Tattoo reminds award winner of his life’s mission

By John Shaughnessy

Yan Yan smiles as he shows the tattoo that represents his approach to serving others and honoring God. The 20-year-old’s tattoo on his right leg features the Latin phrase Imago Dei.

“It means image of God,” Yan says. “Since everyone is created in the image of God, every action I take should be for God. I got the tattoo on my leg because it’s a reminder that every step I take is to serve God.”

That philosophy has guided his volunteer efforts to help children from Burmese families in Indianapolis to improve their English and their academic skills, all in the hope of aiding them to adapt to life in America and pave the way for a better future.

These efforts have also led Yan to be chosen as the young adult recipient of the archdiocese’s 2019 Spirit of Service Award, an honor he will receive on April 30 in Indianapolis during a celebration that will mark the 100th anniversary of Catholic Charities in central and southern Indiana.

Yan’s concern and compassion for youths who are struggling stems from his own struggles upon arriving in the United States when he was 13. His family’s journey to freedom began when his father—a Catholic—fled Burma because of religious and ethnic persecution. Yan and his parents eventually became refugees in Malaysia before moving to America. Their first stop was in Washington state before settling in Indianapolis.

A turning point in his life came when he attended St. Mark the Evangelist School in Indianapolis for eighth grade.

“I was one of the first Burmese to attend the school,” he says. “There were only about five of us. Most of us didn’t

Faith and family guide mother of seven to live her dream of becoming a doctor

By John Shaughnessy

When Ann Schmitt graduates from medical school on May 4, the 41-year-old woman will celebrate the occasion and how she became pregnant with her seventh child in 2015 while she was in school.

Add in the fact that Schmitt—a seventh child in 2015 while she was in school. (Submitted photo)

and a stay-at-home mom at the time—then decided to move her family from Michigan to the Indianapolis area so she could pursue her childhood dream of becoming a doctor. There are also the details of how she married her husband Bryan in 2012 because of the one relationship she could consider that Schmitt never felt that way because of the one relationship she could always count on at every point of her journey.

"God was always with me," says Schmitt, a member of St. Malachy Parish in Brownsburg. "I could feel his presence." Then came the moment when even that relationship changed—for the worse. It happened in the days after she nearly bled to death while delivering her seventh child, Nathan, on Feb. 26, 2016. It happened in the days after she nearly bled to death while delivering her seventh child, Nathan, on Feb. 26, 2016.

If all of that seems overwhelming, consider that Schmitt never felt that way because of the one relationship she could always count on at every point of her journey.

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As she nears her graduation from Marian University’s School of Osteopathic Medicine in May, Ann Schmitt, left, celebrates with her daughter Madeline after receiving the news on March 15 that she has been accepted for a residency in family practice medicine at IU Health’s Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis. (Submitted photo)

Pro-life victories in Indiana could have national implications

By Victoria Arthur

The Indiana General Assembly’s passage of two major pro-life bills represents a “milestone moment” that will not only save the lives of unborn children in the state, but possibly lead to a long-term impact on a national scale.

That is the appraisal of Mike Fichter, president and chief executive officer of Indiana Right to Life, who hailed the legislation that now awaits the signature of Gov. Eric Holcomb. As The Criterion went to press, the two bills were still sitting on the governor’s desk.

House Bill 1211 bans dismemberment abortion, a later-term abortion method that involves tearing a live fetus apart in the uterus and extracting the unborn child piece by piece. Senate Bill 201 expands conscience protection rights beyond physicians and hospital employees to nurses, pharmacists and physician assistants, ensuring that they do not have to participate in abortion procedures if they object on moral grounds.

The Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC) supported both bills and actively lobbied for their passage.

“These were both hard-fought victories that will have far-reaching effects,” Fichter said. “For the first time since the Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion in 1973, a broad range of health care professionals in Indiana will be protected from being forced to violate their personal beliefs. This is so important, because chemical abortion is rapidly rising, and it pats many pharmacists and nurses in the position of having to act against their conscience.”
The annual chrism Mass to be celebrated at 2 p.m. on April 16 at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, 1347 N. Meridian St., in Indianapolis, will arguably be one of the most solemn and joyful moments of worship this year for the Church in central and southern Indiana.

Priests serving in the archdiocese will renew their ordination promises. And Archbishop Charles C. Thompson will bless oils to be used in sacraments across the archdiocese.

Every celebration of baptism, confirmation, the anointing of the sick, ordination and church or altar dedication in the archdiocese in the coming year will involve oils blessed at this Mass, which is open to the public.

The oils so joyfully and solemnly to be blessed at the chrism Mass were prepared in a rather mundane way at the cathedral rectory, 1400 N. Meridian St., in April.

For 27 years, Christina Tuley, the executive assistant in the archdiocesan Office of Worship, has overseen a crew of volunteers who annually pour more than 20 liters of olive oil into 750 small bottles and place lids and labels on them. One bottle of each of the three kinds of oils—the oil of catechumens, the oil of the infirm and chrism oil—are then put in small boxes.

They are blessed during the chrism Mass and then distributed to Catholics taking part in the liturgy who take them back to their faith communities across central and southern Indiana.

“We’re preparing the oil for every child that is baptized, for every priest that is ordained, the churches that are built, and for the catechumenate, anointing of the infirm goes for the sick,” Tuley said. “It’s very much an honor.”

Arnold and Kathleen Feltz, members of St. Barnabas Parish in Indianapolis, volunteered for the first time this year. She appreciated the aromatic oils added to olive oil to give chrism oil an attractive smell.

She recalled the effect it had on her twins when they were anointed with chrism oil at their baptism.

“My mom put it on their fingers and told them it was their Chrism oil and that they were blessed,” Kathleen said. “It was a reminder of how blessed and how present Christ is. In our faith, we have some very tangible means of experiencing Christ.”

Father Patrick Beidelman, executive director of the archdiocesan Secretariat for Worship and Evangelization, stopped in to see the work of the volunteers and thank them for their service.

“They’re offering their time to enable our faith family to be who it is and do what it does by the power of the Holy Spirit,” Father Besedelman said. “You can see them putting their faith into action. It’s their love for the Church, for the sacramental life of the Church. And the kind sharing of their time builds up the body of Christ.”

Easter liturgies are set at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral and Saint Meinrad Archabbey

Easter liturgies at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis and the Archabbey Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln in St. Meinrad are open to the public.

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson is scheduled to be the principal celebrant at the Easter Vigil Mass at the cathedral, 1347 N. Meridian St., in Indianapolis, at 9 p.m. on April 20.

Starting times for all liturgies at the Archabbey Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln in St. Meinrad are Central Time. Due to space constraints, The Criterion is only able to list these Easter liturgical schedules. For information about liturgies at parishes or other religious communities, contact them individually.

**Volunteers prepare oils to be blessed at chrism Mass**

By Sean Gallagher

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Arnold and Kathleen Feltz, members of St. Barnabas Parish in Indianapolis, and the parents of Father Joseph Feltz, have helped prepare the oils for 18 years. They then attend the archdiocesan chrism Mass on April 16 at the cathedral. (Photos by Sean Gallagher)

Volunteers prepare oils to be blessed at chrism Mass

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Prayer sent with appeal donations show people’s ‘burdens, faith’

By Natalie Hofer

At a table covered with prayer intention cards stacked in piles of varying heights, Dana Stone randomly pulls a few of the handwritten notes and reads a line or two from each.

“For my husband’s conversion.”

“For all of my family who left the Church.”

“For the success of my wife’s cancer treatments.”

“That I find a good job close to home.”

Stone is not a member of a religious order or head of a prayer ministry. No, oddly it would seem—in terms of receiving prayer requests—she is director of appeals and creative services for the archdiocese’s Office of Stewardship and Development.

“People send them in every year” with the prayer request card attached to their United Catholic Appeal (UCA) intention form and payment reminders, she says. “Usually it’s not that many, though. Last year there were less than a hundred.”

Not so this year.

Since the launching of the annual appeal last fall, she says, “we had somewhere around 1,000 [requests] come in.” she says. “I’ve been just floored.

‘Compassion’ comes from two Latin words that mean ‘to suffer with.’ The petitions reveal people of compassion who care about others and consequently carry burdens of great concern and care for those who are ill, going through difficult times or have abandoned the faith. Stone says she is especially touched by the intentions “clearly written by an elderly person in shaky handwriting asking for prayers for their health or explaining why they aren’t able to give as much this year, but they still want to give because it’s so important to them.”

For example, one person writes, “My age causes health problems. I am 85. … Please pray so I feel better. I have pain in my hip and back.” Yet the person goes on to offer help by noting that “I can stuff envelopes sitting down, just not standing.”

Another person writes that they will send a check soon but “had some seizures and got behind on a lot of stuff. … I’m always thinking of you.”

“Intentions answered thanks to those who give”

As more requests rolled in, Stone noticed a connection between the intentions and the services of the Church in central and southern Indiana that address their needs and concerns.

“What I don’t think people realize is that many of the intentions that we see … are being answered thanks to those who faithfully give to the United Catholic Appeal” that help archdiocesan ministries, she says.

For instance, many prayer requests focused on those suffering from drug addiction, depression and other mental health issues. Funds donated to the UCA benefit the archdiocesan Office of Human Life and Dignity, whose ministries address each of those needs, and Catholic Charities Bloomington, which offers mental health counseling.

Other requests mention a parent or spouse with dementia. One request asked for prayers “for my wife with Alzheimer’s, and for me so that I stay healthy so I can care for her.”

Caregivers can receive help through at least two ministries receiving appeal funds: Catholic Charities in Indianapolis offers caregiver support groups, and the mental health services offered by Catholic Charities Bloomington address those dealing with life adjustments, stress and more.

Several intentions express concern regarding infertility issues. Should such a couple be open to adoption, they could seek help from St. Elizabeth Catholic Charities in New Albany or St. Elizabeth/Coleman Pregnancy and Adoption Services in Beech Grove. Both agencies receive UCA funding.

Stone says she is especially touched by the intentions “clearly written by an elderly person in shaky handwriting asking for prayers for their health or explaining why they aren’t able to give as much this year, but they still want to give because it’s so important to them.”

As he read the intentions, Archbishop Charles C. Thompson says he was struck by “how much people, especially parents for their children, worry about the spiritual well-being of souls.”

Catholic schools and Young Adult and College Campus Ministry—both direct beneficiaries of the United Catholic Appeal—help address this concern.

Many donors also sought prayers for struggling families and for troubled youths. Becky’s Place in Bloomington, Holy Family Shelter in Indianapolis and Ryes Youth Center in Terre Haute all benefit from the appeal.

And the many prayer requests for an increase in vocations are directly affected by works of the archdiocesan Office of Vocations and Bishop Simon Bruté increase in prayer intentions submitted with appeal pledge cards and payment slips this year.

“Look at all that’s happened over the last six to nine months” in terms of the Church she says. “Maybe it just has people in a different mindset.”

For Archbishop Thompson, the number of intentions speak to the state of people’s hearts.

Through the prayer requests, he says, “People share their hopes and concerns, especially for the Church, the world, their families and their friends.”

And it’s obvious that many people carry tremendous burdens, but remain steadfast in faith.

(For more information about the annual United Catholic Appeal or to contribute, go to storybook.link/UCA/storybook or call the Office of Stewardship and Development at 800-382-9836, ext. 1415, or 317-236-1415.)
Opinion

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson, Publisher
Mike Krokos, Editor
Greg A. Oroszki, Associate Publisher
John F. Fink, Editor Emeritus

Our faith calls us to uphold religious liberty

Sikh Temple of Wisconsin in Oak Creek; Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C.; Dar Al-Farooq Islamic Center in Bloomington, Minn.; First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, Texas; Tree of Life Congregation Shaarey Tefilla in Carmel, Ind. They are houses of worship in the United States where heinous acts of evil have taken place in recent years, resulting in the loss of lives in several instances and vandalism in others. The tragedies left many of us reeling, wondering what led individuals to do such things. They also resulted in a call for our diverse communities of faith to come together and support one another.

We can add other houses of worship in our nation and around the world in recent weeks that have faced similar situations: A March 15 attack on two mosques in New Zealand during Friday prayer that killed 50 Muslims and injured 50 more. An assaulter stabbing a Catholic priest in a Montreal church during Mass on March 22 (Father stabbing a Catholic priest in a Montreal church during Mass on March 22 (Father stabbing a Catholic priest in a Montreal church during Mass on March 22 (Father stabbing a Catholic priest in a Montreal church during Mass on March 22 (Father stabbing a Catholic priest in a Montreal church during Mass on March 22 (Father stabbing a Catholic priest in a Montreal church during Mass on March 22 (Father stabbing a Catholic priest in a Montreal church during Mass on March 22 (Father stabbing a Catholic priest in a Montreal church during Mass on March 22 (Father stabbing a Catholic priest in a Montreal church during Mass on March 22 (Father stabbing a Catholic priest in a Montreal church during Mass on March 22 (Father stabbing a Catholic priest in a Montreal church during Mass on March 22 (Father stabbing a Catholic priest in a Montreal church during Mass on March 22 (Father stabbing a Catholic priest in a Montreal church during Mass on March 22 (Father stabbing a Catholic priest in a Montreal church during Mass on March 22 (Father stabbing a Catholic priest in a Montreal church during Mass on March 22 (Father stabbing a Catholic priest in a Montreal church during Mass). That question was raised by three parishioners at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Charlotte, N.C., last week called on President Donald Trump, Vice President Mike Pence and other to uphold religious liberty.

The letter also outlined several other principles the group asked the president, vice president and congressional leaders to affirm. They include:

• Individuals of all faiths and none have equal dignity, worth and rights to religious freedom.

• A person is not more or less American because of his or her faith.

• Individuals must be free to exercise their religion without fear for their physical safety.

• Scapegoating, stereotyping and spreading false information about any person or community, including religious individuals and communities, is unacceptable.

• Americans should never foment fear about groups based on attributes like race, religion or ethnicity, and they should speak against fear-mongering by others.

• The civic and religious virtue of humble dialogue with those with whom one disagrees should be encouraged.

• Leaders should avoid using violent imagery because it can encourage violence.

• Any attack on one religion should be treated as an attack on every faith.

Saddled, these acts of evil show us there is still darkness in the world. Our nation must always be prepared to give light to these circumstances, including in cases where religious liberty is concerned. As we approach the holiest day in humanity (Good Friday), we also know Easter joy is only a few days away. We should always be prepared to give light to Christ on our brothers and sisters in need during not only the Easter season but every day—despite our differences.

We are all made in the image and likeness of God. May our lives of faith always reflect that.

—Mike Krokos

Letters to the Editor
Too many black lives are lost through abortion, reader says

There is one horrific consequence of the specter of “white supremacy” that has seemed to have flown beneath the public consciousness radar for far too long. That is the tragic and disproportionate loss of innocent black babies through the evil of abortion. Far more black lives are lost at the hands of abortionists within their mother’s womb than through street violence of all types—including conflicts with police officers.

Arguably, a significant contributing factor to this tragedy would be the very successful efforts of white eugenicist Margaret Sanger. Sanger—a true believer in “survival of the fittest” and a co-founder of Planned Parenthood—passionately advocated “improvement” of the U.S. population through dramatic reduction in the African-American population by birth control and abortion.

Today, Planned Parenthood is our nation’s largest provider of abortion and the overall elimination of innocent black lives through abortion (percentage wise) greatly exceeds that of the general population.

In fairness, it is recognized that, subject to certain constraints, abortion is legal, and Planned Parenthood is not solely responsible for this terrible statistic.

However, all young black lives do truly matter, and moral outrage—within both the black and white communities—unfortunately seems to be lacking.

We owe much more to the precious and innocent black lives lost through abortion than to do nothing.

David Nealy
Greenwood

We need more guidance in assisting our neighbors at the southern border

I recently read Editor Emeritus John F. Fink’s editorial in the March 29 issue of The Criterion about loving your neighbor. As I was reading it, I thought to myself, “Finally, an article about the humanitarian disaster at the U.S.-Mexico border,” but unfortunately it stopped short.

Is our Church helping to feed, clothe, and shelter these people? Is Catholic Relief Services involved? As a Catholic, what should I think about this issue? Many of us are confused.

—Tom Stiens
Richardson
Las oraciones de Jesús en la cruz hablan de abandono y de esperanza

“Jesús, con un grito, exclamó: ‘Padre, en tus manos encomiendo mi espíritu.’ Y diciendo esto, expiró” (Lc 23:46).

El salmo 21, la oración que Jesús prays en solidaridad with God.

El salmo 21, la oración que Jesús prays in solidarity with God. It includes the familiar cry of Jesus, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34), but it does speak of his sense of abandonment by his disciples (especially Judas) and of his struggle to do his Father’s will. His final outcry in St. Luke’s Gospel is one of faith-filled surrender, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Lk 23:46).

The bystanders who heard the Lord’s words quoted by St. Matthew and St. Mark misunderstood him. They thought he was calling on Elijah or one of the prophets to come and save him. They didn’t realize that his words of abandonment were also words of profound hope. On the cross, Jesus speaks of both abandonment and hope.

Standing before the cross this week, we will understandably ask ourselves, what did Jesus mean when he prayed these words of abandonment and hope? Did he really think that his Father had abandoned him? What was the source of his hope? What did this final act of worship mean—for him and for many of us who have felt God’s “absence” (especially during the scandals of the past year) and who are desperately seeking hope?

Jesus died as he lived—in constant dialogue with his Father, in communion with the One whose love sustained his every word and action as the Son of the Living God and as our brother. Jesus lived, died, and prayed. That means he lived and died in intimate communion with God. Even before he spoke every action he performed was indivisibly linked to the will of his Father.

Unlike you and me, there was no division between Jesus’ intentions and his actions. Although his human nature strayed at times, he knew that he was placed on him as he entered into the loneliness and bitter pain of his passion and death. Jesus accepted his Father’s will and did what was required of him. Why? To save us from our sins. To show us what it means to surrender our will and let God our Father raise us up into loving communion with him.

Jesus’ prayer of looking surrender on the cross transformed his suffering and death into an act of love and worship. By his wounds, we are healed. By his cruel death, we are set free. His prayer was the source of his freedom. His acceptance of the Father’s will made it possible for him to descend into hell and liberate by his tremendous act of unselfish love all who were waiting to be set free.

Psalm 21, the prayer that Jesus prays in the passion narratives of Matthew and Mark, is a prophetic psalm that affirms the ultimate goodness of God in spite of life’s pain and suffering. This psalm, which Jesus spoke on the cross, makes it possible for us to seek hope in the face of abandonment and hopelessness.

Psalm 21:6 says, “Let your priests be clothed with righteousness.” This means they will be set free from sin and death, and that they might be empowered to minister to others with compassion and love. It is a call to prayer that asks God to give us the power of prayer and to use it for the benefit of others.

This is why we pray this psalm, because it is a prayer of hope. It is a prayer that promises that God will be with us in our times of need and that he will answer our prayers.

Psalm 21:7 says, “May your priests be clothed with righteousness.” This means that God will give them the power to minister to others with compassion and love. It is a call to prayer that asks God to give us the power of prayer and to use it for the benefit of others.

Psalm 21:8 says, “May the life of your priests be boundless.” This means that God will give them eternal life and that they will be able to minister to others with compassion and love. It is a call to prayer that asks God to give us the power of prayer and to use it for the benefit of others.

Psalm 21:9 says, “May your priests be clothed with righteousness.” This means that God will give them the power to minister to others with compassion and love. It is a call to prayer that asks God to give us the power of prayer and to use it for the benefit of others.
Catholic Charities Terre Haute's new foodbank to open with blessing by Archbishop Thompson on April 29

All are invited to attend a blessing of the new Catholic Charities Terre Haute Foodbank building by Archbishop Charles C. Thompson at 430 N. 14 1/2 St., in Terre Haute, on Monday, May 11, from 11:30 a.m.-3 p.m.

The event will include a ribbon-cutting ceremony and open house. The mayor and other officials will be on hand to mark the completion of this project, which will double the size of the foodbank.

Uccabbi will provide shuttle service from the parking lot north of Catholic Charities' Bethany House at 14th and Locust streets in Terre Haute beginning at 4:30 p.m. and will run through the end of the open house.

Guests are encouraged to arrive early and take advantage of the shuttle to and from the new foodbank warehouse.

For more information, contact Jennifer Buell, Catholic Charities Terre Haute executive director, at 812-232-1447, ext. 7107.
Book shares stories of key figures in Cristero War in 1920s

Reviewed by Sean Gallagher

It may surprise many Catholics living in the U.S. today that less than 100 years ago, dozens of clergy and laity were killed for their faith just across the southern border in Mexico.

In a secularist persecution, the Mexican government seized Church property, closed Catholic schools and sent nearly the entire Mexican episcopate into exile, mostly to San Antonio, Texas. The few who stayed continued to minister on the run, living in hiding.

The height of this persecution in 1920s also saw the first large-scale immigration of Mexicans to the U.S., nearly 250,000 fleeing during the period for safety and the freedom to practice their faith.

By 1926, the intensity of the persecution was sharp enough that the Mexican bishops suspended all public worship across the country as of Aug. 1 of that year.

Within a few months, large groups of Mexican Catholics had had enough and led an armed rebellion against their persecutors in a civil war known as the Cristiada. The Cristero fighters, as they were known, had as their battle cry, “Viva Cristo Rey!” (“Long live Christ the King!”)

Although the story of the Cristiada was told in part in the 2012 movie For Greater Glory, it did not draw large audiences.

A new book by Msgr. James Murphy of the Diocese of Sacramento, Calif., has the potential to open the eyes of contemporary readers to the ferocity of a persecution against the Church not so long ago and far away, and the courage and holiness shown by many Mexican Catholics in response to it.

Saints and Sinners in the Cristiada War: Stories of Martyrdom from Mexico, with a foreword by Archbishop Jose H. Gomez of Los Angeles, was published earlier this year by Ignatius Press.

Msgr. Murphy, who is now retired, earned a master’s degree in journalism from the University of California, Berkeley, and served as his diocese’s communications director, the managing editor of its newspaper and pastor of three bilingual parishes. He also founded the first Spanish-language diocesan newspaper in the U.S. in 1979.

While the stories he tells of the saints and sinners of the Cristiada War are compelling, Msgr. Murphy does so in the broader context of the rebellion as a whole, the history of Mexico that led up to it and how it was ultimately resolved, largely through the efforts of the U.S. ambassador to Mexico and an American priest.

Msgr. Murphy’s book is particularly relevant to the faithful in central and southern Indiana.

Many Mexicans who have immigrated to the U.S. and live in the archdiocese came from Jalisco, a state in west-central Mexico where the anti-Catholic persecutions and fighting Cristiada War were especially fierce.

And the many members of the Knights of Columbus in the archdiocese belong to a Catholic fraternal organization that made great efforts in the 1920s to raise awareness of Americans of the persecution south of the border and to move American government leaders to persuade their Mexican counterparts to bring it to an end.

Some of the saints Msgr. Murphy portrays have been either beatified or canonized: Blessed Miguel Pro, St. Toribio Romo and Blessed Anacletio Gonzalez Flores.

St. Toribio has an interesting contemporary relevance for many Hispanics who have immigrated to the U.S. across the southern border.

Msgr. Murphy recounts how many immigrants who were in danger of death in desert areas around the border encountered a man in black who led them to safety. When leaving them, he invited them to visit him in his hometown of Santa Ana in Jalisco.

When they traveled there, they discovered at the shrine of St. Toribio an image of the priest who was martyred in 1928 and canonized in 2000 that looked just like the man in black who had saved their lives.

Others have not yet been recognized as saints. They include Archbishop Francisco Orozco y Jimenez of Guadalajara and the many largely nameless members of the Women’s Brigade, who went to great lengths and bravely many dangers to bring material support to the fighters.

Among the sinners described by Msgr. Murphy are many Mexican government leaders of the time, including President Plutarco Elias Calles and Tomas Garrido Canabal, governor at the time of Tabasco, a state in southern Mexico where the persecution of the Church was particularly brutal.

But he also includes a priest among the sinners. Father Jose Reyes Vega, a priest of the Guadalajar Archdiocese who took up arms in the Cristiada War directly against the orders of Archbishop Orozco who, while suffering great persecution himself, was wholly opposed to violent resistance to the government.

Father Vega, who became a general in the Cristero army, easily made it to the list of sinners for several reasons, not the least of which included his ordering of an attack on a train thought to be carrying a shipment of gold and money in which 51 civilians died.

The Cristiada War did not end with a culminating battlefield victory by either side in the struggle. By 1929, the two sides had fought to a stalemate, even though government troops were easily superior to the ragtag Cristeros in numbers and armaments.

The conflict—and the heightened persecution that brought it about—came to an end in 1929 largely through the intervention of Dwight Morrow, who served as U.S. ambassador to Mexico, and Paulist Father John Burke, who earlier led the efforts to start what later became the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In particular, it was the positive working relationship that Father Burke built with President Calles, despite the latter’s strong anti-Catholicism, that paved the way for peace.

Msgr. Murphy describes well the careful diplomatic tightrope walked by Morrow and Father Burke. Even though such details can be dry for many readers, Msgr. Murphy recounts them in ways that keeps their attention.

The entire lack of involvement of the Mexican bishops in the secretive peace process until close to its end, and then only in a limited manner, suggests an approach to theology in marked contrast to that commonly held today.

Msgr. James Murphy’s book, Saints and Sinners in the Cristiada War: Stories of Martyrdom from Mexico, shares the stories of some of the people who were involved in Mexico’s war in the 1920s, many who were killed because of their faith.

Since at least the Second Vatican Council, the theological understanding of the Church has emphasized a communion among all the faithful. From this is understood that, while the bishop of Rome is still recognized as the universal shepherd of the Church, all bishops form with him a college of co-equals, serving (in most cases) as the chief shepherd of their local Church.

Such an understanding of the episcopate seemed wholly absent in Father Burke’s peace efforts in which the Mexican bishops were largely kept in the dark and on the sidelines.

At the start of his book, Msgr. Murphy explained that he was motivated to write Saints and Sinners of the Cristiada War in part because of a lack of works in English that tell the stories of key figures in the struggle.

That hole has now been ably filled by Msgr. Murphy who tells English-language audiences the compelling stories of these men and women in the broader context of Mexican history.

(Sean Gallagher is a reporter for The Criterion.)
During that time, Schmitt felt a lot of loneliness. She had never experienced before, a feeling that often left her in tears. Schmitt felt that it was the physical pain from the emergency sectio that was needed to deliver her son, and the several hours of efforts to save her life following the loss of five liters of blood from her body. Yet it was an even deeper spiritual pain that overwhelmed her—the feeling that God had abandoned her for the first time in her life.

‘I shook my faith’

“Ever since I became a mother, whether I’m under stress or joyful, I pray the Hail Mary, and something just clicks. I’m going back to school, and I’m going strong,” Schmitt recalls.

She chose Indianapolis for two reasons. It moved her closer to her parents and her best friend, high school principal William Green. She didn’t spend enough time with the kids, even her prayers didn’t help. Yet a touch of providence did.

“Almost every day,” Schmitt says, “there was a new challenge. It strengthened my faith.”

She graduated with a bachelor’s degree in biology from Marian University in Indianapolis in 2013. Yet instead of entering IU’s medical school, she entered Marian’s new School of Osteopathic Medicine in 2014. The dream was in reach until the nightmare of nearly dying rocked her world.

“Before that, I wasn’t really thinking about my career. I was thinking about caring for newborns and families. In family practice, I can do all of that,” Schmitt says.

On March 15, 2014, Schmitt learned she had received her first choice. Her thoughts quickly turned to God. “I thought, ‘OK, it’s going to be here. I want you to want me to be. This is what you want me to do.’”

She pauses before adding, “To try to lead my life with my faith. I try to listen to that voice where God says, ‘This is why you’re here.’”

“Without God, I couldn’t have made it through medical school,” Schmitt says. “Prayer had always helped her before, and I’m sure there will be a lot of happy tears that day from all of us.”

“Any dream is too big”

“The dream was in reach until the nightmare of nearly dying rocked her world.”

Yan views all these efforts as a way “paying back” for all the agencies that helped her family: “I felt like a partnership. He’s given me the feel of his presence. I didn’t understand why that happened, but I couldn’t understand why I couldn’t take care of my children. It was a long recovery.”

Sister Arrianne Whittaker, who is following her dream of being a religious sister and a medical doctor.

As graduation nears, Schmitt says, “I’ve always felt close to him in my faith. It deepened for Schmitt during her time in medical school.”

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HYATTSVILLE, Md. (CNS)—Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory, set to become the new head of the Archdiocese of Washington, promised to serve with truth, love and tenderness in a region where he acknowledged “unrest and anger” after the departure of Cardinal Theodore McCarrick and the current sexual-abuse scandal.

“I want to offer you hope. I will rebuild your trust,” Archbishop Gregory said during an April 4 news conference. “I cannot undo the past, but I sincerely believe that together we will not merely address the momentous issues of the present and failed outliers, but we will model for all the life and teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and we will provide for our families, for our communities, for those who will follow us. That is my greatest, indeed, it is my only answer.

Archbishop Gregory was introduced to media gathered for the announcement at the Archdiocese of Washington’s pastoral center in Hyattsville by Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl. Pope Francis accepted Cardinal Wuerl’s resignation as archbishop of Washington on Feb. 16, according to the mandatory, to the pope when he turned 75, but it had not been accepted until last fall.

Archbishop Gregory continued from page 1

Glenn Tebbe, executive director of the ICC, the organization that supports pro-life lawmakers of choice to terminate pregnancies that are facing now was a misuse of power, an abuse of power, clerical power. Power that is so-called “abortion pill,” as a driving force in our country’s seat of political power, may ask us to do things that are wrong.

“In some cases, clericalism manifested itself by “circling the wagons, so the episcopacy wouldn’t call one another to task,” he said.

“I think this moment has shown the folly of that approach to episcopal governance and episcopal collegiality, he said.

While “technical and structural responses” are necessary to combat the abuse scandal the Church is facing, “they alone will never heal the heart of our people,” he said.

In the Archdiocese of Washington, which he called “home to the poor and the powerful,” he promised transparency and truth and said that during a time when the Church had given the people in the pew many reasons to leave, “I want to give them a few reasons to stay.”

“I want to assure the people that I will be honest with them,” he said. “I’m an ordinary human being, and I have to acknowledge those things that I simply can’t handle perfectly or even at all, but I always will to tell you the truth. And that’s been a theme here. I have to tell you the truth, and I will.”

Rebuilding trust during a moment fraught with challenges throughout the Church is not an easy task, he said, but added that he would rely on the grace of God to do so at the local level.

“When my service to you has ended, you will know I came to serve you with love, truth and tenderness in the name of the Lord Jesus,” he said.

Cardinal Wuerl, referred to the Catholic Church
center in Hyattsville by Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl, who has been apostolic administrator of the archdiocese, looks on as Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory speaks during a news conference in the pastoral center at the Archdiocese of Washington on April 4 after Pope Francis named him to lead the archdiocese. Archdiocese of Washington (CNS photo/Bob Roller)
Priest who minister at Medjugorje shares Mary's message of love

By Jennifer Lindberg

Special to The Criterion

"feeling," he said during a visit to a Rome parish on

"He always listens because he is so close to us," which

Father Leon was appointed the chaplain for

every day, noting that in Medjugorje, Our

"Sometimes there is no language at all," he said.

For more information, please log on to

"You felt immediately how she loved you."

..."You see whole regions would be

"There is nothing special about me."

"You do just wash your clothes on

..."So why not go to confession more regularly?"

..."There is nothing special about me."

..."You do just wash your clothes on

People can call Jesus at any moment; he is always there, pope says

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Everyone has a direct line to Jesus, who is always nearby, ready to listen and help, Pope Francis said.

People can call Jesus at any moment; he is always there, pope says

People can call Jesus at any moment; he is always there, pope says

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People can call Jesus at any moment; he is always there, pope says
Palm Sunday witnesses to the humility, humanity of Jesus

By Mary Marrocco

Not far from where I live is a donkey sanctuary. It’s highly popular because of the donkeys’ beauty. Donkeys, often mistreated, have a gentleness that draws and heals people. The farm is a sanctuary for the donkeys, but also for the people.

When the Gospels were written, no therapeutic donkey sanctuaries existed, but the donkey was a common animal of service, humble and ordinary. The donkey who took part in Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem appears in every Gospel. All four evangelists show Jesus entering the holy city in a great welcome—riding, not a majestic horse that a king or warrior might ride, but a donkey.

In our day, it would be like a world leader, instead of coming on a private jet welcomed by military bands and ribboned officials, putting in an old faithful station wagon. Like the pope rejecting fine limousines and driving a humble compact car.

The Church gives us this glimpse of Christ at the end and beginning of a special journey together. We are coming close to the end of Lent, the journey into the desert. We are beginning Holy Week, the end of which includes the solemn Easter triduum. To mark the end of the Lenten journey and the beginning of this year’s Easter journey, we open our gates (like the people of ancient Jerusalem) to welcome the Lord to see. We are welcoming God!

It’s so beautiful, so glorious, it bubbles to the surface and overflows for the whole city to see. We are welcoming God! More astonishing still, we are welcoming humanity.

The early Gospel commentators saw the donkey as a symbol of Christ’s humanity, as with the donkey on which the good Samaritan placed the wounded traveler. When we see Christ riding a donkey, we see God taking up humanity. Like the donkey, our humanity becomes a bearer of God. Christ enters into Jerusalem in a state of humility, because God enters the world carrying our humanity.

Ultimately, then, rejection of Jesus is not only rejection of God, but also of humanity, for Christ is truly human as well as truly God.

Why should we reject Jesus? Because it’s not easy to be with him. To enter Jerusalem on a donkey, as he did, is not glorious like entering on a fine horse or a jet airplane. Jesus’ donkey ride shows us that this is a journey of humility. It will make us a laughingstock.

This journey will lead us through who we truly are as human beings. Along this path, we will find God in those parts of us that are most frightened to let God in, most resistant to being changed, most inclined to cling to power and fight back.

Today as we pick up our palms, we share our joy in Christ. At the same time, we pick up the cross. In the Byzantine liturgy of some of Eastern Catholic Churches, as the people pick up the palms they sing: “Today we all take up your cross.”

As the perilous journey ends and begains, let’s enter Holy Week together. Let’s look for victory not in pomp and military might, but by way of humility, powerlessness, love and forgiveness. Here is true joy. Here is the way to meet the early dawn of Easter Sunday.

Let’s be unafraid to wave the palm, to pick up the cross and to meet the new life that awaits.
Joyful Witness/Kimberly Pohovey

Conversation leads to epiphany that we are kissed by God

I couldn’t help but look at the beautiful little girl with the mop of curls happily sitting on the doughnut shop counter.

I’m sure her mother thought I was rude for staring.

Not wanting them to be self-conscious, I turned and told Mom that I too had a large red button on my forehead. Though mine is conspicuously hidden on the sides of my head, partially concealed by my hairstyle, this little girl had one that covered her forehead and made her look like the one who showed the wiggly toddler mine. Then I told her mother what my own mom told me.

When I was about 7 years old, I came home from school one day and burst into tears. My alarmed mom asked what was wrong. I told her that kids at school kept picking on me because of my birthmark, and it looked like the world was about to come and take care of her while her husband was incarcerated.

She told me that when she was growing up, she had trouble comparing her car broke down, and she was desperate for some money to get it fixed. Then she and the children were evicted from their home.

There were no family embassies to turn to that could help her and her children.

She talked to a friend and got their permission to allow them to sleep on their floor for a while. It was a tight fit and an uncomfortable living arrangement. The children were tired and cried most of the time. Eventually, they had to leave because her friends were being threatened with an eviction if they allowed Laura and her children staying there.

Unfortunately, Laura’s story is far too common. As of January 2018, Indiana’s Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) of that total, 481 were family shelters. Of those, 268 were unaccompanied young adults (ages 18-24), and 449 were individuals experiencing homelessness.

Public school data reported to the U.S. Department of Education during the 2017-18 school year shows that an estimated 17,863 public school students experienced homelessness over the course of the year.

We know of many more individuals and families that experience homelessness—depending on when the count is made and the time of the year—but no one can argue that there are an incredible number of our neighbors of every age and background who are homeless. Lutheran Charities sees a variety of reasons why people like Laura and her children become homeless. Lack of housing, that low-income people can afford is one of the primary causes. Without housing options, people face eviction, instability and homelessness. Low-income households often do not earn enough to pay rent and utilities and have a place they can call home. Health problems can cause a person’s homelessness as well as exacerbate the condition by the time it manifests.

Many survivors of domestic violence become homeless when leaving an abusive relationship.

Laura came to Catholic Charities for help. She and her children stayed in one of our shelters. While she was there, she was provided help with applying for assistance with affordable child care. She was still able to go to school and get a job in a convenient store while working with an employment specialist to search for a job with a higher wage. Then we helped her her with her resume, so she could pursue other employment opportunities that could lead her to a career, not just a job. In the meantime, her children were able to continue to attend their school.

Last week, Laura came back to see us after she moved into her new home. She shopped at our food pantry and selected healthy food and fresh produce to take to her family. Laura starts a new job close to her kids’ school and day care next week.

She told us that she and her children are a lot happier and more relaxed knowing they have a place and will continue to have a place to call home in a very welcoming neighborhood. They are settling in with routines and loving their new home. “We have a lot more space than they have been in a very long time.”

For The Journey/Effie Calderaloca

We are encouraged to welcome the Lord by loving his world

Near the end of “Thirst,” one of my favorite volumes of Mary Oliver’s poetry, she speaks to the Lord in the epilogue:

“Love me with your whole heart and love for you are having such a long conversation in my heart.”

When Oliver didn’t say more, I felt a great loss, as if I would be the only one who knew to that marvelous conversation that has added my own dialogue with the Lord and the Earth.

Her death provoked an outpouring of grief on social media. Oliver was America’s best-selling poet, and her books contain fragments of people reprinting her own words. They alone would suffice, along with the occasional heartfelt beers, to “love her.”

A keen observer of the natural world, Oliver was a herald for our time, combining a love for nature with a quest for transcendence. She and Pope Francis are contemporary prophets of the way in which we should care for each other.

“Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home,” she with her eye for the deer, the hummingbird, the sunflower and their hummingbird, the sunflower and their practical steps.

We try to remain people of hope because that is the cross we ultimately people of resurrection.

Mary Oliver didn’t talk about these possibilities.

Instead, in her poem “Making the House Ready for the Lord,” she talked about creatures of this world and said that when she welcomed them— the sparrow, the lost dog—she could tell the Lord, “really I am speaking to you whenever I say, I do all morning and afternon. Come in. Come in.”

In her poem “Not to be afraid of the Holy Spirit,” she keeps her eye on the empty bird’s nest that has perched all winter on a barren tree branch of the windows. I imagine Little birds visit, as if checking out a bird condo open house.

In the front yard, a rabbit has made a home in such bushes and thinks she is keeping this a secret from me.

Twenty Something/Christina Capecchi

Giving joyful witness: how the Holy Spirit stirs the restless

When Pope Francis talks about evangelization, his poster child may well be an immigrant in North Dakota.

Sister Brenda, a 34-year-old Daughter of Charity of Mary of Guadalupe, lives more than 1,500 miles (2,414 km) away from Coahuila, Mexico, serving the sprawling Diocese of Brownsville, N.D., and ministering to the Hispanics working in its booming oil industry.

Sister Brenda’s smile echoes the pope’s call for joyful missionary disciples: Her eyes disappear, and smiles appear at each uttered corner of her mouth. There is something magnetic about the small woman in the giant world. She is the subject of a 2012 Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium (“The Joy of the Good News”) and a reference for all Catholics of how to effectively evangelize.

Most of the Hispanics who relocated to North Dakota are not here to stay. Some are young. Some are only 18 or 19. Others are single; others are new parents. All are yearning for something.

Among the makeshift homes and temporary work, the early mornings and the English lessons, seeking something stable, something familiar. It is a more extreme version of a search we all undertake: The quest for love, the quest for the open entryway to each shopper to join her mass. She approaches with humility. She is not there to dispense wisdom. She believes she can learn even more than she’ll teach.

That begins by listening, according to Evangelii Gaudium: “We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine dialogue cannot occur.”

This enables Sister Brenda to enter into their world, because “an evangelizing community gets its word in and builds itself in daily lives,” Pope Francis writes.

For Sister Brenda, that begins by fielding questions about former jerseys and better cell-phone plans.

They approach the Church for direction and comfort. They want to be with someone who can share a sacrifice of love by living in small spaces, leaving their family or bringing it to live in extreme weather conditions.

She takes her time with each encounter, heeding one of the most practical tips in “Evangelii Gaudium,” to “keep a most of patience and disregard for constraints of time.”

The teenagers talk about her habit, and she talks freely, happily about religious life. Her message is bold: “Do not be afraid to open the doors to Christ!”

She encourages their parents, too. “It is very important to strengthen the... See CAPUCHIN, page 14
Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

My Journey to God

Grand Entrance

By Michael Barrett

No Sadducee wades among this throng which Paul Romana fails to pacify. Pockets of Pharisees are for themselves the lowly lift the carpenter’s son on a beard of burden. None know how this path will twist. Nor the bath that awaits the Anointed.

Children jump and sing.
Their dogs gambol and wag.
Mothers lift infants to be blessed.
Palm fronds bend in raised hands.
Hosannas ring form stone to stone.
Palm fronds bend in raised hands.

A donkey brays. Hearts soar as Hosannas ring form stone to stone.
Palm fronds bend in raised hands. By Michael Barrett

That the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit is one who refuses to accept God’s forgiveness.

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains: “There are no limits to the mercy of God, but anyone who deliberately refuses to accept his mercy by repenting, rejects the forgiveness of his sins and the salvation offered by the Holy Spirit. Such hardness of heart can lead to final impenitence and eternal loss” (?)1646.

As St. John Paul II explained in his 1986 encyclical letter “Dominum et Vivificantem”: “‘Blasphemy’ does not properly consist in offending against the Holy Spirit in words; it consists rather in the refusal to accept the salvation which God offers to man through the Holy Spirit, working through the power of the cross” (846). No “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit”—I believe and would hope—is any other kind of blasphemy.

Recently I heard read at Mass these words from St. Mark’s Gospel: “Amen, I say to you, all sins and all blasphemies that people utter will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an everlasting sin” (Mk 3:28-29). This puzzled me. How does one blaspheme against the Holy Spirit? (Ohio)

On the surface, the quote you reference from the Gospel of Mark would seem to clash with what we grew up learning: that God can forgive anything if we’re sorry. And so, not surprisingly, this passage has sparked considerable commentary.

The first thing I should say is that God, indeed, can forgive anything; that’s the very reason Jesus came. Early in the Gospel, the angel of the Lord tells Joseph in a dream: “You are to name him Jesus—because he will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21). What then does the Marcan passage mean? It means that the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit is one who refuses to accept God’s forgiveness.
Rest in peace

Please submit in writing to our office by 10 a.m. Thursday before the week of publication; be sure to state date of death. Obituaries of archdiocesan priests serving our archdiocese are listed elsewhere in "The Criterion." Obituaries of religious sisters and brothers are included here, unless they are natives of the archdiocese or have other connections to it; those are separate obituaries on this page.


In death penalty cases, she said, the court must not simply decide "whether the evidence supports their claim of innocence or guilt," but also "whether the person didn't actually participate directly with the intent to kill." Missi Engle was also an especially active advocate of anti-death penalty legislation. In 1968, she co-founded the group People Against the Death Penalty, which became the Illinois Coalition for the Abolition of the Death Penalty.

Missi Engle was known for her commitment to nonviolent resistance and her belief in the power of love and compassion to bring about change. She was a pacifist and a strong opponent of war and violence, and she worked tirelessly to promote peace and understanding among people of different backgrounds and beliefs.

She was widely recognized for her advocacy work, and she received numerous awards and honors for her contributions to the anti-death penalty movement. Missi Engle's legacy as a powerful voice for justice and compassion continues to inspire many people today.

For more information about Missi Engle and her work, please visit the website of the Illinois Coalition for the Abolition of the Death Penalty, which can be found by searching "Illinois Coalition for the Abolition of the Death Penalty" on your preferred search engine.
Asylum-seeker credits new home in Iowa to prayers

Josué Mejía Montoya could have been still languishing in a detention center in Arizona, after escaping the violence. But Montoya credits prayers—particularly to Father Sergio—bringing him to one of the few individuals granted asylum in the United States from the Central American country.

“Darwin said to me a year ago that you could come to Iowa,” said Father Friedrichsen, who advised him to be one of the others at the church. “I was never nervous at the other court dates, but that day, I realized there was something going to happen, I would be all right.”

The youngest of six children, Montoya grew up in Santa Lucía, Nicaragua. His parish is Parroquia de Santiago Apóstol (Parish of St. James the Apostle)—where members received the sacraments of baptism, Communion and confirmation. One of the priests who served at Santiago was Padre Sergio Antonio Alvarez Aleman, with whom Montoya “is a good friend,” explained Father Friedrichsen, now the pastor at St. Mary Parish in Storm Lake and Sacred Heart Parish in Early.

“Darwin has been a friend,” explained Father Friedrichsen, “and so many who will not be as fortunate as Darwin was.”

Montoya told Father Friedrichsen in January 2016 that he was granted asylum. They ended up in a detention center in El Centro, Arizona, about 100 miles from the border.

Father Friedrichsen wrote letters and worked with lawyers to facilitate Montoya’s case while the young man went through several lawyers during his stay at the detention center and prayed the rosary every day.

He had numerous meetings and court dates that resulted in no decision or postponement. On the Jan. 22 court date, he had spent six months and five days in detention.

“That day, a miracle of God and Our Lady took place,” Montoya said, noting that when he was granted asylum, “even the lawyers were surprised.”

“I have to believe that Vice President Michael Pence’s condemnation of the Ortega government’s violence against the people who were exercising their freedom of speech, as well as violence against their freedom of religion, was very helpful in Darwin’s case,” Father Friedrichsen speculated.

With tears in his eyes, the priest said he was happy his friend was safe. He also said he was glad Montoya didn’t follow his advice and stay in Nicaragua.

“This ordeal has weighed heavily on my heart and mind, as do the ordeals of so many who will not be as fortunate as Darwin has been,” Father Friedrichsen said.

Montoya now calls Storm Lake home and is beginning the process of getting a Social Security number, a job and taking Spanish classes.

When asked about the biggest adjustment, Montoya, wearing blue jeans, a T-shirt, a black leather jacket and his miraculous medal, shrugged and said: “The cold.”

For more information, call 317-236-1585

Darwin Josué Mejía Montoya, left, recounts his journey in achieving asylum in the U.S. at St. Mary Church in Storm Lake, Iowa, as the pastor, Father Tim Friedrichsen, and translator Araceli Reyes, listen on March 13. Montoya left his country of Nicaragua to make the arduous trek north and seek asylum in the U.S. (CNS photo/Larry W. Nance for the Catholic Globe)
Holy Thursday procession in Franklin County

Children prepare for a Holy Thursday procession in this photo from St. Peter Parish in Franklin County on Apr. 11, 1895. St. Peter Parish was founded in 1838.

(Would you like to comment on or share information about this photo? Contact archdiocesan archivist Julie Motyka at 800-382-9836, ext. 1538; 317-236-1538, or by e-mail at jmotyka@archindy.org)

Lenten penance services are scheduled at archdiocesan parishes

Parishes throughout the archdiocese have scheduled communal penance services for Lent. Below is a list of services reported to The Criterion.

**Bloomington Deanery**
- April 17, 4-9 p.m. at St. Charles Borromeo, Bloomington and St. Paul Catholic Center, Bloomington, at St. Paul Catholic Center
- April 17, 4-9 p.m. at St. Francis and Clare of Assisi, Greenwood
- April 15, 7 p.m. at Our Lady of the Greenwood, Greenwood
- April 17, 4-9 p.m. at St. Paul Catholic Center, Bloomington, at St. Paul Catholic Center
- April 13, 9 a.m. at SS. Francis and Clare of Assisi, Greenwood
- April 15, 7 p.m. at Our Lady of the Greenwood, Greenwood

**Indianapolis South Deanery**
- April 13, 9 a.m. at St. Francis and Clare of Assisi, Greenwood
- April 15, 7 p.m. at Our Lady of the Greenwood, Greenwood
- April 17, 11 a.m. at St. Joseph, Rockville

**Indianapolis West Deanery**
- April 12, 7 p.m. at St. Paul the Apostle, Greencastle
- April 17, 11 a.m. at St. Joseph, Rockville

(An updated version of this list, along with other Lenten resources, can be found at www.archindy.org/lent.)

Family tradition: Carrying the cross on Jerusalem’s Via Dolorosa

Jerusalem (CNS)—For four decades, Mousa Kamar has taken his place at the head of the heavy wooden cross used during the Franciscan Good Friday procession on the Via Dolorosa.

Kamar, 55, can be seen every year at the front of the cross, the same position where his father used to carry the cross. His grandfather also helped carry the front of the cross. The scores of old black-and-white pictures, color photographs and magazine photos Kamar has collected and uploaded onto his Facebook page attest to the long-held family tradition.

“We do this not only because it is the tradition, but because we are religious and we truly believe in it,” said Kamar, looking over some of the photographs scattered on a coffee table as he sat in his mother’s living room in Jerusalem’s Old City, near the ninth station of the cross. “This is the home where he grew up and where his paternal grandmother was born.”

Mousa Kamar, front right, helps carry a large wooden cross during the Good Friday procession on the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem’s Old City on March 25, 2016. Mousa Kamar and his sons are continuing the tradition of his grandfather and father, carrying the cross on Good Friday. (CNS photo/Lara Hafny)

Jerusalem is directly about Jesus.”

The cross, though still large and heavy, is smaller than the one used generations ago, he said.

In the pushing and shoving of the procession, which sees local Catholics and pilgrims packing the cobblestone streets of the Old City as they make their way along the Via Dolorosa, Kamar said he is able to reflect on the significance of the moment and on the life of Jesus.

“When I am carrying the cross I remember Jesus, how he died for us and how he walked all this way by himself,” said Kamar. “We are 20 people carrying it, and carried by himself. Especially as we stop at each station and it is mentioned where he fell [or other detail], it makes me feel like I am following the footsteps of Jesus.”

Kamar’s parents had run a family grocery store near the eighth station of the cross, and Graciella Mathekah Kamar, today 83, recalled the pride she felt as she would stand in the doorway of their shop on Good Friday and watch as her husband carried the cross during the procession. Her husband, Kamar’s father, was killed during the 1967 war in which Israel took over control of Jerusalem from the Jordanians.

“After he was killed, I couldn’t watch the procession anymore. It was too painful,” she said.

Only when Kamar, at age 15, stepped in to fill his father’s place was she able to once again watch the procession, she said.

Kamar was 5 when his father was killed.

“Especially on Good Fridays, my mother would tell me about how my father carried the cross and that one day I would carry it, too,” he said. “The first time I carried it I couldn’t sleep the night before; I was so excited about carrying the cross and filling that space my father had had.”

Several years ago, Kamar’s oldest son, Youssef, 20, also joined the group of men carrying the cross, but during the procession, he steps aside to let others take their turn. More recently, Kamar’s youngest son, Ramaz, 15, began taking part in the carrying of the cross. One of the pictures shows a 13-year-old Ramaz at the end of the cross, his head barely peeping over the top of the cross among the crowd of men surrounding it. With his dark curly hair and full cheeks he looks just like his father at that age.

“It was very exciting to be able to carry the cross,” said Youssef Kamar. “In the future I will continue the family tradition. Although this is a tradition, it also helps me feel closer to Jesus and what he went through before being crucified.

“It is also a burden and an honor to do this,” he added. “Since I was young, I heard stories about this family tradition and, since my father, and his father and his grandfather have done this, I think it is important to keep the tradition and to keep our religion alive.”

In preparation for the procession, Mousa Kamar spends Holy Week in prayer, visiting the Church of the Holy Sepulcher every day after work and participating in the liturgical ceremonies, including the traditional veneration of the pillar of Jesus’ Resurrection, the washing of the feet pilgrimage to the Cenacle, and holy hour on Holy Thursday at Gethsemane.

He said he uses the time to meditate and pray for Christian unity and a strengthening of Christian religious identity, which he feels is being lost.

“All week I am praying, preparing to carry the cross, linking how Jesus suffered for us to the Palestinian situation. He fought for us, sacrificed himself for us but, unfortunately, we are losing our Christianity. I always pray for that, that people will return to the foundations of Christianity,” he said, noting that Christians in the Middle East are living a difficult reality with close to 50 percent of the Christian population having emigrated.

“We love Jesus and we feel we are a part of Jesus. Every corner, every stone in Jerusalem is directly about Jesus.”