoner
by K of C Council #2902, Schulenburg

• Rev. Msgr. John C. Peters Seminary Burse #8
Lector

In memory of John Peters, Jr. and Tillie
Peters by Deacon Joey and Mary Targac

Acolyte
In honor of Rev. Msgr. John Peters for
Christmas by Sacred Heart School
Faculty, Staff and Students

• Rev. Michael Rother Seminary Burse
Lector

In memory of Mike Mustachia by
M/M Bernard Rother

To contribute to an existing Seminary
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P. O. Box 4070
Victoria, TX 77903

Columbus church says farewell
to Father Augustine

COLUMBUS – The Rev. Augustine Asante, the pastor of St. Anthony Catholic Church, has announced that, with Bishop Brendan Cahill's consultation and permission, he will begin work with the Catholic Chaplain Corps at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.

His new job begins Feb. 5 and he will

be in transition to full-time ministry and residency there in the near future. Bishop Cahill said he expects to name a new pastor for named for St. Anthony in Columbus by June.

The parish plans a celebration for Father Asante's 25th anniversary of ordination and bid him farewell following a special Mass on Feb. 4 at 10 a.m. at St. Anthony.

After his transition, the Very Rev. Bob Knippenberg, pastor of St. Roch in Mentz and Sts. Peter and Paul in Frelsburg, will be temporary administrator of the parish. The Rev. Nelson Gonzalez-Nieto remains the parochial vicar for the parish and Father Knippenberg will remain in residence at the Frelsburg parish.



*Rev. Augustine
Asante*

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Hope pops up like a green surprise from a dying root

I like plants, yet I'm not very good with all kinds of plants. I always feel bad when someone gets me a high-maintenance plant as a gift, because I know the days to its demise start ticking away as soon as I touch it. I'm a big fan of the low-maintenance kind. The ones that fight to live; where I have to put minimal effort in keeping them alive. I prefer the ones that thrive on just water and light. I like those plants so much that I keep bringing new ones to the chancery office. I believe that, eventually, Bishop Cahill will have to stop me before I convert the chancery into a jungle.

I've had a small plant for many years. It's called a prayer plant. In the morning it opens up its leaves and later it rolls them up. One day, Father Kirby came by in the afternoon and saw the plant. He told me it was time to retire it, as it was dead, I told him that the plant does that and is very much alive. I don't know if he ever believed me.

When I was out of the chancery for the preparation of my final profession, the poor prayer plant received too much love in the form of water. When I came back, it was clear that it had drowned. Still, I took it and placed it on the windowsill near my office.

Finding Beauty in Mystery

By Sister Rosario Resendez, IWBS



The plant did not recover. I was sad, as I had that plant for at least six years and now it was gone. I cut off all the dead leaves and pulled out the rotten ones but I didn't get rid of the pot thinking I would just use it when I propagate one of the other ones.

A few days later, I was watering the other plants on the window sill and I saw a bit of green popping out of the "empty" pot that once held the prayer plant. I didn't think much of it, just that maybe I missed a rotten root. The next day, I saw another bit of green popping out of the dirt. Now my interest was piqued. Each day the green came out more and more, and I was surprised to see that this prayer plant showed it was not done yet.

I think one can see that there is a sort of

symbolism here. How many times have we felt like we drowned our prayer life? We pray and we feel nothing. We pray and feel like there are no fruits coming from it. We start to lose hope. We think our prayer life is dead. We're going through all these challenges and we can't see any blessings. Yet we still hold onto something. Just like I didn't throw away the pot, thinking I could use it for something else, we hold onto something – a little bit of hope.

Right now we are in ordinary time, and the vestments the priests wear are green. Green is the color of hope. Just like that little bit of green that popped out of the dirt showed me there was hope that this plant would survive. There are times in our prayer life, no matter how dry (or drowned) it may feel, that a little green pops in. A little hope.

One day we look back and we see that there have been blessings all along during these times of struggle. I've said it before: It is hard for one to see the blessings while we are going through the challenges. It is only after we overcome a challenge that we see the blessings that helped us through. We will come to a time when we look around and we see that what we were praying for, we are

actually in the midst of it. God has blessed us even when we couldn't see it.

This is why it's so important for us to continue to show up to prayer, even when we feel like we can't and that our prayer life is suffering. It is important for us to continue to go to Mass, even if we don't feel like we are gaining anything from it, because we are gaining much more than we can even imagine. Just like I couldn't see beneath the soil to know that there was still hope for my little prayer plant, many times we cannot see what our Beloved God is doing and the blessings He's preparing for us. But they are coming.

"Prayer unites us; it makes us brothers and sisters. It opens our hearts and reminds us of a beautiful truth which we sometimes forget. In prayer, we all learn to say "Father," "Dad." And when we say "Father," "Dad," we learn to see one another as brothers and sisters. In prayer, there are no rich or poor; there are sons and daughters, sisters and brothers. In prayer, there is no first or second class; there is brotherhood.

"In prayer our hearts find the strength not to be cold and insensitive in the face of situations of injustice. In prayer, God keeps calling us, opening our hearts to charity."
– Pope Francis, September 2015

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Hospice professionals to lead retreat for caregivers moving to the next phase of life



Amor Meus Spirituality Center, Incarnate Word Convent, 1101 N.E. Water Street, is offering a workshop/retreat on Feb. 11, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. entitled: “Life After Care Giving” for anyone who may have been a caregiver of a loved one and may now be asking questions such as: “What’s next?” or “Where do I find meaning and purpose in my life now?”

This is an opportunity to take a day to help work through the loss of the person to whom so much love, care, and compassion has been given, through gratitude, reconciliation,



Deacon Leo Sharron

prayer and trust.

Deacon Leo Sharron and Terry Robinson will lead the retreat. Sharron is presently the director of clinical services at the Emmaus Counseling Center, and bereavement services coordinator/chaplain for Hospice of South Texas. Robinson provides services to local rehabilitation hospitals in his retirement. In the past he has worked as executive director of Hospice of South Texas, acute rehabilitation services and as CEO of SCCI Hospital in Victoria.

Sign-in will be at 9:30 a.m. Parking is in front of the convent. Lunch will be provided. A free-will offering will be accepted.



Terry Robinson

Faith brings awareness of our duty to care for creation

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

In her book *Race and the Cosmos: An Invitation to View the World Differently*, Dr. Barbara Holmes, spiritual teacher, activist and scholar of African American spirituality, mysticism, cosmology and culture, states that, “It is time to awaken to self, society, and the cosmos, for none of us has the luxury of sleepwalking through the major systemic shifts taking place in society, and the small and sacred moments of daily life. ... Up above our heads, there are worlds unknown and a canopy of grace, light, air, and water that supports our survival. Without realizing it, we expend massive amounts of energy to block out the vastness of our universe. ... this information can be more than human systems can take.”

We may not sleepwalk through the major systemic shifts that are taking place in our daily lives and block out the vastness of our universe. Our faith challenges us to awaken to good stewardship of the earth and its inhabitants.

Contemplation of God’s creation is helpful in acknowledging where reality and truth lie. Walking around the convent grounds in the spring of 2019, I saw the beauty of God’s creation all around me: the majestic live oaks, the orchard trees that bear fruit, the decorative landscaped bushes, the green carpet and Bermuda grass, the setting sun that gives life to the plants and us, and the eight deer that inhabited the grounds. I witnessed the Texas thunderstorms, sometimes bringing rain and more often not. As I walked, Psalms 19:2 came to mind: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims

his handiwork.”

I am in awe of the beauty, intelligence, majesty and, particularly, the love of God. Like a person who paints a picture that he/she values and loves, so God loves what God has created. “God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good.” (Gen. 1:31)

At the same time, I also saw that the grass, and some of the oak and other trees were barren in places. Some branches appeared to be dead due to a lack of rainfall, or perhaps from damage done by Hurricane Harvey. The deer had come up to our lawn to eat the leaves and flowers of the flowering plants since other vegetation was scarce for lack of rain. I saw the season of winter pass without much freezing weather and the season of spring quickly become an unofficial summer. Extreme heat has led to more indoor air-conditioning.

Because God is its Creator, every aspect of creation and each living thing reflect some aspect of God. Every part of creation, without exception, is the outpouring of God’s love. Genesis 1:27-28 says that God has entrusted us with the care of that creation. “God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him. ... God blessed them, saying: ‘... Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth.’”

To return God’s love is to have “dominion,” that is to love, respect and take care of creation.

Since we are commissioned to relate to creation as God relates to it, we demonstrate this love in the choices we make as stewards of creation. God has given us an extraordinary gift to make these choices -- the ability to think and reason, to know what is reality and truth. Reason calls us to acknowledge the reality and value of each element of creation: air, fire, water, sunlight, earth, microbes, plants, and animals, as well as human beings, and realize that each element depends on and needs the other. God values all creation, so we must value all creation.

Besides witnessing the beauty of God’s creation changing locally, we will continue this reflection based on what we see across the nation and the world.



Sister Marian Sturm,
IWBS

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vocations@victoriadiocese.org

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cglynn@svictoriadiocese.org



March for Life

The 36th Candlelight March for Life took place Jan. 26 with hundreds attending. Those who walked prayed the rosary from DeLeon Plaza to Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Church where the program included a talk from Heather Gardner, executive director of the Central Texas Coalition for Life. Gardner is one person who was a first-hand witness of the well-known conversion of Abby Johnson, former Planned Parenthood director, who now advocates for life. It was Gardner's birthday and she brought a sign that said "Everybody deserves a birthday." She said she could think of no better way to spend her birthday than at a pro-life event.



Many recognized for completing Pastoral Institute



Sister Digna Vela receives a gift from the Pastoral Institute for her part in creating and developing the Pastoral Institute. The presentation was part of a ceremony presenting certificates of completion to 41 people who did all of the coursework the PI has to offer in a three-year period. Those receiving the certificate were:

Melissa Arellano
Richard Arellano
Emily Benavides
JoAnn Blanton
Todd Brosch
Bernice Cavness
Sr. Mary Beth Cernoch, IWBS
Stephanie Charbula
Mary Jane Cortinas
Rachel De Leon
Antoinette Garcia
Dr. Gloria Gonzalez

John Henke
Yolanda Hernandez
Mary Vincent Hogan
Brittany Hollas
Sr. M. Liliane Janda, IWBS
Barbara Jasek
Sharon Jemelka
Valerie Jurica
Sheila Klmitchek
Audrey Loos
Anne Marie Martin
Sally McElroy
Joe Mejia
Dolores Miller
Pat Mladenka
Howard Motal

Brunilda Ortiz
Mary Ann Postel-Rodriguez
Margaret Pruett
Ovelia Rivera
Joe Ryan
Suzie Ryan
Heather Taylor
Jessica Valdez
Minnie Villa
Gayle Wesson
Dolores Wilkes
William (Bill) Wilkes
Martha Ybarra
Carol Zarbock
John Zarbock
Sharon Zimberg

Rates are on the rise!

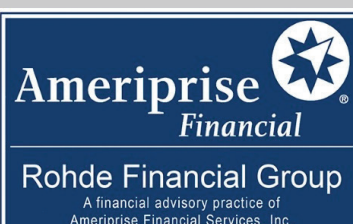


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Advocacy Day returns March 28

Continued from pg. 1

about 2,000.

This is the first Advocacy Day event since 2019.

The schedule includes a Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral in Austin the evening prior to the March 28 event, and a rally at 11 a.m. on the steps of the capitol.

Not only is it a chance for Catholics to advocate for their position on issues, the capitol also hosts groups from Catholic schools who participate in mock trials. The high-school students usually are involved in the mock trials while junior high students sit in the audience. This year's topic will be "payday loans."

The Diocese of Victoria's Office of the Chancellor will take, by charter bus, some

50 people who want to voice their support for the bishops to State Rep. Lois Kolkhorst. The visits will be scheduled at certain times and anyone who wishes to be a spokesperson for the diocese should contact Brenda Ortmann in the chancellor's office at bortmann@victoria-diocese.org. Small groups will be scheduled at different times to meet the representatives. A short training is necessary for the groups' spokespersons prior to the visits.

Schools who plan to send a delegation of students should also call the chancellor's office to have T-shirts ordered for the day.

For more information about TCCB and Advocacy Day, visit www.txcatholic.org.



Suffering can make us bitter or better

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The Rev. Charles Kram wrote this sermon for the fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B. He titled it "Suffering – What Good Is It?"*

No one present here can honestly say, "I never suffer." The world is full of sufferings of every kind.

Even newborn babies suffer. The first thing that happens to them as soon as they are born is that they get spanked by the doctor, but some say they also cry immediately because they are born with their share of our huge national debt.

All joking aside, why do even innocent babies have to suffer? Actually, there is much about suffering that is a mystery. The Bible often mentions it but offers no final solution.

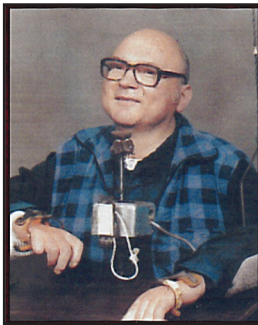
In general, suffering is the result of sin. That is, if Adam had not sinned, we would not have to suffer.

But in an individual case, we can't connect an individual's suffering with his sins

unless we mean such natural consequence as emphysema from smoking or liver disease from drinking or AIDS from sharing infected drug needles.

The famous atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hare once said that she couldn't believe that God exists because, if he did, there couldn't be such things as deformed babies and earthquakes and storms.

Can God will evil? God cannot will moral



1929-2000

Father Charles Kram Corner

evil; that is, God cannot will sin. Approving of sin would be impossible to his nature as God, but he can permit it. We are all living proof of that.

But God can will physical evils such as earthquakes and floods and giant meteors striking the earth. These result from the working out of the laws of nature established by God. If they don't happen when they should, we thank God for a miracle.

But why does God so often let the innocent suffer while the guilty prosper? One preacher answered this question by saying that ... God does not balance his books once a month like accountants do, but that one day there will be a day of reckoning.

Another, and perhaps better, answer would be the fact that God uses suffering to bring about great good. Think of how the sufferings of his innocent Son brought about the defeat of Satan and of sin and death and the redemption of the world.

St. Paul endured countless sufferings for the sake of Christ – stoning, imprisonment, shipwreck, constant persecution. His attitude was, as he said to his people, "I rejoice now in the sufferings I bear for your sake," ... "and

what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ, I fill up in my flesh, for his Body, which is the Church."

As long as we live in this world, suffering will remain with us.

Our clinics and hospitals and treatment centers are special places for people who are suffering, and anyone who visits or works there soon sees how much a part of human life suffering is. It is also in the school and in the home, in the store and in the church, in the park and on the street – everywhere – the story is the same.

But as Christians, we need not despair. One day our sufferings will be over, and when in Heaven, we see God face to face, we will see why everything we had to go through here, had to be the way it was, and we will rejoice exceedingly.

Then it will no longer be important whether we were rich or poor, a success or a failure, healthy or ill.

What WILL matter then is whether our trials made us bitter or better, sinners or saints. The choice is ours.

As Christians, then, rather than question God or become angry with Him, we take care of ourselves as best we can. We ask God for his help. We accept what we must and we trust God and his mysterious ways for the rest.

Lord, Jesus, thank you for consoling us in our sufferings and being always our example and our strength. Help us to accept our sufferings patiently and to achieve their purpose to the fullest. Grant that by our willing endurance we may one day join you in the glory your sufferings won for us. Amen.

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CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



Dear Friends of Catholic Education,

As we celebrate the 2023 Catholic Schools Week, we reflect on the immense gift we are given by God through our Catholic schools.

Our Diocese of Victoria Catholic schools give children a way to see Him in unique and special ways. Whether we are experiencing Him in the Eucharist, relying on His divine providence as we see enrollment numbers climb, or simply seeing Christ through the smile of a friend, we know God is with us. Catholic school education allows children to become adults who see life through a different lens.

As our diocese focuses on the National Eucharistic Revival, we are also grateful for the gift of His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. I am so grateful that our school children are blessed with opportunities to encounter Jesus in the Eucharist, and I am excited to see what new and beautiful ways we will be introducing through the Revival. We pray for an increase in devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and a full understanding of the gift of the Real Presence. Our Catholic school children will be on the frontlines of extending this devotion and love to their friends and family as we plan and promote Eucharistic activities for our school communities.

We look forward to continued success over the coming years and know that—with God’s help—we will be able to continue our work of bringing the Gospel message of our Lord to children throughout this diocese.

May God bless you and your families.

Let’s keep each other in prayer,

+ *Brendan Cahill*

+The Most Reverend Brendan J. Cahill, S.T.D.



Diocese of Victoria Catholic Schools

There are 15 Catholic schools in the Diocese of Victoria serving children in Pre-K through 12th grades. All schools are accredited by the **Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops – Education Department** and use the **National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools** to further incorporate our mission of faith, service, and love.





CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

The Catholic Lighthouse Special
Page 3-A — February 2023

Nazareth Academy Catholic School in Victoria
Established 1867
www.nazarethacademy.org



St. Joseph High School in Victoria
Established 1868
www.stjvictoria.com



St. Michael Catholic School in Cuero
Established 1877
www.stmschoolcuero.org



Sacred Heart Catholic School in Hallettsville
Established 1882
www.shschool.org



St. Rose of Lima Catholic School in Schulenburg
Established 1889
www.strosecardinals.org



St. Michael Catholic School in Weimar
Established 1890
www.stmichaelswords.org



St. Joseph Catholic School in Yoakum
Established 1891
www.stjccatholicsschool.com



St. Ludmila Academy in Shiner
Established 1897
www.shinercatholicsschool.org



Holy Cross Catholic School in Bay City
Established 1940
www.bcholycrosssschool.org



St. Philip Catholic School in El Campo
Established 1949
www.stphilipschool.org



St. Anthony Catholic School in Columbus
Established 1955
www.stanthonycolumbus.net



Our Lady of Victory Catholic School in Victoria
Established 1957
www.ourladyvictory.org



St. Paul High School in Shiner
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www.shinercatholicsschool.org



**Our Lady of the Gulf Catholic School
in Port Lavaca**
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- Communication applications such as speech and debate
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Spiritual Development Opportunities Include:

- Daily religious instruction rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- Regular Mass attendance, either weekly or daily
- Regular reception of sacraments such as reconciliation and Holy Eucharist
- Grade-level and faculty retreats
- Sacrament preparation
- Service projects

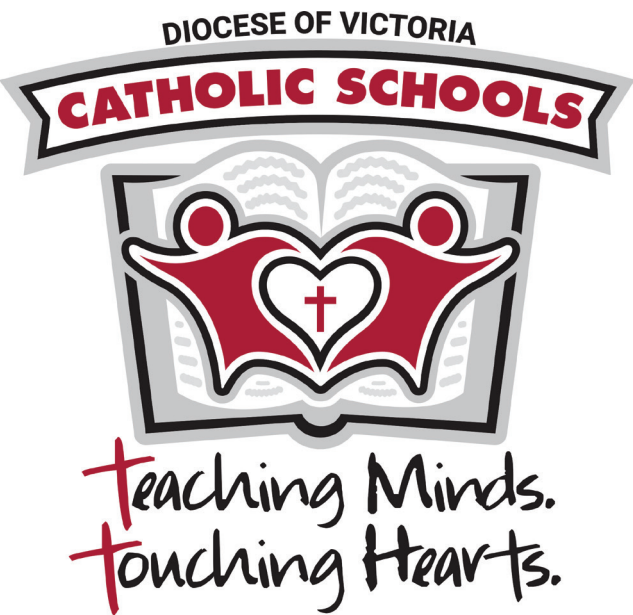
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CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



Diocese of Victoria Catholic Schools by the Numbers

- 2,900 - number of children, on average, given the opportunity of receive a Catholic education each year
- 17:1 - average student-to-teacher ratio
- 12,000+ - number of completed service hours last school year
- 109 - students with a diagnosed disability from a local education agency
- 100% - percentage of high school graduates that enter into a post-high school education or military program
- 10 - number of counties in Texas served by our schools

12 pre-k programs • 13 elementary schools • 3 high schools

For a full impact report on our schools, visit www.victoriadiocese.org/catholic-schools





Weimar KC members honored for service



The Weimar Knights of Columbus Council 2153 recently honored former Grand Knight Jack Muggli for his leadership and dedication to the Weimar council and the Knights of Columbus during the past three years (2019-2022). Delphin Bartek, current grand knight, left, is shown here with Jack Muggli.



For the year 2022, the Weimar Knights of Columbus, Council 2153, named the Buddy Hudec Family as the council's Family of The Year. They have served as an inspiration to St. Michael Church, St. Michael School and the Council by supporting and strengthening Catholic family life. Pictured, from left, are Grand Knight Delphin Bartek, Kathy and Buddy Hudec.



Father Tommy Chen knows you can't fight God's will

Continued from pg. 1

of a family who brought Catholicism to the country. Chen said he visited family in Taiwan after becoming a priest, and he was "treated like a movie star" because of that. His father converted to Catholicism while Father Tommy was in college and his parents are also his parishioners.

As a youth who studied piano, he took a job at First United Methodist Church playing for Sunday services. After he started that job, the organist retired from St. Ann and they tapped his talent as well, so he played for both churches each Sunday. "I was very firm in my identity as a Catholic," he said, adding that the Methodist church members didn't know that and thought he was a member of their church. His ordination was a surprise to his Methodist friends, but they were all very happy for him. He laughed about that, saying, "They were just so proud that 'one of their own' became a Catholic priest."

Before he decided to become a priest, the signs pointing in that direction were everywhere, but he admits he looked the other way. He even quit reciting "Thy will be done," when he prayed the Our Father. "I'm a firm

believer in 'Be careful what you pray for,' because He's going to let it happen."

After all, he wanted to be a doctor, even though every time he heard from a priest about "vocations," "I always thought they were looking at me," he said.

So off to the University of Texas in Austin he went, and enrolled in a pre-med curriculum.

So what happened? "I discovered that I hated biology and chemistry." In fact he was failing CHEM302, and that put him in somewhat of a tailspin. "I've never failed a class in my life," the straight-A student said. "It shook me up."

Halfway through college he switched majors having found a love for psychology. He also, at some point, backed off of being as religious. He surmised that people were guiding him in the direction of the priesthood because he had always been at church so much. So he faded into the pews for a while until, as fate would have it, they were calling

See Father Tommy Chen, pg. 20

East Bernard society helps Hostyn church

EAST BERNARD -- The KJT St. Wenceslaus Society No. 40 of East Bernard sponsored a silent auction at the Holy Cross Church Bazaar in East Bernard to benefit Queen of the Holy Rosary Catholic Church in Hostyn, which was destroyed by an explosion and fire on June 9, 2022. The silent auction raised \$1,724. Voluntary donations added \$526. Additionally, the State KJT home office matched funds of \$250, making a total of \$2,500 that was presented to the Rev. Felix Twumasi, pastor of Queen of the Holy Rosary in Hostyn. Edwin C. Marik, president of the KJT society, is shown here presenting the check. *(Contributed Photo)*



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"In those days, when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples and said to them, 'I feel compassion for the people because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a great distance.' And His disciples answered Him, 'Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?' And He was asking them, 'How many loaves do you have?'" (Mark 8, Feeding of the 4,000)

IN THOSE DAYS, Jesus had a problem: too many hungry to satisfy; too many mouths to feed. And so it was that he called together his disciples for their thoughts. They had heard many who had shouted at him before: the Pharisees and Romans, deniers and those demanding him to be the Messiah they wanted.

But these were not shouts directed at him, rather cries to him -- the cries of the hungry.

But what could they do? Considering the little they had, and all that would be needed, "Send them away," seemed to be the only option.

"Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?"

IN THESE DAYS, modern-day disciples also see that, at every level -- global, diocesan, local and domestic -- we as Church are surrounded with problems that challenge the vitality of its institutions and peoples. Pressures come from antagonistic forces bent on eliminating the faith and faithful through persecutions, threats and death. Cultural and moral poisons of secularism, acute individualism, relativism

At Your Service

By Deacon Michael Tankersley



and atheism continue to lead people astray. Socio-economic and political threats bark at each move of the Church. And, sadly, some of what has wounded the strength of the faith has been self-inflicted -- the widespread sexual abuse crisis being the most notable.

How to increase vocations to the priestly and religious life? Can we reverse the tide of people leaving the Church? But even the shouts from those threats and challenges do not drown out the cries for help which come from our present-day 4,000 ... the poor and vulnerable, those grieving and suffering, those who hunger for hope and thirst for the Blessed Assurances of Christ's love. So many hungry to satisfy; so many souls to feed. And, like the disciples in those days, we are challenged to ask ourselves "Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?"

IN THOSE DAYS, Jesus led the disciples to the answer with a provocative question: "How many loaves do you have?"

The disciples had been thinking in terms of what would be needed for the task, a process in which limitations and scarcity are the chief concerns and come from a place of doubt.

But Jesus did not ask them what they would need; rather, he asked them what they have. In asking them to consider what they do have, Jesus led them to see through the eyes

of possibility and positivity and put them in the position to recognize that, with the tools and talents at hand, something could be done even if it is not everything.

In asking his disciples to consider "How many loaves do you have?" and inviting them to "Bring them to me," he set the pattern for the way to meet the challenges of discipleship. The 4,000 were fed that day, not because the disciples found what they needed in the surplus of man, but because they returned to Christ what they had.

I recall an anecdote of a troop commander who had been trying desperately to evade a much larger pursuing enemy. One night, the scouts entered his tent and reluctantly reported, "Commander we have the worst problem. The enemy has us completely surrounded. We can only surrender."

The commander rose from his chair and in exuberance proclaimed, "Worst problem? Surrender? Do you not see the great opportunity? Now we can charge in any direction we wish!"

IN THESE DAYS, there are those who do feel surrounded with the worst of problems... those who see too many hungry to satisfy, and so many mouths to feed that surrender and "send them away" are acceptable responses. Gratefully, that is not the case here where across our diocese the needs of so many are being met. In his January col-

umn, Bishop Brendan paid tribute to some of the many ways that the people of our diocese are reaching out and serving those in need. Scan through *The Lighthouse* and bulletins of our local churches and you can take comfort in noting the ministries and services, conferences and seminars, organizations and small groups and individuals who help feed the hungry of others. There are lay movements and religious organizations; crisis centers and support groups; professional and volunteer.

We are not hunkered down in defense, holding on to what we have and shouting at what we are against. Instead, we are charging -- in every direction where we are needed -- to help those we are for.

Jesus tells us that, "The poor you will always have with you" (Matthew 26:11).

We can add the sick and suffering, the weak and vulnerable, the lonely and downhearted. We hear their cries and the cries of all in need, but "Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?"

We can find enough when we bring what we have to Christ in the service of his people.

Pilgrimage, Mass planned at shrine in Dubina

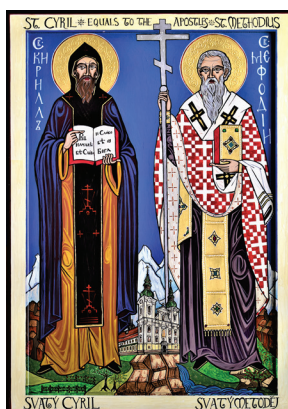
DUBINA — A pilgrimage including Mass will be celebrated at the Diocese Shrine of Saints Cyril and Methodius Catholic Church on Saturday, Feb. 11. The Mass will begin at 11 a.m., followed by a covered-dish lunch. The Czech Catholic Foundation of Texas annual membership meeting will follow the lunch.

The lunch and meeting will be in the KJT Hall adjacent to the church. The public is invited to attend all three of the activities of the day. Those attending the luncheon are asked to bring a covered dish to share with

the other attendees.

The Feast Day of the Apostles to the Slavs and evangelizers of our Czech and Moravian forbears, Saints Cyril and Methodius, is on the following Tuesday, Feb. 14.

Bishop Brendan Cahill designated the church in Dubina as a shrine and place of pilgrimage on Feb. 14, 2022, honoring the ethnic religious heritage and immigrant predecessors of



the Czech families in the state today. The shrine is a special place of prayer where graces can be gained by the special indulgences granted to places of pilgrimage.

The Czech Catholic Foundation of Texas (CCFT) invites you to join its membership and friends for this special day of prayer and fellowship.



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Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict embrace each other at the Vatican's Mater Ecclesiae Monastery, June 30, 2015. (L'Osservatore Romano.)

'I lost a dad': Pope Francis speaks about losing Benedict XVI

By AC WIMMER
Catholic News Agency

In a new interview published Wednesday, Pope Francis said the death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI meant he had lost a "good companion" and a father figure.

"I lost a dad," Pope Francis told the Associated Press (<https://apnews.com/article/pope-francis-retirement-papacy-dcca464e7c1fd910568d07d6bf4d9994>), praising his predecessor -- who died on Dec. 31, 2022, at the age of 95 -- as a "gentleman."

Francis said he would visit Benedict for counsel at the converted monastery Mater Ecclesiae in the Vatican Gardens, where the retired pope resided.

"For me, he was a security. In the face of a doubt, I would ask for the car and go to the monastery and ask."

Pope Francis, 86, who has not ruled out retiring, said Benedict's decision to live in a converted monastery in the Vatican Gardens was a "good intermediate solution" but that future retired popes might want to do things differently.

"He was still 'enslaved' as a pope, no?" Francis said. "Of the vision of a pope, of a system. 'Slave' in the good sense of the word: In that he wasn't completely free, as he would have liked to have returned to his Germany and continued studying theology."

Benedict "opened the door" to future resignations, Pope Francis said.

The pope also confirmed what he said six months ago: If he should retire, he would choose the title of "bishop emeritus of

Rome," not "pope emeritus," and live neither in his native Argentina nor the Vatican, but in Rome.

Asked if he would reside at Archbasilica of St. John Lateran in a TV interview broadcast on July 12, 2022, Francis said "that could be," since he would like to retire "to hear confessions at a church."

Bishop emeritus reflects on the papacy of Benedict XVI

Continued from pg. 2

held fast to church dogma, broke tradition and retired from the papacy for the good of the church he loved so well. "I suppose he knew that he was growing feeble," Fellhauer said. "With clarity of mind, he resigned for the good of the church."

Fellhauer was appointed bishop by Pope John Paul II, Benedict's predecessor. "When I met John Paul, he was getting pretty old," Fellhauer said. "He seemed so small, so feeble. So, you see? Benedict was close to him and would have seen him in that state. It was an act of great courage for Benedict to retire. To say his time was done."

• *Tamara Diaz is a reporter for the Victoria Advocate. She can be contacted at tdiaz@vicad.com.*

Blessing of the chalk

The Rev. Stephen Vacek, pastor of Holy Cross in Bay City, administers the blessing of the chalk and marks the doorways of the school. The tradition is tied to the Feast of the Epiphany and the writing above the doorway include the first letters of each of the magi, Sts. Casper, Melchior, and Baltassar.

(Contributed Photo)

NOTE: The Feast of the Epiphany has, for centuries, been a traditional time for Christian families to bless their homes. This tradition likely came about because the Three Wise Men visited the home that the Holy Family had established in Bethlehem. The visit from the Wise Men blessed the home of the Holy Family because they came in humility to honor and pay homage to the Christ Child and because they were the first to not only seek Jesus, but also to recognize Him as the Messiah.



Journeys of Faith with Ceci



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!**

Date Change!

Pilgrimage to Mexico City with Bishop Cahill, **August 25 - 31, 2023.** Details coming soon!

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



Think of Lent as a spiritual detox regimen

The season of Lent is right around the corner, which means the season when we get a second chance to try to actually do our New Year's resolutions, right? Well, sometimes that's how I end up using Lent. I think of all the unhealthy habits I have and how this year will be when I finally get it right. Maybe I'll fast a little more than I usually do, instead of just giving up sugary foods and drinks. That should help. Of course, I'll be holier; that's the main reason I need to give things up. But maybe I'll lose some weight, too.

I hope I'm not the only one who has (sadly) treated Lent as merely a diet, because it's so much more than just a chance to lose weight. But maybe there's a kernel of truth in this way of looking at Lent that doesn't make it all so bad. What if, instead of a diet, we looked at it like a season to detox?

I think we can all agree that we are constantly consuming things that are bad for us — not only food and drink, but even more so media, entertainment, news, gossip and

In Communion

By Very Rev. Jacob Koether



grudges. The next time you go to any public place, look around and see all the people with their heads buried in their phones, consuming voraciously. After a while, all that junk accumulates and weighs us down physically, emotionally and spiritually. What are you filling yourself up with?

With its roots in the final preparations of catechumens for their baptisms at Easter, Lent can be a time when we are renewed in our rejection of the things of the world and our acceptance of the things of God. It can be a time when we let go of trying to grasp to what we think will satisfy us and instead refocus on Life in Christ. It can be a chance

to detox.

Granted, Lent is more than just giving things up. We also practice the discipline of this season through works of mercy, giving alms and strengthening our prayer life. But I feel a sense of urgency when it comes to the idea of getting fasting right and practicing it often. In fact, I wonder if our culture's supersaturated palate and overindulged hearts are contributing to the fallout in belief and devotion to the Most Blessed Sacrament.

How will I ever be hungry for the Eucharist when I'm already filled up with so much junk?

Be honest: On a scale of 1 to 10, how hungry are you for the Eucharist? How much time do you spend scrolling social media in comparison to the amount of time you spend in front of the tabernacle? How many hours do you sacrifice for sports and

entertainment? How many minutes do you pray? What could you fast from this Lent that could help you hunger for the Heavenly Food of God's Table?

In *The Lord of the Rings*, as Sam and Frodo run out of food on their way to Mount Doom and are forced to only consume the semi-supernatural bread of the Elves, they experience that bread's deeper power. They found that it "had a potency that increased as travelers relied on it alone and did not mingle it with other foods. It fed the will, and it gave strength to endure, and to master sinew and limb beyond the measure of mortal kind." (*Return of the King*, Chap. 'Mount Doom')

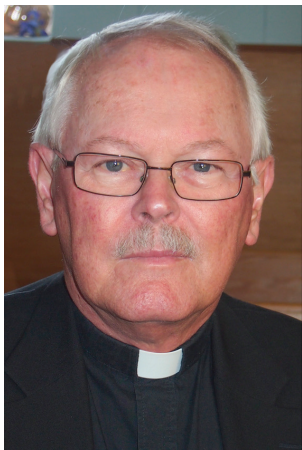
To implement the Eucharistic Revival, I think what it's going to take is a bit of detoxing. We are too filled up with the wrong things to experience the Eucharist's true power. So, for this Lent, when you're praying about what to do to prepare for Easter, consider fasting. May we hunger for Jesus in the Eucharist more than we hunger for anything else on this earth.

• *The Very Rev. Jacob Koether, pastor of Our Lady of Sorrows in Victoria, serves as episcopal vicar for Evangelization and Catechesis for the Diocese of Victoria.*

Spirit Wind Ministry retreat focuses on struggle to surrender

The Rev. Ronald Rolheiser will lead a Spirit Wind Ministry retreat themed, "Wrestling with God and with Love -- Resistance and Surrender Within Our Spiritual Journey," March 24-26 at House Schoenstatt Retreat Center in Rockport.

The retreat center is located at 134 Front St., situated on Copano Bay. Cost for the retreat is \$270 per person, which includes meal and lodging. All rooms are double occupancy. Retreat begins Friday evening and ends with lunch on Sunday. Space is limited and will be reserved in the order that deposits are received. A \$70 deposit is required with the balance of \$200 due by March 1. Pay by check to Spirit



Rev. Ronald Rolheiser

Wind Ministry and mail to Susan Oakley, 103 Woodmere, Victoria, TX 77904. Include name, address, phone number and email address with deposit. Fees are non-refundable and non-transferable. Partial grants are available.

Men and women of all faiths are encouraged to attend. For more information, call Oakley at 361-649-6391 or email smoak53@msn.com.

Father Rolheiser, a member of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, is a community-builder, lecturer and writer. His books are popular throughout the English-speaking world and have now been translated into many languages. More than 80 newspapers carry his weekly column, "In Exile," worldwide. He is the immediate past president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, taught theology and philosophy at Newman Theological College in Edmonton, Alberta, for 16 years, served as Provincial Superior of his Oblate Province for six years and served on the General Council for the Oblates in Rome for six years. Learn more about Father Rolheiser at www.ronrolheiser.com.

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.txabusehotline.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.

Es un buen mes para anteponer el valentía a la precaución

NOTA DEL EDITOR: Esta columna es una versión editada de la primera del obispo Cahill publicada en febrero de 2016.

Queridos hermanos y hermanas,
Un obituario escrito en 1994 para el obispo Joseph Durick incluía lo siguiente:

“Estaba en Birmingham cuando los antagonismos raciales y las protestas estallaron en 1963. Él y un puñado de colegas blancos pidieron al Dr. King y a los “forasteros” que desistieran y dejaran que los tribunales trabajaran hacia la integración. El Dr. King, en la cárcel para entonces, respondió con una larga carta a ‘mis queridos compañeros clérigos’ para explicarles que los negros no podían

Mensaje del Pastor

By Obispo Brendan Cahill



esperar más. Expresó su decepción por los sacerdotes, ministros y rabinos blancos y dijo que ‘deberían estar entre nuestros aliados más fuerte’. El Dr. King escribió: ‘Demasiados han sido más cautelosos que valientes y han permanecido en silencio detrás de la anestesiante

seguridad de las vidrieras. Su ‘Carta desde la cárcel de Birmingham’ probablemente ha sido reimpresa más que cualquier otra cosa que haya escrito. ... ‘El verdadero mensaje de la carta no llegó a casa hasta más tarde’, dijo el obispo Durick en 1969”.

El verdadero mensaje se hizo evidente para obispo Durick, quien se convertiría en el obispo de Nashville, Tennessee. Después del asesinato del Dr. King en Memphis, el obispo Durick organizó una misa conmemorativa en Memphis y participó en otros servicios conmemorativos con hombres y mujeres de diferentes denominaciones, religiones y colores. Mientras celebramos el Mes de la Historia Negra, creo que este puede ser un buen momento para volver a comprometernos con nuestras alianzas ministeriales para promover la dignidad de cada persona humana.

Una de las fortalezas del Movimiento por los Derechos Civiles fue que muchos sacerdotes, rabinos y ministros blancos se volvieron más “valientes que cautelosos” y se unieron a sus hermanos y hermanas afroamericanos en protestas pacíficas por condiciones injustas. Ya sea por la equidad racial, el derecho a la vida de un niño por nacer o la defensa de lo sagrado y el valor

de la familia, hay muchas áreas en las que podemos seguir uniéndonos a los hombres y mujeres de buena voluntad.

También durante el Mes de la Historia Afroamericana, creo que es bueno recordar la gran contribución de tantos afroamericanos a la Iglesia Católica. La gente parece sorprendida cuando menciono que hay más de 3.000.000 de católicos afroamericanos en los Estados Unidos, más que muchas otras denominaciones. Especialmente después de la emancipación de los esclavos, muchos afroamericanos buscaron unirse a la Iglesia Católica. En 1889, Daniel Rudd convocó el primer Congreso Nacional Católico Negro (NBCC), que se llevó a cabo en la Iglesia Católica St. Augustine en Washington, D.C.

La historia de los católicos afroamericanos en Texas incluye la participación en algunos de estos congresos en el siglo XIX: un hombre llamado William Easton viajó desde Galveston para representar a la Diócesis de Galveston. Este julio viajaré con otros tejanos a Washington, D.C., para el próximo NBCC. Para obtener más información sobre la historia de los Católicos Afroamericanos, puede visitar el sitio web (<https://nbccongress.org>) o la página de Facebook del National Black Catholic Congress.

Que seamos valientes al defender los derechos de los más vulnerables de nuestra sociedad. Dios bendiga a ti y a tu familia. Gracias por su hermoso y fuerte testimonio de la fe católica.

Mantengámonos unos a otros en oración,

+Brendan

La Eucaristía signo de comunión

Por El Padre Nelson Gonzalez

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 Corintio 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 hacia 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 vegetal asimila al mineral, las plantas al agua y las sales; los animales se nutren de los vegetales; un pájaro come granos y no al revés. En la eucaristía Cristo se asimila a nosotros, somos nosotros quienes nos transformamos en él y no al contrario. Entonces para Pablo, el cuerpo de Jesús es todos los bautizados reunidos en comunidad, comiendo juntos. El contacto y unión de los cristianos con Cristo es tan íntimo que formamos un solo cuerpo 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 comunión 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 ser más compasivos y humanos.

Las relaciones fundamentales del ser humano son de fraternidad, amistad, diálogo, solidaridad, agradecimiento y respeto. En toda relación 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

• El Padre Nelson Gonzalez es Vicario Parroquial de St. Anthony Church, Columbus

**Diocese of Victoria's
2023 Men's Conference**

**Be a man
Be a SAINT**

**February 25
8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Holy Family Catholic Church, Victoria**

www.victoriadiocese.org

Featuring

Father Larry Richards

Bishop Brendan Cahill

Gary Marek

Deacon Joe Machacek

Adoration and confession



Blessing of Seed and Soil

Bishop Brendan Cahill will bless seed and soil samples during the Blessing of Seed and Soil to take place at 10 a.m. Feb. 11 at 713 County Road 202 in Ganado. Everyone is welcome to bring a sampling of seeds and soil, whether full-time farmers or window-sill gardeners. *(Lighthouse file photo)*



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 This, dear Lord, 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.

Sunday Readings from Feb. 5 to March 5

February 5 ~ Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Isaiah 58:7-10
Psalms 112:4-5, 6-7, 8-9
1 Corinthians 2:1-5
Matthew 5:13-16

February 12 ~ Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sirach 15:15-20
Psalms 119:1-2, 4-5, 17-18, 33-34
1 Corinthians 2:6-10
Matthew 5:17-37

February 19 ~ Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18
Psalms 103:1-2, 3-4, 8, 10, 12-13
1 Corinthians 3:16-23
Matthew 5:38-48



February 22 ~ Ash Wednesday
Joel 2:12-18
Psalms 51:3-4, 5-6ab, 12-13, 14 and 17
2 Corinthians 5:20—6:2
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

February 26 ~ First Sunday of Lent
Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7
Psalms 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17
Romans 5:12-19
Matthew 4:1-11

March 5 ~ Second Sunday of Lent
Genesis 12:1-4a
Psalms 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22
2 Timothy 1:8b-10
Matthew 17:1-9

For daily and Sunday readings, as well as a daily reflection video, visit
www.usccb.org/bible/readings.

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Blessed Carlo Acutis

The Source & Summit

2.19.23

KC Hall 321 US-77 South, Hallettsville, TX 77964

All High School Students are welcome to attend!

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

Contact: Wendy @ weggert@victoriadiocese.org or
Shannon @ stomas@victoriadiocese.org
or 361-573-0828

Keynote Speaker:
Father David Micahel Moses

**Deadline to Register:
2-10-23!!**

Event T-Shirts available!
See website for more information.

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20th Anniversary & now serving 10 counties!

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victoriagabrielproject.org
(361) 576-1156



Meals • Picnics and More

February

Victoria – St. Mary's Parish Festival Feb. 5 at the Victoria Community Center, 10:30 a.m.-3 p.m. A barbecue brisket and sausage dinner will be served from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at \$12 per plate with dine-in or plates-to-go available. Live and online auctions. There will be games, raffle, jewelry, plants, cakewalk and much more.

El Campo – Patricia Talbot to presents a true conversion in English and Spanish, Feb. 8 at St. Robert after the 6 p.m. Mass. See pg. 3 for more information.

Victoria – Holy Family Altar Society Lenten mini-retreat, Saturday, Feb. 18, beginning with a Mass at 8 a.m. in the main church. The retreat will be held in the Activity Center following the Mass, with Bishop Cahill leading the retreat. All are welcome, men and women. There is no fee for the retreat. A light breakfast and lunch will be served. In order to prepare enough food, we need you to please call and sign-up with Betty Frederick 361-550-0064 or Mary Alice Hernandez at 361-571-9726.

Victoria – KC Council #9088 Annual Fat Tuesday Fundraiser Tuesday, Feb. 21. Serving begins at 4:30 p.m. at the Holy Family Activity Center. Fried chicken plates \$10 p/p with dine-in or to-go available. Proceeds benefitting KC's charities.

Victoria – Our Lady of Sorrows Youth Ministry will have an Ash Wednesday Fish Fry on Feb. 22 at Trinity Hall. Plates will consist of a fish fillet, green beans, coleslaw and a roll for \$12 per plate. Serving 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. and 5 - 8 p.m. Limited indoor seating. For more information, contact Bonnie Malone at 361-220-2839.

Victoria – Veterans of Foreign Wars Fish Fry Feb. 24 from 11 a.m. until sold out at the VFW Hall. Plates of fish, fries, hush puppies and coleslaw are \$12 each with dine-in or plates-to-go available.

Nada – Knights of Columbus Lenten Fish Fry every Friday (Feb. 24-April 7) from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Nada Community Center. All-you-can-eat fried catfish, fries and slaw for \$15 inside dining and \$12 for plates-to-go.

March

Port Lavaca – Our Lady of the Gulf Altar Society hosts its annual Lenten Women's Retreat March 4, 8 a.m. to noon at St. Jude's Hall, 300 W. Austin St. The Rev. Richard Barfield will be the speaker. Registration from 8 to 8:45 a.m. followed by First Saturday Latin Mass. Refreshments after Mass. Luncheon to be served and cost is \$10. For information or to pre-register, call Nancy Thompson, 361-212-5838, or Rosy Weaver, 361-482-8030.

Hilje – St. Procopius Spring Festival March 5 at the parish hall. See pg. 8 for more information.

Blessing – The Knights of Columbus Council #4307 is sponsoring a Lenten shrimp etouffe and gumbo meal fundraiser on March 12, at the St. Peter's Church Parish Hall. Serving will start at 10:30 a.m. The meal will consist of shrimp etouffe and gumbo with rice, dessert, and tea or coffee. A large bowl with dessert and beverage is \$12 each. A raffle and auction will also be held during the day. The proceeds of the fundraiser will be used for Knights of Columbus state charities and high school senior scholarships.

Amor Meus

Contact: Sr. Digna Vela, IWBS
(361) 575-7111 / e-mail: amormeus@yahoo.com
website: www.amormeusspiritualitycenter.org
IWBS Convent • 1101 NE Water St. • Victoria

Workshop / Retreat

Feb. 11 – Life After Care Giving facilitated by Deacon Leo Sharron and Terry Robinson will begin at 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sign-in is from 9:30 a.m. until the workshop begins. Lunch will be provided. A free-will offering will be accepted.

Ministries • Ongoing Activities

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.couragerc.net>.

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 – 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 – 2023 Dates: April 21-23, Aug. 4-6 and Nov. 10-12. Registration is on a first-come, first-served basis. Fee must accompany registration form. For information, call 361-573-0828 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.

Do you have any calendar of events
for the Lighthouse?
Submit to
lighthouse@victoriadiocese.org

Mission Trip Planned

The next mission trip to Las Obras in Antigua, Guatemala, will take place July 9-16. The late Father Dan Morales led many mission trips to the orphanage and an endowment in his name was created to help support Las Obras. Registration opened Feb. 1. For more information, visit the website at <https://www.coramdeotexas.org/>.



Father Dan
Morales

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 – Please join Strength for the Journey team for their monthly meeting, February 14 in the parish hall at Assumption Church, 108 6th St., Ganado (77962) from 6:30-8pm. The meeting is open to anyone who has had a child died at any age. Upcoming Day retreat is April 15. For information, call Pat Hoelscher 979-257-9984.

id.9:16 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 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 raphaelsrefuge@att.net, or visit <http://www.raphaelsrefuge.org>.

Retrouvaille – Retrouvaille, meaning "rediscovery," is a marriage-healing ministry offered in the diocese to couples in difficult marriages. Contact John and Jennifer Vincent at jbvjov@sbcglobal.net or 361-580-2770; or call 800-470-2230; or visit <http://www.helpourmarriage.org>



Father Tommy Chen knows you can't fight God's will

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for a pianist. His conscience got the better of him and he volunteered, finding a new level of fulfillment.

The turning point

That chemistry class that plagued him? He still had a chance of passing if he did well on a particular test. He planned a study night for himself. That same evening, a friend invited him to the Catholic center for a program by the Paulist priests that focused on vocations. Father Tommy declined that invitation, but his friend said, "They're going to feed us." And, for a college kid, free food is hard to turn down.

Father Tommy said the dinner was good and it wasn't an aggressive pitch at vocations. No pressure, right? So once the dinner was over, he put himself in a perfect study environment. The only problem was, he could not concentrate on chemistry. Instead he kept thinking about the brochure he took home like every other person at that dinner. His mind was wrestling with the will of God, not the mysteries of chemical formulas.

"I told God it wasn't a good time. And the Lord wouldn't leave me alone. He kept bugging me," Father Tommy said.

So, reluctantly, still irked by the nagging of God, Father Tommy prayed, "Do with me what you will."

"I prayed it and meant it," he said.

Then he wrote an email to Father Dan Morales, who at that time was the vocations director for the diocese. Then he deleted that email. Then he rewrote it. "It was like the Holy Spirit just smacked me and said, 'SEND IT.'" And he did. "I didn't tell anybody," he said.

Father Morales encouraged him to go ahead and transfer to the seminary, but he

really wanted to finish his degree in psychology and, this time, he got his way. He said he's glad he stayed because he made so many friends in the latter years of his college days.

He said he finally found some peace via the guidance of a college friend, a Buddhist, who told him, "Pay attention to what gives you peace in your heart."

"And that's exactly what happened," Father Tommy said.

And now

In June, Father Tommy will celebrate his 15th year as a priest. He spent three years in Hallettsville and two years in Shiner, and he has been in the Calhoun County churches for nine years.

The highlight of his vocation, he said, is being able to assist people of all walks and all ages. "I never know what's going to happen during the day."

When he's not taking care of his duties as a pastor, Father Tommy might be found taking care of his animals.

"I've always been an animal lover, ever since I was a kid."

But he was not one for the usual kinds of pets. His first pets were a pair of chickens that turned out to be roosters and caused some noise problems. "My second pet was a nice, quiet rabbit," he said.

Today, he can easily get lost in caring for his many lovebirds, white doves, hens and cockatiels. Not to mention his guinea pigs, a pot-bellied pig and a sheep named Bo.

Eventually he gained two more traditional pets, which was another battle of wills. He was offered a Chihuahua/terrier mix puppy from a litter that a friend's dog had and declined saying he had a strong dislike for dogs. "Just give it a chance," they said. When he

finally gave in, he found a great companion and "the perfect rectory dog."

Same thing happened with a cat. He liked them even less than dogs, but a kitten showed up cold, wet, and so pitiful that he felt sorry for it and started feeding it. It's become a beautiful calico that knows her way around the property and doesn't stray too far from her master.

Father Tommy also loves gardening, although the cold snap took almost all of his plants, cooking, particularly Chinese cuisine, because that's what he likes to eat, and collecting certain things. In his office are rows of bobble heads and figurines stacked about three deep but very neatly.

Fortunately for the Emmaus Counseling Center, Father Tommy agreed to be the

next honoree at the Roast & Toast fundraiser without having to be dragged into that role.

He said, "It's for a good cause. As a priest, I was always looking for a Catholic counseling center. When Father Gary (now Bishop Gary) told me this was going to come to fruition, I was so excited."

"The reason we chose him," according to the Very Rev. Kirby Hlavaty, executive director of the Emmaus Center, "is Father Tommy has always been a supporter of the Emmaus Center, particularly a supporter of the Roast and Toast."

Father Tommy also was vocation director for the diocese for many years and knows many of the priests and seminarians.

"We thought he was a good fit to put in the hot seat this year," Hlavaty said.



Father Tommy Chen gives some attention to some of his pets in the back yard of the rectory at Our Lady of the Gulf in Port Lavaca. He said he has always loved animals, particularly non-traditional type pets. (Janet Jones/The Catholic Lighthouse)

Catholic schools blessed with dedicated teachers

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been a lot worse.

He said there was some slide in academic growth, but the teachers handled remote learning well. "We're still feeling some residual effects from the pandemic, but I would say, as a diocese, we have fared pretty well."

Quary credits the tenacity and dedication of the teachers for getting the students through a tough time. They proved they could "pivot on a dime" if they needed to, he said, to keep the students engaged and learning.

"The teachers are just so caring and so professional, they really do us proud,"

Quary said.

Recently about a dozen teachers and other professionals from Catholic schools in the Diocese of Victoria gathered at the library of St. Joseph High School for their first in-person gathering as they pursue master's degrees in education leadership. The master's program for Catholic educators is new at the University of Houston-Victoria, and was some five years in the making, according to Catholic Schools Superintendent Dr. John Quary.

The program is a fast-tracked master's degree program, which UHV has had for educators, but this program was specifically

tailored to Catholic school educators.

During the first in-person gathering, the educators were given time to introduce themselves and share their reasons for deciding to add this task to their already busy lives. Each person there expressed their love for Catholic schools as the main reason they want to be better leaders. Some have given up larger salaries in the public education system to come to work for the Catholic schools. Several said they took a pay cut to work in the Catholic schools, but have never been happier.

With the master's degree program the Catholic schools can develop future admin-

istrators as well as have leaders in the ranks of the teaching staff.

Megan Schott, principal of St. Joseph High School in Victoria, said the educators who are sacrificing time and money to pursue their masters are an inspiration to her. "I know I'm going to learn a lot for each of the people participating because of their love for what they do. They are really invested in their schools."

• *For more information about Catholic schools in the diocese, see the special A section in this month's edition of The Catholic Lighthouse.*