Sisters committed lives to serving poor, vulnerable people in Mississippi

NAZARETH, Ky. (CNS)—The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth commit in their mission statement to “risk their lives in their ministry to the poor and vulnerable.”

“You don’t know what that’s going to be like or look like,” said Sister Susan Gatz, president of the religious order. “But now we are experiencing that.”

Sister Paula Merrill, a member of the congregation since 1979, was found murdered on Aug. 25 along with Sister Margaret Held, a member of the School Sisters of St. Francis in Milwaukee, in the home they shared in Durant, Miss. Both women religious worked at the Lexington Medical Clinic as nurse practitioners, caring for the impoverished people of Holmes County, Miss.

The Mississippi Department of Public Safety announced late on Aug. 26 that Rodney Earl Sanders, 46, of Kosciusko, Miss., had been charged with two counts of capital murder in connection with the deaths.

The bodies of the sisters, both 68, were found by police on Aug. 25 after co-workers asked law enforcement to check on the women when they failed to arrive for work at the clinic in Lexington, about 10 miles from the house they shared in Durant.

“It’s a huge loss for the people there,” said Sister Susan during an interview on the motherhouse campus on Aug. 26. “They were really the heart of the clinic there. The loss to our congregation is huge,” too, she said. “They were valiant women.”

Sister Susan noted that St. Vincent de Paul, co-founder of the Sisters of Charity, “invited his early sisters to really live in tune with those who are the poorest. That church was very deep in Paula’s heart. She took her skills as a nurse practitioner, and put them at the service of the poor and the ministry of the church. She loved it. It wasn’t a burden for her.”

As the sisters and their families mourn the slain women, they’ve asked for people to pray for them.

See SISTERS, page 9,
St. Elizabeth Catholic Charities named Non-Profit of the Year

By Natalie Hoefer

On Aug. 16, St. Elizabeth Catholic Charities of New Albany was selected as the Non-Profit of the Year by One Southern Indiana ("1si"), an economic development organization and chamber of commerce serving Clark and Floyd counties.

St. Elizabeth Catholic Charities administrator Mark Casper says he knew the organization was one of three finalists, including Family & Children’s Place and Goodwill of Southern Indiana, in the time of the 1si annual meeting on Aug. 16.

"We were the smallest of the three," he says. "We weren’t real confident we’d win, but we had a good story from last year to two-three years back."

Their success happened despite the challenges of "funding cuts, a spike in clients and new regulations in accreditation" in the last three years, according to Wendy Dant Chesser, president and CEO of 1si. "When you do more with less, it’s quite remarkable," she says.

She adds that 1si, as an economic development organization, has "been able to celebrate their growth through ribbon cuttings. Mark Casper and I laughed and said if we’re behind a ribbon, that means good things are happening!"

The New Albany-based charitable organization offers a crisis pregnancy maternity home, a transitional home for unwed mothers, Affordable Supportive Housing (ASH) units, adoption services, Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Family and Children’s Services, Marie’s Ministry Community Distribution Program, supervised visitation and supported living.

In the last several years, St. Elizabeth Catholic Charities added a new 12-bed maternity home, bought and opened an additional ASH unit, and completed a renovation of their historic headquarters building.

This was accomplished despite federal cutbacks, Casper noted in a August interview with The Criterion.

Casper credits winning the award to the organization’s staff and volunteers.

"We only have 15 full-time staff, and 14 part-time staff that live with the women in the shelter, and 152 recurring volunteers," he says. "It’s a community and because we couldn’t do what we do to help people here without a whole lot of people who get us results, from volunteers board members, to people who answer the phones, to people who do direct service. I’m quite proud of everybody.”

Cheesser says that pride is well-deserved.

"A lot of the Louisville non-profits are in the area [1si serves],” she says. "St. Elizabeth should be very, very proud of the recognition, and we’re very happy to bring that recognition and to work with them.”

(For more information on St. Elizabeth Catholic Charities of New Albany, log on to www.stecharities.org) 


Historic flooding has changed region forever; special collection is set

Baton Rouge, La. (CNS) — Water lapped at the heels of Father Michael Galice, steady rain an ominous reminder of Mother Nature’s unfinished business.

With a sadness in his voice, Father Galice, pastor at Holy Rosary Parish in St. Amant, estimated that as many as 90 percent of his parishioners were impacted directly or indirectly by the disaster that touched nearly every corner of the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

"It’s going to change the whole dynamic of Holy Rosary as a parish as we know it," Father Galice told The Catholic Commissioneer, the diocesan newspaper.

"It’s not going to be the same. And we are going to lose quite a bit of people if they choose to move away." Together coming as a family, whether it is a community, parish or simply a family dinner, is a question many are asking, given the wake of the floods that in some area dumped 20 inches of rain in as many hours.

In the town of Central, it is estimated 27,000 out of 28,000 people were impacted, leaving some to speculate if the suburb will be able to recover.

In Livingston Parish, a civil jurisdiction, at least 75 percent of residents suffered some type of water damage, with most of the destruction major. Residents in the civil jurisdictions of East Baton Rouge, Ascension and Tangipahoa parishes also were forced to dig out.

Schools were closed, many for weeks, and businesses were struggling to reopen.

Carwufs were enacted in civil parishes throughout to lessen the threat of looting in the impacted areas.

Some estimates are as high as 100,000 homes damaged, with thousands fleeing to evacuation shelters. The floodwaters claimed 13 lives, and many others survived only after being rescued from their rooftops.

As a result of the catastrophic flooding, Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin has scheduled a special collection on the weekend of Sept. 17-18 in parishes in central and southern Indiana to assist victims of the recent flooding.

It will support the humanitarian efforts of Catholic Charities USA, the Church’s domestic relief agency, and help provide support to Catholic dioceses also impacted.

(Donations can be made through Catholic Charities USA. For more information, go to catholiccharitiesusa.org)
Fatima statue visits southern Indiana parishes on its ‘Tour for Peace’

By Natalie Hoeter

SELLERSBURG—As the rosary was prayed aloud, 16-year-old Rebecca Reynolds knelt with her parents and three siblings near the altar of St. Paul Church in Sellersburg. Her eyes were turned upward toward the illuminated statue of Mary.

She described the experience as “emotional.”

“I felt like she was actually with us while I was praying,” she said. “It was an once-in-a-lifetime experience. It was not just any statue that Rebecca and her family venerated. It was the traveling pilgrim statue of Our Lady of Fatima, a twin to the statue at the shrine in Fatima, Portugal, where the Blessed Mother appeared six times to three shepherd children in 1917.

The pilgrimage statue was one of two commissioned in 1947 with the purpose of bringing the message of Fatima to the world. It was blessed in 1947 by the bishop of Fatima, and later by Pope Pius XII. It has been traveling for almost 70 years.

“The statues were commissioned for the millions of people who may never have the chance to go to Fatima in Portugal,” said Patrick Sabat, custodian of the statue and coordinator for the tour. “Our Lady of Fatima comes to us.”

The statue’s most recent journey is a nearly two-year mission, from March 2016 through November 2017, to all 50 states in anticipation of the 100th anniversary of the final apparition of Mary at Fatima on Oct. 13, 1917. The journey is called the ‘Tour for Peace.’

“I think this beautiful country, the United States, could lead this world to peace by means of prayer, penance and conversion, which is the message of Fatima,” said Sabat. “The goal is to make it to 100 dioceses. As of now we already have 90 scheduled, so we’re very close to making that goal already.”

In the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, the statue visited St. Michael Parish in Borden on Aug. 18-20, and St. Paul Church of John Paul II Parish in Sellersburg on Aug. 21.

Rebecca and her family are members of St. John Paul II Parish. They visited St. Paul specifically to see the traveling pilgrim statue.

“Nothing big ever happens in little Sellersburg,” said Rebecca. “This is just amazing.”

Charles Whittaker, one of the Fourth Degree members of Knights of Columbus Father Baden Council 80244 who processed into the church with the statue, says it was an honor to participate in the event.

“The [shepherd children] got to see how beautiful [Mary] was,” said Whittaker, a member of St. Augustine Parish in Jeffersonville. “We haven’t, but we felt her presence, and just that was beautiful.”

His sister and fellow St. Augustine parishioner Karen Long said it was “pretty humbling to be in the presence [of the statue]. Even though it’s a statue, there’s a special ambiance around it.”

Whittaker’s wife, Laann, agreed. “I was just in awe,” she said. “I just felt a sense of peace.”

Whittaker’s fellow Knight Joseph Carrico, a member of St. Mary Parish in Laneville, has visited the shrine in Fatima.

“The [pilgrimage statue] is smaller, but it looks just as beautiful,” he says. “It was an honor to get to [participate in the procession] for the Blessed Mother.”

When asked about the statue, Father Thomas Clegg, pastor of St. John Paul II Parish, said it was “a great honor to be able to host this here at our parish,” but he gave credit to parishioner Phyllis Burkholder for making the statue’s visit possible.

“We have first Saturday devotion here [at St. Paul],” said Burkholder, referring to the request of Our Lady of Fatima for people to go to Mass, receive Communion, go to confession and pray the rosary for her intentions on the first Saturday of five consecutive months.

“So I get information from [the World Apostolate of Fatima]. I found out about there being a world tour through the United States of Our Lady of Fatima. I called and found out that she was going to be in [the Archdiocese of] Indianapolis, so I asked if she could come here.

“I think people are really thrilled about seeing her. You can see that in their expressions and in their piety, praying before Our Lady.”

Such prayer is precisely what Our Lady of Fatima called for, said Sabat during a talk he gave in the church.

“On the 13th of every month between May and October [in 1917], she held up the rosary and said to pray it every day,” he said. “Every time we have a problem? No, every day. Every week? No, every day. Every 13th day? No, every day.

“‘She said this prayer will bring peace. The Blessed Mother, the Queen of Peace has said, there will be peace if you do what I ask.’ That’s why the Church calls it the ‘peace plan from heaven.’

‘Mary is here before us in the form of this pilgrimage statue again asking for peace, for penance, for conversion, for the first Saturday devotion, and [for] wearing our brown scapular as a sign of our consecration to her Immaculate Heart. This is the peace plan from heaven.’

Sabat shared how on May 5, 1917, after several years of violence and death during World War I, Pope Benedict XV wrote a letter asking Catholics to invoke the name of Mary for peace. He declared that a new name would be added to the end of the Litany of Loreto: “Our Lady, Queen of Peace.”

“Eight days later, she came to Fatima,” Sabat said.

But the message the Blessed Mother declared was not just for the people of Portugal, nor just for the circumstances of that time, he explained.

“Cardinal [Joseph] Ratzinger, before he became Pope Benedict XVI, said that Fatima’s call for prayer, penance and conversion is the correct response to this moment in our history,” said Sabat. “Your patron saint, St. John Paul II, a very devoted Fatima pope, he trusted his papacy to Our Lady. On Oct. 13, 2013, Pope Francis consecrated the world to Our Lady of Fatima.

“Such devotion to Mary is not an end of itself, Sabat explained. “True devotion to Mary naturally leads to the adoration of Jesus Christ in his body, blood, soul and divinity present in all the tabernacles of the world,” he said. “What we’re doing when we pray is that we are in communion with God. It is a call to holiness. When we meditate upon the mysteries of the holy rosary, we become closer and closer to Jesus.”

Turning to Jesus through Mary will result in peace, said Sabat.

“Those simple requests for prayer, penance and conversion, our consecration to her Immaculate Heart, to save souls, is the most important thing to do today to bring about the peace she promised,” he said.

Burkholder was grateful that this message and statue were shared at her parish.

“I’ve been to Fatima, and there’s a special peace there,” she said. “That peace has traveled with the statue. She’s not just a statue—we see Mary in her. It makes our faith really come to life. Having her come here, in our own little southern Indiana town, I think this is one of the biggest blessings.”

(For more information on the pilgrimage statue of Our Lady of Fatima’s ‘Tour for Peace,’ including a list of upcoming locations and information on the message conveyed in the Fatima apparitions, log on to www.fatimatroopforpeace.com)
Sisters’ ministry reflected God’s love to rural poor

We have read the stories about a priest being killed and women religious being murdered overseas, but this news stunned and shocked us, especially since it hit close to home.

This time, we are left searching for answers because of the senseless deaths of two religious sisters who were ministering to the poorest of the poor in rural Mississippi, performing an outreach they truly loved.

Sister Margaret Held, 68, a member of the School Sisters of St. Francis in Milwaukee, and Sister Paula Merrill, 68, a member of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth in Kentucky, were found stabbed to death on Aug. 25 in their Durant, Miss., home.

Although news reports said a 46-year-old Mississippi man confessed to the crimes, we will never be able to comprehend what led him to take the lives of these two missionary sisters who brought the light of Christ to so many.

They both worked at a health clinic for the poor in nearby Lexington, where they also led Bible study at a church.

The clinic and the sisters’ home in Durant are in Holmes County, whose population is 18,000. With 44 percent of its residents living in poverty, Holmes is the seventh-poorest county in America, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

The nun’s death leaves a gaping hole in what was already a strapped health care system, a local medical official said.

The clinic provides about 25 percent of all medical care in the county, said Dr. Elias Aboud, the physician who oversees the clinic in Lexington where the sisters worked.

People who knew the sisters, known for their generosity and commitment to improving health care for the poor, have been grappling with why anyone would want to kill them.

As people who value and are thankful for the ministry provided by missionaries like these two religious sisters, we, too, struggle with understanding this senseless loss.

“These were just two wonderful, faith-filled women who just brought so much life to this poor little section of Mississippi,” said Franciscan Father Greg Plata, sacramental administrator of St. Thomas the Apostle Parish in Lexington, where the sisters participated in parish life. “They and so many of the sisters who have come down here throughout the years are the unsung heroes.

“They just bring the light of Christ to this area here. Both were extremely loved by the people in the area.”

Dr. Aboud added that the deaths are “a loss to the community. They were loved by everybody.

“Love” is also an appropriate word to describe how the sisters felt about their work in Mississippi.

A video about Sister Paula’s ministry recently posted on her community’s website described her ministry in Holmes County, where 62 percent of the children live in poverty.

“It has been so edifying by the faith of the people that we served for,” Sister Paula said in the video. “They challenge me, they inspire me.”

Sister Margaret first ministered in Mississippi as a social worker at a health center in Holly Springs in 1975. She relocated to Omaha, Neb., from 1981 to 1983 as a community health nurse before returning to Mississippi that year. She became a nurse practitioner in 1994, serving in Tupelo, Marks and Lexington.

Pope Francis called the murder of 85-year-old French priest Father Jacques Hamel in July while celebrating Mass in France “an absurd violence,” and said four Missionaries of Charity murdered in March in Yemen were “ Deployed today.”

Sister Paula’s and Sister Margaret’s outreach performing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy and their senseless deaths, unfortunately, helps us witness firsthand the dangers of missionary life in America today.

Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Ky., who serves as president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said in a statement that the sisters “leave a legacy of dedication to their consecrated life and deep compassion for those they served.”

We echo the words of Archbishop Kurtz, who asked the faithful to “join me in praying for the repose of the souls of Sister Paula and Sister Margaret, and for their families and religious communities. May they rest in peace.” —Mike Krokos

Reflection

John F. Fink

Mother Teresa of Calcutta: ‘Do something beautiful for God’

Pope Francis will canonize Mother Teresa of Calcutta on Sept. 4. During my many years as a Catholic journalist, I was privileged to be with her four times.

The first time was in 1976 during the International Eucharistic Conference in Philadelphia. We were with some other people but then, for a while, I was left alone with Mother Teresa when the others present photographed something. I wish I could remember what we talked about, but I don’t know how.

How did you make small talk with Mother Teresa?

I do. However, remember another time I was with her. It was in 1982. I was leading a group of 26 Catholic journalists on a trip to Jordan, Israel and Egypt. It was a fact-finding trip during which we had the chance to meet with numerous top government and Church officials and journalists. I was leading it because I was president of our Sunday Visiter, which funded it.

While we were in Jordan, we visited a home for the elderly, the dying and the mentally handicapped operated by Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity. Mother Teresa was not there at the time. We toured the building and then had Mass in the sisters’ small chapel.

Albina Aspell, the editor of the Poiea Register, was one of those on the trip. She later wrote what I’m about to relate. She said that she had always greatly admired Mother Teresa and her work but, when we started meeting the people in that house, she found that they made her physically ill. She didn’t expect that, but she couldn’t wait to get out of that home. She spent the next few days feeling really down on herself.

Several days later, we were in Jerusalem, where we stayed at the Notre Dame Center. As we left it, Mother Teresa was there. Too. She said that she would be glad to meet with our group. She spent a half-hour with us, posing for pictures, talking briefly with each of us, and then giving us a little talk. I wrote down what she said, and included it in my diary that night.

Aspell, who had been feeling so bad ever since she had been turned off during our visit to Mother Teresa’s home in Jordan, wrote in the Poiea Register that it seemed that Mother Teresa was speaking directly to her, because Mother Teresa told us:

“You cannot do what I do. But I cannot do what you do. Each of us has his or her own work to do. The important thing is that we all do something beautiful for God. God has brought you to the Holy Land for you to learn the truth and then to write it. We must share the sufferings of the people. Your work is a work of love to bring peace to the world. Be the carrier of God’s love. Be close to Jesus so that he will write with your own hands.”

Of course, she wasn’t speaking only to Albina. She was speaking to all of us Catholic journalists, and I’ve tried to remember her words ever since.

In 1985, I was asked to give the commencement address at Bishop Churard High School in Indianapolis. I told this story to the graduating students to make the point that all can’t be saints, namely the wedding of two people of the same sex.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) disagrees with such a stance, and bolted opposed India’s Religious Freedom Act when it was defeated last year. This remained so despite the fact that supporters said that no similar laws across the country for more than 20 years had allowed unjust discrimination, but actually had protected many religious minorities from government overreach.

Now we see the ACLU using India’s religious freedom law to do just that. It has advised a Muslim prisoner, who was refused a diet in conformity with his faith by the staff of the Boone County Sheriff’s Department.

Is it too much to ask that those who support—as I do—the religious liberty of a Muslim prisoner to receive a diet in conformity with his faith, to also support the religious liberty of a person opposed in conscience to receiving food and water which a prison does not want to be compelled to give material support to a same-sex wedding ceremony?

As the religious landscape of our country becomes more diverse, and as more people in society choose not to practice any faith at all, it is in the common good that we respect with great consistency the conscience rights of all people where there is not a compelling interest that would justify burdening that right in the most minimal way possible.

(Sean Gallagher is a reporter for The Criterion.)

Seek greater consistency in allowing for conscience rights of all people

Some recent controversies have had me asking, “A little consistency, please.”

Last weekend, it was the controversy surrounding quarterback Colin Kaepernick created a controversy when he refused to stand during the singing of the national anthem before a National Football League preseason game.

“I am not going to stand up and show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color,” Kaepomick said after the game in explanation of his action.

Many people condemned his stance. Others supported it. Still others, while not agreeing with him, affirmed Kaepernick’s right to freedom of conscience.

Francis Beckwith, a professor of church-state studies at Baylor University, noted, “Until modest-income bakers had the same right of conscience to not participate in a ceremony as well as big, wealthy bakers, the Freedom Restoration Act when it was debated last year. This remained so despite the fact that supporters said that no similar laws across the country for more than 20 years had allowed unjust discrimination, but actually had protected many religious minorities from government overreach.

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(Sean Gallagher is a reporter for The Criterion.)

Sister Margaret Held, 68, a member of the School Sisters of St. Francis in Milwaukee, and Sister Paula Merrill, 68, a member of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth in Kentucky, were found stabbed to death on Aug. 25 in their Durant, Miss., home. (CNS/Photo/School Sisters of St. Francis and Sisters of Charity of Nazareth)
El matrimonio y la vida familiar encierran una espiritualidad profunda y característica

Marriage and family life have a profound, distinctive spirituality

This is my final reflection in this series on Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation “Amoris Laetitia” (“The Joy of Love”). It has been a privilege to be a part of this important and timely document with you, and to share with you some of the pope’s ideas about the challenges and the joys of marriage and family life today. I hope you will read (or re-read) “The Joy of Love.” It speaks to the profound spirituality of marriage and family life today, but it does so in very practical, down-to-earth ways. What does it mean to talk about the spirituality of marriage and family? To answer this question, we need to start by defining what “spirituality” is.

One simple way to define spirituality is to say that it is the way individuals and communities use the gifts of the Holy Spirit to follow Christ and live the Gospel. Of course, we know from the lives of the saints, which are sometimes quite diverse, that there are many different ways to live the Gospel. Blessed Teresa of Calcutta lived the Gospel in a different way than St. Teresa of Avila did. One followed Christ on the spiritual mountaintop; the other followed Christ behind the cloistered walls of her Carmelite retreat. One was more “active” and the other more “contemplative.” Both prayed fervently, loved the Eucharist, and sought ways to follow Christ. But what does it mean to be a missionary disciple devotedly devoted to using the Holy Spirit to help people find God and serve God’s people.

In the final chapter of “The Joy of Love,” Pope Francis tells us that there is a distinctive spirituality of marriage and family life. This doesn’t mean that every married couple or family lives the Gospel the same way. We know from experience that there is a lot of diversity in marriage and family life—especially today.

But the pope tells us that the same fundamental principles that grounded all the saints must be observed by couples and families that truly seek God. These are: prayer; devotion to the Eucharist; care for others; the ability to “let go” of selfishness, petty jealousy and a desire to control our own lives and the lives of others; and the willingness to forgive—out of gratitude for God’s love and mercy—the wrongs committed against us.

Pope Francis says, “When a family is committed to reaching others, especially the poor and the neglected, it is a symbol, witness and participant in the Church’s motherhood.” (“The Joy of Love,” #324). Earlier in “The Joy of Love,” the Holy Father emphasizes this as a part of our family spirituality.”

Pope Francis concludes “The Joy of Love” with a prayer to the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary and Joseph, In you we contemplate The splendor of true love; To you we turn with trust. Holy Family of Nazareth, Grant that our families too May be places of communion and prayer, Authentic schools of the Gospel And small domestic churches.

El matrimonio y la vida familiar encierran una espiritualidad profunda y característica

Esta es mi última reflexión de la serie del verano sobre la exhortación apostólica del papa Francisco, “Amoris Laetitia” (“La alegría del amor”). Ha sido un privilegio para mí leer este maravilloso documento junto con ustedes y compartir algunas de las ideas del papa acerca de los desafíos y las alegrías que tienen los matrimonios y la vida familiar hoy en día. Espero que lo (o lo) vuelvan a leer) “La alegría del amor,” que habla sobre la profunda espiritualidad del matrimonio y de la vida familiar en la actualidad, pero de una forma muy práctica y ajustada a la realidad.

¿Qué significa hablar sobre la espiritualidad del matrimonio y de la familia? Para responder esta pregunta tenemos que comenzar por definir la espiritualidad.

Una definición sencilla de la espiritualidad podría ser que es la forma en que las personas y las comunidades emplean los dones del Espíritu Santo para seguir a Cristo y vivir el Evangelio. Por supuesto, tomando como referencia las vidas de los santos, que son bastante variadas, sabemos que existen muchas formas de vivir el Evangelio.

Por ejemplo, Santa Teresa de Calcuta vivió la vida de un santo erudito a Santa Teresa de Avila. La una siguió a Cristo en las calles, atendiendo a los más pobres entre los pobres, en tanto que la otra siguió a Cristo tras los muros del claustro de su monasterio carmelita. Pero ambas eran “activas” y “contemplativas”, ambas rezaban fervientemente, amaban la eucaristía y transmitían a través de sus palabras sus ejemplos y, sobre todo, se conocían entre sí.

En el último capítulo de “La alegría del amor,” el papa Francisco nos dice que el matrimonio y la vida familiar poseen una espiritualidad característica. Esto no significa que cada pareja de casados o familia viva el Evangelio de la misma forma. Sabemos por experiencia que en lo que respecta al matrimonio y a la vida familiar existe una gran diversidad, especialmente hoy en día.

Pero el papa nos dice que las parejas y las familias que verdaderamente buscan a Dios deben observar los mismos principios fundamentales que rigen las vidas de todos los santos. Estos son: la oración, la devoción a la eucaristía, cuidar del otro, la capacidad de despojarse del egoísmo, los celos mezquinos y el deseo de controlar nuestras vidas y las de los demás, y la capacidad de perdonar las faltas cometidas contra nosotros, basado en el agradecimiento por el amor y la misericordia de Dios.

Papa Francisco dice: “Cuando la familia acoge y se hace hacia los demás, especialmente hacia los pobres y abandonados, es símbolo, testimonio y participación de la maternidad de la Iglesia” (“La alegría del amor,” #324).

Al principio de “La alegría del amor,” el Santo Padre hace énfasis en que la familia es una “escuela de amor.” También nos dice que la Iglesia es un “hospital en campo,” un lugar en donde aquellos que han sido heridos de cualquier forma pueden encontrar consuelo, sanación y esperanza.

En su último capítulo, el Papa extiende esta imagen a la familia como iglesia doméstica. “Los Santos cristianos son mutuamente para sí, para sus hijos y para los restantes familiares, cooperadores de la gracia y testigos de la fe. Dios los llama a engendrar y a cuidar. Por eso mismo, la familia ‘ha sido siempre el hospital más cercano. Currómonos, contengamos y estimulémonos unos a otros, y vivamos como parte de nuestra espiritualidad” (#321). El papa Francisco concluye “La alegría del amor” con una oración a la Sagrada Familia:


Jesus, María y José en vosotros contemplamos el esplendor del verdadero amor, a vosotros, confiados, os dirigimos.

Santa Familia de Nazaret, haz también de nuestras familias lugar de comunión y escuela de oración, auténticas escuelas del Evangelio y pequeñas iglesias domésticas.

Santa Familia de Nazaret,
St. John Paul II Parish, 27821 Campbell Ave., Liberty Township of Westfield.

Friday, Sept. 16: 7:30 p.m., Bingo. For information, call 708-725-7750.

For tickets or more information, call 317-357-8352, pclegg@littelflowerparish.org or visit littelflowerparish.org.

Sisters of Providence of the Mother of Peace, 2100 E. Washington Blvd., Bloomington.

Sisters of Providence of the Mother of Peace Retreat on Sept. 17

The registration deadline is Sept. 19.

Sisters of Providence of the Mother of Peace Retreat on Sept. 17

 Providence Sister Cathy Campbell will host a retreat on the Gospel of Matthew in the Providence Center conference room, 1 Providence Place, in Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, St. Mary-of-the-Woods, from 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m. on Sept. 17.

The Gospel of Matthew differs from the other Gospels because it was composed for and proclaimed to a Jewish audience by a Jewish author trying to teach his fellow Jews to recognize Jesus and his ministry as fulfilling the many Scriptures about the Messiah found throughout the Hebrew Scriptures with which they would have been very familiar,” says Sister Cathy.

The retreat will look at five primary passages in the Gospel of Matthew, the Beatitudes, the disciples’ mission to proclaim the Messiah, the parables of kingdom life and the information of a community to continue Jesus’ work, and the last judgment.

During the retreat, participants will explore and pray these five sermons in an attempt to identify who Jesus is, and how Christians can find a path for thriving in a changing world. Time will be included for quiet prayer and journaling.

The cost is $45, which includes lunch.

The registration deadline is Sept. 12. Registration is available online at Events.SistersofProvidence.org, by calling 812-357-9141 or by e-mailing jfrost@spswm.org.

VIPS

Indy Irish Fest set for Sept. 15-18

The Indy Irish Fest will be held at Military Park, at the corner of West and Ohio streets, in Indianapolis, on Sept. 15-18.

Indy Irish Fest celebrates Irish heritage with bands, dancers, vendors, food, a beer tent and exhibitions.

The event starts on Thursday from 5-10:30 p.m. with a pub preview.

Entry is free for children 17 and younger. A donation of canned goods is requested.

The event will be open on Friday from 4:30-11 p.m., with S5 early admission from 4:30-5:30 p.m.

Indy Irish Fest will run on Saturday from 11 a.m.-11 p.m., and on Sunday from 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

Free admission will be offered on Saturday 11 a.m.-10:30 a.m. and Sunday 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m., and one free admission for children ages 12 and younger with student I.D., $5 ages 6-13, and free for children ages 5 and younger.

For more information, call 317-713-7117 or log on to www.indyirishfest.com.
Vox Sacra to ‘praise God’ during first public concert

By Mike Krokos

Jeanne Chandler and Tim Gelhaus listen intently as Andrew Motyka instructs them on how to refine the song they are performing.

So do 12 other people on this evening.

The 14 singers compose Vox Sacra (Sacred Voice), a newly formed schola cantorum (choir) of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.

Thursday evening practices have been a constant since June as the group prepares to perform a concert of Marian choral music to honor the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, 1347 N. Meridian St., in Indianapolis, at 7 p.m. on Sept. 8. It will be their first public concert, which is free and open to the public.

“We came together through an audition process,” explained Motyka, director of archdiocesan and cathedral liturgical music. “When I put the word out that we were looking for singers, I was overwhelmed by the number of talented musicians who showed interest.”

All told, 10 parishes are represented by the group, whose goal, Motyka noted, “is both to serve the archdiocese by providing music for various events, and to create a model for excellence in liturgical music.”

“Beauty is one of the pathways that leads many to God, and we strive to create and perform excellent, beautiful music that might not be possible at the parish level,” he continued. “The Church’s treasury of sacred music, especially but not limited to Gregorian chant and polyphony, makes up the core of our repertoire.”

The group agreed on the name Vox Sacra. Motyka said, “because it not only succinctly implies what the group is, but describes part of our method. When many singers come together to praise God, we do so with both many voices and with one.”

Music has long been a staple in Gelhaus’ life. He is working on earning a master’s degree in music from Butler University in Indianapolis. His mother was the organist at his home parish in Wisconsin, and he obtained an undergraduate degree in music from Clarke University in Dubuque, Iowa.

“I really like the talent here,” said Gelhaus, who is a bass baritone with the group. “Chandler, who works as a licensed professional engineer by day, also shares her musical talent as a soprano in Vox Sacra.

“I have been with the group since the beginning,” said Chandler, a member of SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral Parish, adding, “Andy [Motyka] is amazing, and I wanted to sing with the best singers in the archdiocese.”

At the concert, the group will have its first CD of music available for $10.

“When we convened the group in November, it made sense to dig right in to music for Advent and Christmas. It was too late to do much for Christmas of 2015, but we thought that it could be a good launching point for our visibility if we created a CD of Advent and Christmas music,” Motyka said. “People always enjoy listening to seasonal music around the Christmas season, and if we can give them a taste of the Catholic Church’s contribution to that, then we can start to demonstrate what this group is about. We began rehearsals for the CD right away, and recorded the tracks in April, after Easter.”

Seeing Vox Sacra work together, Motyka added, has been rewarding.

“‘This group has been a joy to work with. I enjoy every choir I direct, from the Cathedral choir, to the Archdiocesan Choir, to other groups that are convened for special events,” he said.

“What sets this group apart is that it is a group of leaders. It presents plenty of advantages and some challenges. Sometimes we over sing, and I have to remind them that every person in here is the strongest singer in their home choir.

“They have to sing out in their parishes and help lead. Here, they have to fit in more sensitively. They respond so well to each other, and to the music.’

Chandler, like all Vox Sacra members, is eager to praise God through their singing, as the group’s name implies.

“We all have different gifts, and this group allows me to use my gifts to the greatest glory possible,” she said.

(For more information on the concert, contact the Office of Worship at 317-236-1483, 1-800-382-9836, ext. 1483, worship@archindy.org or visit www.voxsacra.com)

For 2017 World Peace Day, pope asks to focus on nonviolence

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—When nonviolence is the basic approach of political decisions and public policy, it promotes the restoration and consolidation of peace, the Vatican said.

In his message for the Jan. 1 celebration of World Peace Day, Pope Francis will offer reflections on the importance of nonviolence as a political choice, the Vatican said in a statement on Aug. 26.

“Nonviolence: A style of politics for peace” is the theme the pope chose for World Peace Day 2017, the Vatican said. Pope Francis’ frequent references to a “third world war in pieces” highlight the “serious negative social consequences” of violence, the Vatican statement said.

“Peace, by contrast, promotes socially positive consequences, and it allows the achievement of real progress. Therefore, we should act within what is possible, and negotiate ways of peace even where they seem tortuous and impractical,” the Vatican statement said.

Andrew Motyka, director of archdiocesan and cathedral liturgical music, leads members of Vox Sacra during practice on Aug. 18 at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis. The group will perform its first public concert on Sept. 8 at the cathedral. (Photo by Mike Krokos)
**CAMP**

continued from page 1

for an organization to “rent” a camp and have the camp staff provide meals, housekeeping, lifeguarding and other services.

He also knew the dates that the Muslim Youth organization requested—Aug. 5-11—came after the end of the CYO camp’s regular summer schedule, so he didn’t hesitate to welcome the group, especially because he viewed it as an opportunity for collaboration between the two faiths.

“We all need that today,” Sullivan says. “As Catholics, we are all raised to believe that our Church is welcoming and is the first to reach out. We tell our staff over and over that our relationships with anyone who comes through our camp are changing the world. With that in mind, why wouldn’t we want their group to be present with us?”

Such a welcoming embrace hasn’t always been a guarantee at previous camps across the country, says the leader of the Muslim youth camp.

“We have had negative experiences with camp sites where a local community came to the gates of the camp and protested why there was a Muslim camp,” says Uzair Siddiqui, a co-camp adviser. “This camp has been the exact opposite. There have been many smiles and a lot of opportunities for the campers to interact with the staff.”

The interactions have left lasting impressions on the 150 Muslim campers, their 21 Muslim counselors and the Catholic staff who helped them all week.

‘We aren’t different’

Consider the experience of Scott Hartman, the CYO camp’s program manager who helped and interacted with the Muslims youths—ages 12 to 18—as they swam, canoed and tackled the high ropes challenge. He was struck by how the youths followed a schedule of praying five times a day during camp—and how they prepared to pray each time.

“They wash their hands and face before they pray because they believe they’re taking one on one with God—which I believe, too—but I haven’t always been concerned about my own prayer,” Hartman says.

“Learning about their culture and religion has been the best part for me. We got to pray together at the first meal. They asked God to bless the food and we got to pray together. It’s a great opportunity for us to learn we aren’t different,” says Siddiqui, who is 23. “One of the passages in the Quran [the central religious text of Islam] is that God has created mankind simply to get to know one another. And from that, to be bridges.”

“One of our first sessions was about family, and what it means to be family. We started by talking about mother, father, brothers and sisters. Then we branch out to our extended family. And we branch out further to all our Muslim brothers and sisters. The last thing we want to bring home is that we all belong. People of other faiths are our brothers and sisters as much as our Muslim brothers and sisters. Until we can think that way, we can’t truly consider ourselves to be strong Muslims.”

‘Be proud of who we are’

The Muslim youth camp at Rancho Framasa also served the same purpose that the recent World Youth Day in Poland did for many Catholic youths, especially those who come from schools and communities where Catholics are in the minority.

“For a week in their respective situations, Catholic youths and Muslim youths were surrounded by people who share their faiths, who want to live their faith,” Hossain recalls the impact that had on him when he attended a Muslim youth camp when she was 13.

“I remember when we stood up to pray, and I realized other people took an initiative for their faith at a young age,” Hossain says.

‘Spiritual work and conversion’

The single-gender approach to camping activities was an eye-opening experience for Kevin Sullivan, the CYO camp’s co-director who served as a lifeguard for the Muslim boys when they swam in the pool and at the lake.

“To my surprise, there was something different about the kids,” he says. “What I came to realize was the single-gender programming was really the difference. No one was showing off or putting on airs with anyone else. They were just being themselves and it made a difference in how they played and how they spoke to me and to each other. I enjoyed my time with them.”

That sentiment expressed the overall experience between the members of the two faiths.

“It was awesome,” Hossain says. “They’ve been able to be together and celebrate their faith in a safe environment.”

The interaction of the members of the Muslim camp with the Catholic camp staff get to know the campers and their counselors. They let us ask anything we wanted.

“I don’t think there are a lot of opportunities where Christian Americans get to ask questions of Muslims Americans to better understand their religion—and to know the conversation is one of interest and trust. It worked both ways, with them asking questions about ‘The Great Wall.’ They’ve had a lot of conversations together, and a lot of fun together and to each other.”

Better understanding between two faiths

“God has to do the work of conversion,” Hossain said. “It’s a grace which a soul receives, for which we can pray.”

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**TERESA**

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Aug. 5. The number of Missionary of Charity brothers has grown by 53 to 416.

When Mother Teresa was alive, her order was working in 120 countries. Today, they are present in 139 nations.

The miracle surrounding the world, Sister Mary Prema believed Mother Teresa was “a living saint.” She was beatified in 2003—six years after she died. The time it took for her sainthood cause to make its way through the exacting Vatican process “have been years of going deeper into understanding who she is,” her successor said.

As it turned out, the years were especially important in coming to understand Mother Teresa’s spiritual thirst and what she described as “the darkness” of her own life. "In all things, Mother did not draw attention to herself but gave herself completely to others, forgetting about her own pain,” Sister Mary Prema said. Her continuing prayer and work, even with the experience of God being so far away, “speaks about her faith, her faithfulness to the commitment she had taken and to the person to whom she was wed: Jesus.”

The “darkness” became part of Mother Teresa’s ministry, the grace that gave it power.

"It was part of her mission to the poorest of the poor, especially sinners who have experienced their unwantedness and their rejection. Sharing their experience of darkness and of being away from God made her an instrument of grace for them," Sister Mary Prema said. “And she had great compassion for those who did not know God, and did not experience the love of God for them.”

Speaking in the sisters’ garden, with blue-trimmed white saris drying on a clothes line, Sister Mary Prema said Mother Teresa’s persistence in prayer and works of mercy, even when she felt God was far from her, is a lesson for all believers.

"Prayer is something we want to be faithful to rather than to be successful at,” she said.

And while the phrase “corporate and spiritual works of mercy” may sound old-fashioned to some people, Mother Teresa demonstrated the enduring power of those expressions of love, Sister Mary Prema said. "However you phrase it, it is always modern because you are imitating Jesus and his compassion.”

The vast majority of people Mother Teresa tended to, cared for and accompanied were not Christian, Sister Mary Prema said, but for her, they were Christ in disguise.

Called like all Christians to spread the Gospel, Mother Teresa “helped people to find God in their own hearts and experience that God has for them just by the experience of her motherly attention and intense interest in their personal lives.”

She had a great desire that all souls would get to know and love Jesus, Sister Mary Prema said. But at the same time, “she knew that conversion is the work of God. The acts of charity and mercy, which she performed, came because of love for Jesus and for others.”

“God has to do the work of conversion,” she said. “It’s not a human work to convince a person to believe what I believe. It’s a grace which a soul receives, for which we can pray.”
SISTERS continued from page 1

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Pope Francis said he wants to visit survivors and those affected by a deadly earthquake in central Italy as soon as possible.

He wants to go to the ravaged area to “bring you personally the solace of faith, the embrace of a father and brother, and the support of Christian hope,” he said after praying the Angelus with visitors gathered in St. Peter’s Square on Aug. 28.

The pope expressed his closeness and concern for the people “hard hit by the earthquake” in the central Italian regions of Lazio, Marche and Umbria.

Before leading a prayer for the deceased and survivors, the pope praised the rapid response of the Italian government and volunteers, saying their efforts showed “how important solidarity is in order to overcome such painful trials.”

The 6.2 quake rumbled across the region on Aug. 24, collapsing roofs, leveling buildings and homes while people slept, and leaving 290 people dead. It also left 388 people injured, with more than 250 of them requiring hospitalization. Rescuers pulled some 238 survivors from the wreckage.

After the strong earthquake struck central Italy and with the early news reporting many deaths and serious damage, Pope Francis turned his weekly general audience on Aug. 24 into a prayer service.

While the pope and some 11,000 pilgrims and others gathered in St. Peter’s Square, six Vatican firefighters were on their way to the town of Amatrice, about 85 miles east of Rome, to help search for victims. The pope sent six Vatican police officers to join them to pray.

When Pope Francis arrived in St. Peter’s Square for his general audience just six hours after the main quake, he set aside his prepared audience talk and instead spoke of his “heartfelt sorrows and my closeness to all those who, in the earthquake zone, especially those who lost loved ones and those who are still shaken by fear and terror.”

“For theLord Jesus, who is always moved by human suffering, would console the brokenhearted and give them peace.”

He emphasized the need to “rebuild with care” for survivors “because there is an important role of the community in helping those affected to recover in the shortest time possible.”

He called on people “to be faithful to the commitments made after the earthquake,” especially by offering donations, and added: “We can and must help those affected by the earthquake with love and spiritual solidarity.”

In Amatrice, one of the hardest-hit towns, the bodies of three religious sisters and four of the elderly guests they housed in the summer were pulled lifeless from the rubble on Aug. 25. Three sisters and two of the elderly were rescued from the church building that the Lord Jesus, who is always moved by human suffering, would console the brokenhearted and give them peace.

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Bishop Giovanni D’Ercolino of Ascoli Piceno, Italy, embraces a woman following an Aug. 27 mass funeral for earthquake victims at a gym in Ascoli Piceno, Italy. Pope Francis said he would visit survivors of the Aug. 24 quake “as soon as possible.” The 6.2 earthquake left hundreds dead and thousands homeless. (CNS photo/L’Osservatore Romano via EPA)

Bishop Giovanni D’Ercolino of Ascoli Piceno, Italy, embraces a woman following an Aug. 27 mass funeral for earthquake victims at a gym in Ascoli Piceno, Italy. Pope Francis said he would visit survivors of the Aug. 24 quake “as soon as possible.” The 6.2 earthquake left hundreds dead and thousands homeless. (CNS photo/L’Osservatore Romano via EPA)

She described her baby sister as fun, stubborn and sarcastic. The two often quibbled, she said about which one was Martha and which one was Mary. When the biblical sisters were the subject of a Sunday liturgy not long ago, Merrill said she called her sister and asked, “Have we decided which of us is Martha and which one is Mary?” By the end of the call, they decided both had a little of Martha and a little of Mary inside them, Merrill said.

“Her faith was very strong. And she was a wonderful nurse,” Merrill said of her sister. “I feel so bad for the people of Holmes County because they’ve lost so much. I hope they provide a huge void. They would do anything for their patients.”

Sister Susan said the deaths do have one silver lining: They help the congregation to be in solidarity with others who have lost a loved one to violence.

“We are experiencing what is so many people around the world are experiencing. It puts us in touch with the pain, the hurt and the bewilderment that so many have experienced in deaths that come violently,” she said.

Sister Paula and Sister Margaret were remembered in the Diocese of Jackson, Miss., at a wake service on Aug. 28 at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Lexington, where they were involved in parish life, and a memorial Mass on Aug. 29 at the Cathedral of St. Peter the Apostle in Jackson.

In addition to her sister, Sister Paula was survived by a brother, John V. Merrill, Jr., of Stoneham, Mass., and several nieces and nephews.

The funeral Mass for Sister Paula was to be celebrated on Sept. 2 in St. Vincent Church in Nazareth.

The funeral Mass for Sister Margaret was to be celebrated on Sept. 2 in St. Joseph Chapel at the School Sisters of St. Francis motherhouse in Milwaukee.

Pope tells quake survivors he will visit them ‘as soon as possible’
Youths touch lives of residents through Nazareth Farm project

BROWN COUNTY—Youths and adults from St. Agnes Parish in Nashville and from Terre Haute’s youth ministry program joined together this summer to improve the homes of elderly Brown County residents.

Known as Nazareth Farm, the outreach is based on four cornerstones: community, prayer, simplicity and service. Since 1995, team members have provided more than 26,000 hours of service to Brown County.

This year’s project, held on July 22-26, involved 15 sites across central and northern Brown County.

As part of the process, Adrienne Spahr, youth leader for St. Agnes Parish, and Paul Spahr, responded to requests for service from individuals and organizations.

This year’s projects included splitting and stacking tons of wood, weeding and mulching overgrown gardens and yards, tearing out and rebuilding steps, cleaning out garages and removing debris.

The volunteers also cut down trees, moved furniture, and washed and painted buildings and fences.

Many of the elderly expressed their gratitude for the energetic efforts of the Nazareth Farm team members, who dedicated a total of 612 hours of labor in the four-day blitz, laboring through the 90-plus degree temperatures.

This year’s team consisted of five youths from St. Agnes Parish. Six youths also came from the Terre Haute youth ministry program, representing the parishes of St. Benedict, Sacred Heart of Jesus, St. Patrick, St. Margaret Mary and St. Joseph University. Seventeen adults, many of whom return each year, also volunteered.

For years, St. Agnes parishioners Patty and Eric Lindsey have offered swimming and dinner at their home for one night of the camp. St. Agnes parishioners Chris and Jim Bullock also have opened their home another night to the weary team members for swimming and a cookout.

Sunday night dinner is always a bountiful feast provided by the ladies of St. Agnes Guild. Joining in the dinner this year were some of the property owners, who enjoyed visiting with team members and talking about the projects.

The rest of the meals are sparse, with lunch consisting of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. To offset the expenses, including materials for some of the projects, the youths each pay $70 to take part in the program.

The contributing parishes can be proud of the work and dedication this project provides to Brown County, and the work done by the young people and their chaperones.

The experience left its impact on the youths, too.

One youth noted, “I am back again because this project brings some of the best memories.”

Another youth said, “We will remember this experience forever.”

(For more information about Nazareth Farms, contact Adrienne Spahr, youth ministry coordinator at St. Agnes Parish in Nashville, at spahr6@gmail.com.)
Poor to end ministry in St. Louis

After 147 years, Little Sisters of the Poor to end ministry in St. Louis

ST LOUIS (CNS)—The Little Sisters of the Poor are withdrawing from their ministry of caring for the elderly poor in the Archdiocese of St. Louis after 147 years of service.

The sisters cited a decrease in sufficient vocations to effectively staff the residence in north St. Louis, in the spirit of the community’s foundress, St. Jeanne Jugan.

“We are eternally grateful for the support and love we received during our many years in St. Louis,” said Mother Gonzaga Castro, local superior. “We love and respect nearly as much as we love the people we work with and for.”

The sisters are seeking new sponsorship to manage the property, which is home to 88 residents and has 125 employees. Efforts to assure the community’s mission through the transition are being managed by Kevin Short, managing partner and CEO of Clayton Capital Partners, a St. Louis-based investment banking firm that specializes in merger and acquisition advisement.

Bishop Zubik initiated the lawsuit against the government on behalf of Catholic Charities of Pittsburgh, arguing that it is a violation of religious freedom to force a religious organization to facilitate access to anything that it teaches is immoral.

After Bishop Zubik won an initial victory in the U.S. District Court in Pittsburgh in November 2013, the case was appealed until it reached the Supreme Court this year.

In May decision, the high court urged the lower courts to give the litigants time to find a negotiated solution. The high court also affirmed that the diocese and the others could not be fined during those negotiations.

However, the diocese has learned that the Department of Justice is pressuring secular insurance companies that have contracts with the diocese, and with other religious organizations, to begin providing Church employees with the objectionable coverage.

The Diocese of Pittsburgh, along with several neighboring dioceses, is self-insured through the Catholic Benefits Trust. Catholic Benefits Trust hires secular insurance companies to handle the administration and claims for its plans.

Those companies have told the diocese that they recently received a letter from the Department of Justice demanding them to provide the disputed coverage at their own expense, said Bishop M. William Lori, general counsel of the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

Since the Supreme Court issued its ruling strongly directing that the parties negotiate a mutually agreeable resolution to this matter, we have remained hopeful and open to those talks,” Lori told the Pittsburgh Catholic, the newspaper for Diocese of Pittsburgh.

“It is discouraging to see this aggressive action taken by the government,” he said. “We hope to prevail upon the Department of Justice to stop this latest action without having to pursue additional litigation. We have believed from the beginning that an agreement could be reached that would allow the government to accomplish its goals without involving the Church in the process.”

The diocese has not paid anything for its legal representation in Zubik v. Burwell. All costs associated with the litigation have been donated by the legal firm of Jones Day.

“Mickey Pohl, one of the Jones Day attorneys who has been representing Bishop Zubik, the diocese, Catholic Charities and other religious organizations in this litigation, said, “It is extremely disappointing that the Department of Justice is trying to pressure insurers to stearamul the religious objections of Catholics and other people of faith who have been part of this litigation. It is also troublesome that these assaults on freedom of religion have not been the subject of inquiry by the mainstream media during this election cycle.”

The Aug. 10 statement from the diocese said that “we are aware that the government has made an extremely aggressive interpretation of the court’s order in the Zubik case and is apparently trying to take over—to force our third-party administrators to include the objectionable coverage in our self-insured plans.”

“We think that is an erroneous reading of what the Supreme Court said,” it continued. “Furthermore, the government seems to acknowledge, because we are self-insured there is no obligation or authority for the third-party administrator to provide the objectionable coverage.”

If the fines for not facilitating the coverage were imposed, Pohl ciellcied, they would bankrupt Catholic Charities of Pittsburgh. Each year, that agency provides about $10 million in services, such as free medical and dental care, and support to homeless women and veterans, to people of all faiths in southwestern Pennsylvania.

Diocese says government slow to offer ways to resolve impasse on mandate
In the great big world of ours, little things still matter

Weeks ago, I stumbled upon a beautiful tribute in a magazine to a man for all seasons. It was a eulogy for his lifelong friend, wherein he said, "My son’s teacher requested that parents send in something to bring an example to..." To bring an example to... There is nothing in it for you. Hurtful. Doing something kind, even when being prompted. Praying for those who are suffering. Gratitude. Acknowledging a job well done. Saying a thank you. All of these are ways back to God. A man for all seasons... Whatever it is. I was feeling a little like it caught my attention that day.

This great big world, sometimes I forget that the little things still matter. I conveyed this to my kids and they asked what "the little things" are. I rattled off plenty of examples: Holding the door for someone. Showing gratitude. Acknowledging a job well done. Doing something kind, even when being prompted. They sort of nodded their heads like they understood. To bring an example to life. I shared a story with them. Recently at back-to-school night, my son’s teacher requested that parents send candy as currency for a social studies unit on trade and bartering. The next evening, that teacher left me a voice mail not only to thank me for the candy donations, but also to thank me for how we were doing since we were new to the school. My son is one of 32 students in her class and the teacher noticed, she made time to say thanks for a bag of Skittles, while extending a warm welcome to our family. One 28-second phone message was the bright spot in my day." I said to the kids. This reminded me that little gestures can be more powerful than we recognize, but I want’t my youngest child was processing it. I usually have to use sports analogies with that one.

One evening during the Olympic games, my daughter cheered and howled when a U.S. athlete broke another record. I told my daughter that we’ll be all amazing athletes who break records and go down in history, but we can be big in the ordinary, day-to-day stuff. Margareta interrupted. "We’re supposed to do ‘little things’," she added. Then my daughter said something which made me think she finally got it. "So it’s like letting Henry have the red PopSicle, and I take the orange one."

Margaret said. "Yes, Margaret. From an 8-year-old’s perspective, that’s a decent analogy. Mother Teresa said, “Not all of us can do great things. But we can all do small acts with great love.” Blessed Teresa of Calcutta will be canonized this weekend, multiple classes! And we’ve had a theme of Writers of Kazan, and that is to look at beauty in the smallest of ways—from right where we are at this very moment! How can we work to heal this broken world, and work our ways back to God, one act of goodness at a time? We’re not necessarily praised, and we’re certainly not ‘big’ in the ordinary, day-to-day stuff. But God sees, and his heart is happy."

(Patti Lamb, a member of St. Susanna Parish in Plainfield, is a regular columnist for The Criterion.)

It’s All Good/Patti Lamb

In this great big world of ours, little things still matter

In Robert Bolt’s play A Man for All Seasons, Rich, who is enamored with the glory of court life, walks with St. Thomas More for a court appointment. "Rich, why not be a teacher? You’d be a fine teacher, perhaps, even a great one.”


When we celebrated the feast of St. Bonaventure in July, it once again reminded me of theologian’s message. St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas Aquinas lectured in their respective colleges; the University of Paris and the University of Naples. When Pope Benedict XVI stated that for Thomas, theology is both “theoretical, it seeks to know God ever more, and it is practical: It seeks to convert and educate.” Bonaventure emphasizes a third dimension of theology: wisdom. Bonaventure quotes: “To know that Christ died ‘for us’ does not remain knowledge, but becomes necessarily affection, love.”

Theology, then, is the purpose of theology as love and benefit the pursuit of the Christian life.

When Francis’ hands, feet and side mirrored Christ’s crucifixion, Bonaventure asked what Christ’s act of amor means for us. When we see the good in the cross, do we envision it as a tree filled with the mystical fruits of Christ’s life? In its entirety, theology addresses the very essence of life through doctrines, spirituality, liturgy and moral law. As Bonaventure states, “theology’s purpose is to love and benefit the pursuit of the Christian life.”

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What will guide those who govern our God-given existence? Where do we find those who should be proclaiming that the world is not ours to do what we will with it, but ultimately, we are its stewards? If we base theological challenges fire up your imagination, be a theologian; not a bad world to be in, and oh, it is not a quiet life. (Father Eugene Hemrick writes for Catholic News Week.)

In the wonderful world of theology and the Christian life


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In the wonderful world of theology and the Christian life

When Francis’ hands, feet and side mirrored Christ’s crucifixion, Bonaventure asked what Christ’s act of amor means for us. When we see the good in the cross, do we envision it as a tree filled with the mystical fruits of Christ’s life? In its entirety, theology addresses the very essence of life through doctrines, spirituality, liturgy and moral law. As Bonaventure states, “theology’s purpose is to love and benefit the pursuit of the Christian life.”

What will guide those who govern our God-given existence? Where do we find those who should be proclaiming that the world is not ours to do what we will with it, but ultimately, we are its stewards? If we base theological challenges fire up your imagination, be a theologian; not a bad world to be in, and oh, it is not a quiet life. (Father Eugene Hemrick writes for Catholic News Week.)
The Book of Wisdom provides this week’s liturgy with its first scriptural reading.

In the most ancient Christian tradition, however, it has been revered as inspired by the Holy Spirit. This book, along with so much of the wisdom literature, builds on the basic determination and wisdom will come from God. To stand firm, a disciple first must admit personal inadequacy and ask for God’s strength and insight. The Gospel bluntly says that many obstacles can stand between a disciple’s initial intention to follow Christ, and actually living as a disciple. It is important to remember that Luke was written when Christianity, albeit an infant religion in the Roman Empire, was very much sailing into the hot, strong winds of cultural opposition to Gospel values, and even into persecution under the law. A fact, an obvious result of this situation, was that Christians had to face pressure from their loved ones to forsake the Gospel. Thus, the evangelist here recalls that Jesus said a true disciple should turn away even from father and mother, brother or sister, if these close relatives urged abandoning Christ. First and foremost was the disciple’s choice to be one with Christ.

Reflection
The Gospel sets the stage. Living the Christian life is not easy. Christians must withstand much if they are committed. Among other pressures is the pressure to face pressure from their loved ones to forsake the Gospel. Thus, the evangelist here recalls that Jesus said a true disciple should turn away even from father and mother, brother or sister, if these close relatives urged abandoning Christ. First and foremost was the disciple’s choice to be one with Christ.

First Day Of School
(And Every Day After)
By Cathy Lamperski Dearing

Come with sharpened pencils and sharpened senses. Come with wide-eyed and wide-minded Pack your lunchbox full. You’ll be hungry for the food and for the knowledge. Crave the who, what, when, where, why, and how Dig and turn up the soil. Excavate—Don’t know what that word means? Portrayed by Jesus—is an age-old question you raise—about the seeming contrast between the God of the Old Testament, destroying enemies into the hands of those who so very, very much want to teach you The criterion Friday, September 2, 2016

The Sunday Readings
Sunday, September 4, 2016

- Wisdom 9:13-18
- Philemon 9-10, 12-17
- Luke 14:23-33

The Book of Wisdom provides this week’s liturgy with its first scriptural reading.

It is believed that this book was written in Alexandria, Egypt, by a Jew who had emigrated from the Holy Land, or whose ancestors had come from the Holy Land. It was originally composed in Greek. Since it was written outside the Holy Land and not in Hebrew, orthodox Jews have never accepted it as genuine Scripture. Noting this, Anglican scholars in the early 17th century excluded it from the King James Version of the Bible.

Sunday, September 4

**Wisdom 9:13-18**
Those who are wise, and who are shrewd, and who are just, and who speak the truth, and who guard the paths of justice, and walk in the ways of the Lord, and fear his commandments, they shall inherit the land forever, because their inheritance is forever.

**Philemon 9-10, 12-17**
As for you, my son, Philemon, I beg you, for Christ’s sake, to give him back to me as a brother in Christ. For I was not a bit reluctant to write this, however, it has been revered as inspired by the Holy Spirit. This book, along with so much of the wisdom literature, builds on the basic wisdom literature, builds on the basic

Sunday, September 4

**Luke 14:23-33**
The Lord said to his disciples, “Suppose one king goes to war and is away from home. When he takes his seat at the table, his servants bring in the invited guests and he finds that they are not worthy. Then he says to his servants, ‘Bring those outsiders in. Let whoever wants to come in.’”

Daily Readings

**Monday, September 5**
1 Corinthians 5:1-8
Psalm 5:5-7, 12
Luke 6:6-11

**Tuesday, September 6**
1 Corinthians 6:1-11
Psalm 149:1b-9a, 9b
Luke 6:12-19

**Wednesday, September 7**
1 Corinthians 6:12-13, 14-17
Psalm 45:11-12, 14-17
Luke 6:20-26

**Thursday, September 8**
The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Micah 5:1-4a
or Romans 8:28-30
Psalm 13:6
Matthew 1:1-16, 18-23
or Matthew 1:18-23

The Criterion Friday, September 2, 2016

God revealed himself gradually in the Old Testament and completely in Jesus Christ.
The religious leaders committed themselves "to a culture of encounter, tolerance, dialogue, and peace that respects the religious traditions of others."
Pope Benedict says it was his ‘duty’ to resign from papacy

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Retired Pope Benedict XVI said in an interview that he felt a “duty” to resign from the papacy because of his declining health and the demands of papal travel.

While his heart was set on completing the final days of his papacy, the retired pope told Italian journalist Elio Guerriero that after his visit to Mexico and Cuba in March 2012, he was “incapable of fulfilling” the demands of another international trip, especially with World Youth Day 2013, which was scheduled for Brazil.

“For the program set out by John Paul II for these [World Youth Day] days, the physical presence of the pope was indispensable,” he told Guerriero in an interview, which is included in the journalist’s upcoming biography of Pope Benedict. “This, too, was a circumstance that made my resignation a duty,” he said.

An excerpt of guerriero’s book, A Pope for All: The Biography of Benedict XVI, was published on Aug. 24 in the Italian newspaper, La Repubblica.

Pope Benedict said that although he was moved by the “profound faith” of the people of Mexico and Cuba, it was during his visit to the two countries in 2012 that he “experienced very strongly the limits of my physical capacity.”

Among the problems with committing to the grueling schedule of an international trip and the change in time zones. Upon consulting with his doctor, he said, it became clear “that I would never be able to travel again.”

The retired pontiff spends his days in prayer and contemplation while residing at the Mater Ecclesiae monastery in Vatican City.

Among the visitors Pope Benedict receives is Pope Francis, who “never fails to visit me before embarking on a long trip,” he said.

“I often receive small personally written letters” from Pope Francis, he said. “The human kindness with which he treats me is a particular grace of this last phase of my life for which I can only be grateful. What he says about being open toward other men and women is not just words. He puts it into practice with me.”

Pope Francis, who wrote the book’s preface, expressed his admiration for the retired pope, and said his spiritual bond with his predecessor “remains particularly profound.”

“In all my meetings with him, I have been able to experience not only reverence and obedience, but also friendly spiritual closeness, the joy of praying together, sincere brotherhood, understanding and friendship, and also his availability for advice,” Pope Francis wrote.

The Church’s mission of proclaiming the merciful love of God for the world, he added, and continues to be expressed through the witness of Pope Benedict.

“The whole life of thought and the works of Joseph Ratzinger have focused on the necessary need to be in the same direction, with the help of God—I strive to continue,” Pope Francis wrote.

Florida appeals court dismisses suit against school voucher program

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (CNS)—The Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops applauded a decision by a state appeals court to dismiss a lawsuit challenging Florida’s largest voucher program for private schools.

The Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program is “a proven method of contributing to the common good and the education of all Florida students,” the Tallahassee-based conference said in a statement posted on its website. “The Florida Educational Association originally filed suit against the program claiming it violates the Florida Constitution. The association is a statewide federation of teacher and educators’ workers’ local unions.”

In dismissing the suit, McCall v. Scott, a three-judge panel of the 1st District Court of Appeal upheld an earlier decision by the Circuit Court that found the Florida Education Association and other plaintiffs lacked standing in the case. The panel also said the plaintiffs could not show that the program harms public schools, is not funding or quality of education.

Through the program’s scholarships, “economically disadvantaged families and children have access to educational choices that would otherwise be unattainable,” the Florida conference, which is the public policy arm of the state’s Catholic bishops, said in its statement. Ruling for the unanimous panel, Judge Lori Rowe said in the 30-page ruling: “At most, [the opponents] quaeril with the Legislature’s policy judgments regarding school choice and funding of Florida’s public schools. This is precisely the type of dispute into which the courts must decline to intervene under the separation of powers doctrine.”

Applying “the [opponents’] remedy is at the polls.”

Joining in the opinion were Judges Ross Bilbrey and Scott Makar.

Since 2001, when it was enacted by the Legislature, the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program “has been providing hope and opportunity to thousands of students from low-income households,” the conference said.

An earlier school voucher program was struck down by the Florida Supreme Court, which said that it violated the state constitution.

Backed by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Florida Education Association brought suit against the current program because it says it is redirecting taxpayer money to religious schools, thereby creating a separate system of state-funded schools. The association has not said whether it will appeal the case to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Under the program, the state of Florida awards tax credits for contributions to scholarship funding organizations, which in turn award scholarships to students to attend private schools. The scholarship money is used to pay tuition, fees and other related expenses.

According to the program, qualifying students must come from families with an income of no more than $44,122 for a household of four. Currently, more than 69,000 students receive the scholarships, and their average household income is only 4.5 percent above the poverty level.

More than two-thirds of the recipients are African-American or Hispanic, and more than half live in single-parent homes.

The Florida Catholic conference said that during the 2015-16 school year, Florida’s Catholic schools served 13,369 students in the program, which represents 15.6 percent of the 85,539 students attending Catholic schools in the state.
Catholic leaders: Pope’s call for mercy in Americas reinforces their work

CHICAGO (CNS)—Latinos Catholic have many gifts and values to benefit the Church and society, and the time is now to embrace them and think, “America needs our gifts. Our world needs our gifts,” said Archbishop Jose H. Gomez of Los Angeles, at the opening of the Catholic Association of Latino Leaders (CALL) annual conference held on Aug. 18-21 in downtown Chicago.

“Latinos represent the Church in the United States,” he said. “The future of the Church in this country depends on you and me.”

The organization was founded in 2007. Archbishop Gomez, a native of Mexico, and Archbishop Charles J. Chaput of Philadelphia are its co-founders. The Los Angeles archbishop was an auxiliary bishop in Denver from 2001 to 2004 when Archbishop Chaput headed the Denver Archdiocese.

“I wanted to reach out to the professional Latinos in the business world and the universities, wherever they are, because most of them identify with the Catholic Church. They go to high school and they go to college, and they lose the contact with the Church,” the archbishop said.

The organization helps them feel they are important to the life of the Church and helps them bring their culture to the Latino community, to the culture, he said.

This was the first year the annual conference was held in Chicago. The group wanted to highlight Chicago’s strong history of welcoming immigrants from various countries and promoting their cultures.

CALL has more than 250 members with chapters in 14 cities dispersed across the United States. The chapter for Chicago began in 2015, said chapter president Jim Palos, who is director of the Hyde Park neighborhood. In the inaugural year, following the directive of Pope Francis, they plan to focus on strengthening families.

“We are a lay organization that is engaging Latinos in leadership positions to bring the positive Christian influence of the Church to our shared future, which we lead,” he said. “We need to see that CALL experience because the Church and the Latino community has so much to offer.”

Mar Muñoz-Visoso, executive director of the Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs in the Church at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), expanded on that point in her keynote address on Aug. 19.

Muñoz-Visoso, a native of Spain, drew from Pope Francis’ remarks to immigrants when he visited the United States for the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia in 2015.

“At one point in his remarks at Independence Hall, Pope Francis signaled out the large presence of Hispanic immigrants in the United States and those second- and third-generation Latinos,” he said.

“He asked us not to forget that, like those who came here before you, you bring many gifts to your new nation. You should never be ashamed of your traditions. Do not forget the lessons you learned from your elders, which are something you can bring to enrich the life of this American land. I repeat, do not be ashamed of what is part of you, your life blood,” Pope Francis said.

“You are also called to be responsible citizens, and to contribute fruitfully to the life of the communities in which you live,” he continued. “I think in particular of the vibrant faith which, as you possess, the deep sense of family life and all those other values which you have inherited, can help your gifts, you will not only find your place here, you will help to renew society from within.”

The pope implored Latinos—who come from various countries in the Americas—to be aware of their gifts not for vain glory but for service, Muñoz-Visoso said.

“If we want to contribute to the common good and help build this society, then it is important to know ourselves and our culture so that we recognize those assets that we have that we can bring to the table,” she said.

What are the assets that Pope Francis is asking Latinos—to name their country of origin—to embrace?

“Family life, faith and values—which are under threat in an increasingly secular American society. Faith is primarily transmitted in the family and the Church is an extension of the domestic Church. However, those connections between family and faith have been broken in second and third generations,” Muñoz-Visoso said.

It only takes a generation for young people to distance themselves from the Church. “The studies show, a growing number of our young people are growing up without the faith or with a very superficial sense of it,” she said. “It is a tragic fact that the more assimilated Latinos get into mainstream culture the less Catholic they become.”

Latinos Catholic understand family as a set of relationships that extend beyond the nuclear family to grandparents, uncles and aunts, godparents and more. Spending time together with loved ones is important, or used to be important,” she said. “Whether we immigrated to the U.S. more recently, or our families have been here for generations, the truth is our children are growing up in a hugely secularist and materialistic culture.”

As the pope said in Philadelphia, Latinos Catholic can bring these values back to an American society that used to hold them in esteem. To do that, Latinos must embrace and share these values that are native to themselves.

“When you are called to lead in a hugely diverse and pluralistic society like the 50 states of America, it is important to first of all know ourselves,” she said. “We are Latinos, but first of all we are Catholics. And since we all are Catholic, we are called to carry on and cooperate with the mission of the Church.”

While the U.S. culture today is moving away from organized religion, the Catholic Church here hasn’t seen such a drop off in members as a result. “We’re not because we’re not losing members as well. It’s because of the influx of immigrants. Seventy percent of the growth of the Catholic Church in the United States in the last 30 years has been thanks to immigrants, particularly from Latin America,” Muñoz-Visoso said.

“We are remaining steady, but if you go to the second and third generations we’re also losing a lot of them. Something needs to be done,” she added.

While in some archdioceses Latinos already account for the majority of Catholics, “we are not producing a proportional number of vocations,” or candidates to the priesthood, said Muñoz-Visoso. Some of that can be attributed to a time not long ago when Latino men and women were not welcome in some religious houses in America.

Church and society need Latino leaders who are engaged in their faith and in the culture and who can bring the values of faith, family and work as leaven in the culture, she said.

“Our own diversity has prepared us to function and live in a diverse environment,” she said. “We are a very diverse crowd, and some of our families have been here for generations.”

She urged her listeners not to be discouraged along the way. “In the face of growing secularism, keep your faith strong and live out your traditions,” she said. “Remember that others have walked before us, have made it to heaven and are watching over us.”

National needs gifts Latinos have to offer, says Archbishop Gomez

Aug. 28, said societal problems persist throughout the hemisphere that require the Church’s attention.

“I think that when we want to change society, we should start with our own hearts,” he said.

That was a sentiment echoed by Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Ky., president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, as he delivered a homily on Aug. 28.

“We are invited to accompany those who are deeply in need of mercy, but only after having allowed Jesus into our hearts with his mercy,” he said.

At a news conference, Haitian Bishop Pierre Dumas said the idea of mercy should be met with action by the Church.

“When we talk to young people, we shouldn’t think about it as something conceptual,” said Bishop Dumas, who heads the Diocese of Anse-a-Veau and Miragoane, Haiti. “For us, it should be something experiential.”

The extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy on the occasion, on Aug. 27-30 in Bogota, drew Catholics from 22 Latin American countries, the Caribbean, the U.S. and Canada. Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos attended some of the sessions.

On Aug. 29, participants were scheduled to tour poor neighborhoods in Bogota, where the Church is carrying out acts of mercy, said Cardinal Ruben Salazar Gomez of Guatemala, president of the Latin American bishops’ council, known by its Spanish acronym CELAM.

“It will be an important experience because it will open eyes to the possibilities of acts of mercy in different parts of the continent,” he said. In Bogota, “the number of homeless people has multiplied due to many factors, above all due to drug addiction and alcoholism. The archdiocese is working to address this.”

In a 28-minute video message to the conference, Pope Francis told participants that all of their work—in religious education programs, seminars, parishes, bishops’ conferences, clergy meetings and even theology—should be “about learning to show mercy.”

“We live in a society that is bleeding, and the price of its wounds normally ends up being paid by the most vulnerable. But it is precisely to this society, to this church, that the Lord sends us,” Pope Francis told them.

“He sends us with one program alone: to treat one another with mercy. To both the sick and those thousands of defenseless people who walk in our beloved American land by proposing a different way of treating them,” the pope said.

The importance of the Church’s work with poor communities has been heightened by an economic downturn that has thrown some of the largest countries, like Venezuela and Brazil, into recession. As a regional economy, Latin America and the Caribbean is forecast to contract by 1.3 percent this year after seeing a 0.7 percent drop last year, according to the World Bank. That has forced governments to cut services to the most vulnerable in places like Puerto Rico. †