Bells toll, sharing the piercing news of the first federal execution in 17 years

By Natalie Hoefer

TERRE HAUTE—On the grounds of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods near Terre Haute, news of the execution pierced the morning quiet on July 14.

The bells of the Church of the Immaculate Conception toll after any execution in the nation, explained Providence Sister Paula Daniano. But that morning, “for the first time in 17 years,” she said, “a sister tolled the bells following [a] federal execution.”

The bells announced the 8:07 a.m. death of Daniel Lewis Lee. Less than 24 hours before, a temporary stay of all scheduled federal executions was announced by the U.S. District Court of the District of Columbia due to evidence that the drug to be administered causes severe pain.

The decision was immediately appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court by the federal Department of Justice. At 2 a.m. on July 14, the Supreme Court overturned the ruling. Lee was executed and pronounced dead six hours later, according to a Reuters report.

In sharing her reaction with the Criterion, Sister Paula said the sisters “believe that forgiveness is vital to faith. We are called to forgive.”

The court reaffirmed the right of religious schools to be free from governmental intrusion in employment decisions, and ruled that the administration of President Donald J. Trump was free to give employers the ability to opt out of providing contraceptive, abortifacient and sterilization coverage in their health plans.

The 7-2 schools ruling came in a combination of two cases: St. James School v. Bief and Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berrum, both involving schools in the Los Angeles Archdiocese.

The 7-2 health care plan ruling likewise came in a combination of two cases: Little Sisters of the Poor Saints Peter and Paul Home v. Pennsylvania and Trump v. Pennsylvania. It involved the order of women religious who care for the elderly poor.

The schools ruling, written by Justice Samuel Alito, said: “What matters, at bottom, is what an employee does,” noting that, even though the elementary school teachers “were not given the title of ‘minister,’” they still had been hired to help form the faith of the students in religious schools.

“The religious education and formation of students is the very reason for the existence of most private religious schools, and therefore the selection and supervision of the teachers upon whom the schools rely to do this work lie at the core of their mission,” Alito wrote.

Dissenting votes were by Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sonia Sotomayor.

A graduation surprise: $1,000 gifts for the ‘fortunate few’

By John Shaughnessy

Curt Gardner wanted to add a touch of drama before the graduating seniors learned which of their classmates would receive a special $1,000 graduation gift.

When the revelation came, it stunned the graduates—and nearly everyone else at the graduation ceremony of Father Michael Shawe Memorial Jr./Sr. High School in Madison on June 21.

As the school’s principal, Gardner told the 19 graduates that an anonymous group of Shawe alumni wanted to give a “fortunate few” of them the special gift—as a sign of their support for the senior class that was impacted in so many ways by the coronavirus during their final months of high school.

“I would like each graduate to remove the envelope that is currently taped under your seat,” Gardner instructed the members of the Class of 2022.

As the students unraveled their envelopes, Jason Minnick, a senior at Father Michael Shawe Memorial Jr./Sr. High School in Madison, opened an envelope to see if he is one of the “fortunate few” of his graduating class to receive a $1,000 gift from an anonymous alumni group.

Court sides with Catholic schools in discrimination suit, rules in favor of Little Sisters in employer exemption

WASHINGTON (CNS)—Two significant religious liberty victories occurred at the U.S. Supreme Court on July 8.

On that day, the court reaffirmed the right of religious schools to be free from governmental intrusion in employment decisions, and ruled that the administration of President Donald J. Trump was free to give employers the ability to opt out of providing contraceptive, abortifacient and sterilization coverage in their health plans.

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“The religious education and formation of students is the very reason for the existence of most private religious schools, and therefore the selection and supervision of the teachers upon whom the schools rely to do this work lie at the core of their mission,” Alito wrote.

Dissenting votes were by Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sonia Sotomayor.
Miami Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski, chairman of the Committee for Religious Liberty of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), and Bishop Michael C. Barber of Oakland, Calif., chairman of the bishops’ Committee on Catholic Education, issued a statement regarding the schools decision.

“Education is a central aspect of the Church’s mission,” the bishops said. “As institutions carrying out a ministry of the Church, Catholic schools have a right, recognized by the Constitution, to select people who will perform ministry. The government has no authority to second-guess those ministerial decisions.”

The Archdiocese of Indianapolis also issued a statement on the ruling, saying，“We welcome the Supreme Court’s decision recognizing that Catholic schools must be free to make decisions about those entrusted to educate and form students in the Catholic faith. Catholic educators play a vital role in guiding their students, by word and deed, and passing on the faith to future generations.”

The schools case examined if courts can hear employment discrimination claims brought by teachers at Catholic elementary schools. It involved California Catholic school teachers who claimed they had been victims of anti-discrimination and the schools that fired them that they were exempt from anti-discrimination laws due to ministerial exception spelled out in a previous Supreme Court case about a fired teacher at a Lutheran school.

At St. James School in Torrance, Calif., former fifth-grade teacher Kristen Becket said she was fired after informing school administrators that she had breast cancer and would have to take time off for medical and chemotherapy. She sued under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Biel died last summer, but her husband is seeking damages. Becket, a nonprofit religious legal firm representing the schools, said that in 2015, the school chose not to renew her Biel’s one-year contract based on classroom performance.

The case of Guadalupe School in Hermosa Beach, Calif., did not renew the contract in 2013 for Agnes Morrissey-Bern, who had taught both fifth and sixth grades since 1999, saying she had a problem keeping order in her classroom and meeting expectations under a new reading program. Morrissey-Bern sued, alleging age bias under the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967.

In both cases, federal district courts ruled in favor of the schools, citing ministerial exceptions that outline panels of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit reversed these decisions. The 2012 decision these schools were on is Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, where a teacher at a Lutheran school in Michigan said she was fired for partaking in an employment discrimination claim based on a disability. In that ruling, the court said the ministerial exception to anti-discrimination laws meant that religious organizations couldn’t be sued for firing an employee classified as a minister.

Richard Garnett, law professor at the University of Notre Dame Law School and director of the university’s Program on Church, State and Society, said at the time of the oral arguments that the cases had been giving “guitar playing” teachers not giving theology instruction and were not ordained clergy, “their role is, and is understood as, a ministerial one, and secular courts are not in a good position to second-guess or override religious institutions’ decisions about their ministerial employees’ role.”

He also said the cases were not, “as a holding case under Hosanna-Tabor, and I have a supposed right of churches to ‘ignore’ civil-rights laws. Quite the contrary. These cases are about protecting the civil and constitutional rights of religious institutions to decide religious questions for themselves.”

In a tweet after the decision was announced, Garnett said it was no surprise that the court reversed them “in Hosanna-Tabor decision and the religious-freedom rights of schools and reverses the Ninth Circuit’s ruling of that decision.”

The health plan decision, written by Justice Clarence Thomas, said the administration had “the authority to set policies to actuate their interpretation of RFRA, which says that the government has the burden of proving that, once again, the Supreme Court has protected our work without violating our conscience.”

“Thomas, describing the work of the Little Sisters of the Poor and their involvement in this case, wrote: “For over 150 years, the Little Sisters have engaged in faithful service and sacrifice, motivated by a religious calling to surrender all for the sake of his work, without violating their sincerely held religious beliefs.”

Mothor Lorraine Maigue, the official U.S. provinces said, the Little Sisters of the Poor were “overjoyed that, once again, the Supreme Court has protected our right to serve the elderly without violating our faith. Our life’s work and great joy is serving the elderly poor, and we are so grateful that the contraceptive mandate will no longer steal our attention from our calling.”

A recap of the sisters’ involvement in this case goes back to 2013 when religious groups and houses of worship were granted a religious exemption by the Supreme Court from the government’s mandate to include contraceptive, abortifacient and sterilization coverage in their employee health plans.

Three years later, religious nonprofit groups challenged the requirement to comply with the mandate and the court sent the cases back to the lower courts with instructions for the federal government to actually try to work out an agreeable solution.

Then in 2017, religious groups were given further protection from the mandate through an executive order issued by President Trump requiring the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to write a comprehensive exemption to benefit religious ministries, including the Little Sisters of the Poor, from the contraceptive, abortifacient and sterilization mandate.

Biect this exemption in 2018, but several states challenged it, including California, Pennsylvania and New Jersey, saying HHS did not have the power to give this exemption.

Pennsylvania and New Jersey obtained a nationwide injunction against the rules protecting religious objectors from the contraceptive mandate; that injunction was then upheld by the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, based in Philadelphia. In one of the two consolidated cases, TRAFA (The Religious Freedom Association argued that the exceptions to the mandate for religious groups were authorized by the health care law and required by the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act, known as RFRA.

Biect Pennsylvania and New Jersey said the administration lacked statutory authority to issue such regulations and the federal government did not follow proper administrative procedures.

The second case examines whether the Little Sisters of the Poor had the standing to appeal the 3rd Circuit ruling since a separate court order had already allowed them to refuse to provide contraceptive, abortifacient and sterilization coverage in their employee health plans.

The USCCB filed a friend-of-the-court brief siding with the Little Sisters of the Poor, which stressed that the court needs to stick to the Supreme Court’s interpretation of RFRA, which says “governments should not substantially burden religious exercise without compelling justification.”
Fire ravages historic mission, community vows to rebuild

LOS ANGELES (CNS)—The fire that ravaged Mission San Gabriel Arcangel Church in the predawn hours of July 11 left behind a haunting scene.

In a matter of minutes, the mission’s 230-year-old roof was nearly gone. The sunlight pouring down through the holes revealed the charred planks that had crashed down on the church’s pews. The altar, along with the mission’s bell tower and museum, were spared, but the thick adobe walls were blackened.

As bad as the damage is, it could have been worse. Because the church had been undergoing renovations, much of the artwork in the sanctuary, including historic paintings and other devotional artifacts, had been removed prior to the fire.

But for Anthony Morales, tribal chief of the San Gabrieleno Mission Indians and a member of San Gabriel, the damage was more than material.

“These are my roots,” said Morales, holding back tears as he surveyed the scene just hours after the fire had been contained.

“This is my church. All my ancestors are buried on these grounds, and this is the church that my thousand of my ancestors are buried in the cemetery next door. Six statues of St. Junipero, like those and statues of figures from U.S. history, included attacks on public monuments broken out across the country, protests that massed, waves of anti-racism protests had begun to give his life as a ransom for many.”

In late June, statues to the California missionary were toppled in San Francisco and in Los Angeles, and the weekend before the fire, a long-standing St. Junipero statue outside the state Capitol in Sacramento was felled.

The July 11 blaze at San Gabriel was part of a weekend that saw churches vandalized in other parts of the country. Statues of Mary were damaged in Queens, N.Y., and in Boston. In Ocala, Fla., a man drove a minivan into a Catholic church before pouring gasoline in the foyer and setting fire to the building.

While there was no immediate word on the cause of the fire, investigators from a regional task force and from the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives spent the afternoon of July 11 investigating.

Local Catholics who showed up at the mission the next day to pray were suspicious. The timing of the fire—and the broader attacks on St. Junipero statues and other church properties—was too much of a coincidence for them.

Resilience was the theme that morning inside the mission’s Chapel of the Annunciation, where the mission’s pastor, Clarient Father John Molyneux, made a bold pledge to Archbishop Jose H. Gomez of Los Angeles:

“You will be back to celebrate our 250th anniversary in a rebuilt church,” Father Molyneux promised the archbishop at the start of Mass.

“This fire changes nothing,” the archbishop said in his homily. “Mission San Gabriel will always be the spiritual heart of the Church in Los Angeles, the place from which the Gospel still goes forth.”

(The Archdiocese of Los Angeles has created the San Gabriel Mission Restoration Fund: https://lacatholics.org/restoration) †
Sight Unseen/Brandon A. Evans
More important than knowledge

When I was in high school, my science classroom had a poster of Albert Einstein with a short and powerful quote—although one that seemed a bit odd for a place of learning:

It was something published in a 1929 issue of The Saturday Evening Post at the peak in Einstein’s life that he had come up with the General Theory of Relativity, become a scientific celebrity and won the Nobel Prize in Physics.

It was accomplishments that take a great deal of knowledge, which he certainly had in abundance, and not just any knowledge, but the type that befuddles many of us: calculus, physics, geometry.

In our age, such things are highly valued, and most certainly necessary as the rain fuel for expanding our technological grasp over the world we inhabit.

But Einstein saw something more that there is a spark required for knowledge to be useful; there is a shining jewel beyond the reach of the merely intellectually that can be obtained without any academic degree at all.

His simple quote is a note of inspiration spoken to a world of progress and learning:

“Imagination is more important than knowledge.”

It seems at first like an all-too-smart bit of arrogance from a person already gifted with that kind. But he was quite serious. To come up with the idea of relativity took looking at things in a new way. It meant imagining beyond the entire framework of Newtonian physics to a cosmos wherein matter could become energy, and gravity could bend light and velocity could alter time.

And Einstein proved it on paper, it took an absolutely brilliant stroke of imagination on the part of another researcher to complete the idea of proving once and for all by observing the stars just on the edge of a solar eclipse.

When looking at the real history of the world, at the actual levers of power that create change, it is not a fact but with an idea—be it a good idea or a bad one. Histories begin with stories.

Imagination is the conduit by which our stories flow, by which we share the beauty of the world with one another, and its horrors. The power of sub-creation is in strength, nor money, nor influence, nor even learning; its nascent seed is in each of us—the span that won’t sit at the center of our consciousness.

But by nature we are creative and by our very nature, we bring the light which illumines our paths, which gives shape to the formless. Our songs, our poems, our works of art; all require patience and knowledge and practice and skill, but they require imagination more.

Imagination, even more boldly put, is the pathway God uses to bring wisdom to the simple. It is a focusing lens that inverts our perception of who are actually the greatest among us.

As if proving the point, a recent article in a Catholic publication mentioned that the bulk of St. Thérèse of Lisieux’s education came from two books: the Bible and The Institution of Christ.

Two books. And yet, in her remarkably short life and having proved to be a scant amount of writing, she gave to Christianity such a treasure through her “Little Way” that she has the power to pretty much not only a saint, but a doctor of the Church.

A simple girl, directed at times by her peers and a mischievous glint always barely hidden in her smile, was given a title of authority rarer than cardinal, or pope, or even pope; one of only 36 people to have walked the Earth in the 2,000 years since Christ did to earn it. St. Thérèse of Lisieux’s story makes his admonition to the prestigious and clever and learned of each generation; a reminder the Spirit blows where it wills, and you never know upon whose head the invisible crown of wisdom will come to lie.

For God is the master of imagination, and the keeper of the keys of the invisible doors through which light comes into each mind—light which allows the unseen to be seen and the unimagined to become real.

(Sight Unseen is an occasional column that explores God and the world. Brandon A. Evans is the online editor and graphic designer of TheCriterion.com and executive editor of St. Susanna Parish in Plainfield.)

Letters to the Editor

Our faith calls us to stand up for victims of injustice, racism

Our Christian faith calls us to stand up for those who suffer injustice. Our Christian faith also calls us to stand up for those who are victims of racism.

Often we can make excuses in order to avoid issues of justice because such action is not popular. Jesus stood up for people who were ignored, not the “right” kind. He stood up for sinners, and he was crucified for this.

We, too, know that by being Christ’s followers and working for those who are victims of racism, sexism, unfair practices, violence, we can also, as Jesus, be put on a cross.

Ron Stegan

Guilford

Chrim Mass reminds us of our ‘unity with God and our neighbours’

The pastoral message from our shepherd, Archbishop Charles C. Thompson, at the June 29 Chrism Mass at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis was the core of our prayer and mission: “unity with God and our neighbors.”

This unity is exemplified in the existential within our Church, which is an immediate presence in acts of unity amid diversity. Daily we celebrate this divine reality through grace.

There are a presence of life and love to the world. We celebrate every day the mystical communion of Christ in the Eucharist.

By solidarity, we confront and make an effort to convert and transform the adversities within our human condition. At the heart of a Church, instituted by Christ, desire him with love to bring fully to his creation his divine grace and presence.

Gary Taylor

Milan
Anhelar el reino de Dios en los tiempos difíciles de hoy en día

Todos somos impacientes; queremos que el reino de Dios gobierne como lo prometió Jesús. Por fuerza, cuando uno es impaciente, no puede dejarse guiar por la gracia de Dios, porque está cegado por su impaciencia. Jesús nos dice que si queremos que el reino de Dios gobierne, tenemos que ser pacientes y esperar a que Él actúe. "Porque puedes usar de tu poder en el momento actual. Debes esperar a que el Espíritu Santo te guíe" (Rom 8:26-27).

En la segunda lectura, St. Paul nos dice que "el Espíritu nos ayuda en nuestras debilidades; porque no sabemos orar como debiéramos, pero el Espíritu mismo intercede por nosotros con sus lamentos inefables" (Rom 8:26). Nuestra esperanza se basa en la misericordia de Dios y en la compasión de Dios por los pecadores como nosotros.

En estos tiempos difíciles, no debemos perder la esperanza. El Reino de Dios viene, de hecho, ya está aquí en forma de una semilla que espera ser sembrada, cultivada y cosechada por nosotros. No nos atrevamos a ceder a la oscuridad y la desesperación, pero tampoco podemos darnos el lujo de dejar las cosas por sentado. Como discípulos misioneros de Jesús, estamos llamados a ser mujeres y hombres de esperanza que trabajamos incansablemente por la paz a través de la justicia y la misericordia, los sellos distintivos del reino de Dios entre nosotros.

"El reino de los cielos es como un gran sembrador que un hombre sembró en su campo. Aunque es la más pequeña de todas las semillas, cuando crece es la más grande de todas las hortalizas y se convierte en árbol, de manera que aves y anidan en él. Un personaje como Jesús nos advierte que no seamos impacientes; queremos que el reino de Dios gobierne como lo prometió Jesús. Por fuerza, cuando uno es impaciente, no puede dejarse guiar por la gracia de Dios, porque está cegado por su impaciencia. Jesús nos dice que si queremos que el reino de Dios gobierne, tenemos que ser pacientes y esperar a que Él actúe. "Porque puedes usar de tu poder en el momento actual. Debes esperar a que el Espíritu Santo te guíe" (Rom 8:26-27).

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VIPs

Announcements for couples celebrating 50, 55, 60, 65, 70 or more years of marriage are accepted. Go to bit.ly/2M4MQm or call 317-236-1585.

Ronald and Barbara (Meyer) Cooper, members of St. Michael Parish in Brookville, celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on July 2. The couple was married in St. Michael Church in Brookville on July 2, 1960. They have four children: Kathy Orschell, Heidi Reece, Phil and Scott Cooper. The couple also has 10 grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren.

Ralph and Beverly (Cross) Hahn, members of St. Mary Parish in Greensburg, celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on July 9. The couple was married in Holy Family Church in Richmond (now a campus of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish) on July 9, 1960. They have four children: Karla Billieu, Robin, Michael and the late Stephen Hahn. The couple also has seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Stephen and Nancy (Dale) Beyer, members of St. Mary Parish in Rushville, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on June 13. The couple was married in St. Vincent de Paul Church in Shelby County, on June 13, 1970. They have three children: Brian, Joe and Scott Beyer. The couple also has eight grandchildren.

Ted and Barbara (Thompson) Brindle, members of St. Simon the Apostle Parish in Indianapolis, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on June 6. The couple was married in St. Peter Church in Fort Wayne, Ind. (Fort Wayne-South Bend Diocese), on June 6, 1970. They have two children: Douglas and Matthew Brindle. The couple also has three grandchildren.

Peter and Pam (Pflumm) Chermansky, members of St. Simon the Apostle Parish in Indianapolis, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on June 20. The couple was married in Holy Name of Jesus Church in Beech Grove on June 20, 1970. They have two children: Melanie Brown and Brett Chermansky. The couple also has two grandchildren.

Larry and Peggy (Cissell) Richards, members of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in New Albany, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on June 27. The couple was married in St. Agnes Church in Louisville, Ky., on June 27, 1970. They have four children: Ellen Woods, Jack, Larry and Nathan Richards. The couple also has eight grandchildren.

Paul and Suzanne (Lassuy) Whalen, members of St. Malachy Parish in Brownsburg, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on June 27. The couple was married in St. Mark the Evangelist Church in Indianapolis on June 27, 1970. They have four children: Theresa Harvey, Colleen Sicuso, Erin and P.J. Whalen. The couple also has nine grandchildren.

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2020. “I want you to open that envelope very carefully. Then if you find a $1,000 check in your envelope, you are a winner and one of the ‘fortunate few.’ And I want you to stand and remain standing, so that your family and friends can see your good fortune.”

As the students reached under their seats and opened their envelopes, a few leaped to their feet quickly, their smiles of surprise and delight showing their good fortune. Then others stood, holding their checks high. And when everyone had finished opening their envelopes, they realized that each of them had received $1,000 from the alumni group.

As the surprise and smiles spread throughout the school’s gym, Gardner told the graduates that they are now part of the “fortunate few” to become alumni of Shawe. She also encouraged the graduates to remember this gift as they go forward in their lives.

“In the future, find ways to bring this same happiness to others,” the principal said. “Be charitable.”

“It was like a ‘wow’ moment”

As one of the 19 graduates in this year’s class at Shawe, Nate Pawlak says it’s a moment he will never forget.

“My classmates and I have talked about it a lot since then. I remember thinking initially that this is awesome that a few of us would be getting it. But I thought. ‘There’s no way this is going to happen for me.’ All the people I’ve been talking to had the same feeling.

“When we all started standing up, I thought, ‘This just makes sense.’ This is awesome that we all got it.”

Nate says his class especially appreciates the alumni group recognizing how hard it was for them to lose so much of the home stretch of their senior year, a time usually marked with a number of senior-related traditions.

“The thing I missed the most was the normalcy—missing all the people I would see on a day-to-day basis,” says Nate, the class valedictorian, student council president, and a pitcher on the varsity baseball team.

“I missed going to baseball practice and seeing the teammates and the coaches. I missed the teachers and my classmates. I finished it in the classroom with them.”

He says that feeling reflects the closeness of this year’s class of graduates. Of whom will attend college while the other has enlisted in the U.S. Navy.

“Shawe, it means family,” Nate says. “Being such a tiny school, your entire class becomes your family. You learn things about them you didn’t know before, and you remember them by more than just a few hours a day if you do sports and other extracurriculars. You build that relationship, that bond that goes past friendship or an acquaintance. It’s family.”

That feeling is shared by Ambar Materano-Sanchez, who arrived at the school 2 1/2 years ago after her family moved from Venezuela to Madison. Every time she arrived, she found a starting point of very limited English when she came to Shawe, she ended up as the class salutatorian.

“I feel love for Shawe because they helped me with everything,” Ambar says. “I feel the support my teachers and classmates gave me. When I started at Shawe, I didn’t know much English, I felt welcome. It was just like a family, and it was like I was a part of that family.”

Her voice also filled with joy in talking about the gift from the alumni group.

“It was really cool,” says Ambar, who will use the gift to help begin her education in nursing. “When everyone got it, it was a big surprise for everyone.”

Beyond the special features of the graduation ceremony, Nate also praised the school’s administrators for “the ton of extra effort they did to make the seniors feel special” as their time in high school came to an end.

He mentioned the yard signs the administrators delivered to each of their homes, signs marked with their name and the news of their graduation from Shawe.

“They also had a parade for us,” he says. “We got in our cars and drove past the school, and all the teachers and parents were cheering us on.”

“The administration had already done so much for us, and it was the icing on the cake that an alumni group would do this for us. It was like a ‘wow’ moment.”

The start of the surprise

As the president of Prince of Peace Schools in Madison, Phil Kahn was one of the few people at the graduation ceremony who wasn’t surprised by the $1,000 gifts to the graduates. Yet even though he knew it was coming, he still delighted by the generosity the alumni group showed.

The Supreme Court decision also affects federal inmates Dustin Lee Honken and Keith Dwayne Nelson, whose executions were previously set for July 17 and Aug. 28, respectively.

The July 15 scheduled execution of Wesley Ira Purkey was already temporarily stayed through a separate case.

Deacon Steve McWilliams, who has ministered to death-row inmates at the FCC for nearly 10 years, shared his reaction to the news in an early morning call with The Criterion.

“Just an amazed that we as a nation continue to use such draconian methods of punishment,” he said.

“We’re so intent on revenge that we seem to lose sight of what justice is about. We only have one true judge, and all of us will face that judge.”

“It’s just such a very sad, sad, state of affairs,” he said.

“This is not going to bring closure to anyone. All it does is reopen the wounds and prove that we have no respect for justice and, certainly not about mercy.”

‘Every person can change their lives’

Delayed, overturned, appealed, overruled, temporarily delayed, appealed, overturned. Like a rapid-fire legal tennis match, the decisions on two cases argued in the courts between July 10 and 14.

At 10 a.m. July 13, a press conference hosted by Death Penalty Action and Terre Haute Death Penalty Resistance was underway across the street from the FCC, where federal executions take place.

At that time, Lee’s 4 p.m. execution was in question pending a U.S. Supreme Court ruling on a denied appeal for a delay until travel was safer from the risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus.

About 25 minutes into the press conference was interrupted by news of the D.C. federal district court’s ruling to temporarily stay all federal executions.

Cheered and lamented the rescheduled death penalty opponents present at the press conference.

Speaking at the event on behalf of the Sisters of Providence, Sister Paula said her congregation was “well-aware of the heinous crimes of those now on death row.

But they are also people who deserve love, mercy and justice,” she added. “We don’t have to love the actions, but we have to love the people—they’s the Gospel message. To do anything less would be to deny the Gospel.”

...Evanston’s lay association Social Justice Society for Charity for Compassion.

“I visit a man on death row here in Terre Haute,” she said. “From all I know of the criminal justice system, and as I’ve walked these halls in the penitentiary, I’m here to say that many of these people are good people. And all we need to do is give them a chance.”

“It’s not only the prisoners about whom the Church is concerned when it comes to execution, according to Archbishop Charles C. Thompson. He explained why in a recent statement regarding the rescheduled executions.

“The underlying Catholic teaching on [the death penalty] is grave concern for the care of souls of all involved—including the judge, jury, prison personnel, families of these officials and society itself,” he said.

“Taking the life of any human being, even one who is guilty of grave crimes against humanity, weighs on the conscience of both individuals and society as a whole.”

Karen Burkhart says. The member of St. Susanna Parish in Plainfield spoke at the press conference through her role as the Indiana death penalty abolition coordinator for Amnesty International USA.

But she had other reasons for being present.

“I’m here because I want to protest the death penalty, but also because I feel just awful that people are being killed in my name,” Burkhart told The Criterion.

“America is supposed to be one of the best countries in the world, and we’re doing things that most countries have abolished. … It’s just an awful example to kill people who kill people, to show that killing people is wrong.”

(For information and updates on federal and state executions, go to catholics mobilizing.org. For information on local efforts to oppose the death penalty, go to Terre Haute Death Penalty Resistance’s Facebook page at www.facebook.com/TerreHautedn. To sign petitions opposing the death penalty and to learn about national efforts for the abolition of the death penalty, go to deathpenaltyaction.org.)
For the Journal/Effe Caldarola

Reflecting on the ‘Holy Saturday’ we are experiencing

It was the Friday before the July Fourth holiday, and as I cleared the dinner dishes I heard to my husband, “It’s seemed like Saturday all day today.”

“Every day is Saturday,” he jokingly replied as he filled the dishwasher.

Welcome to the summer of COVID-19. The days blur into one another. Even when you get home each day, Saturday may still have meaning. But if you are working from home, the days blur.

Like millions of Americans, I missed the coffee dates, the committee meetings, dinner parties, restaurants, date nights in movie theaters, volunteer activities, pilgrimages to the local library, Mass in person at my parish, playing music on a scheduled trip to Europe. I have not flown to see my kids. My mother-in-law died, and was cremated without our presence. Her memorial service awaits a time when we can gather again.

After dinner, sitting on the front porch on not-Saturday, I thought about one of the most significant days of the year, Holy Saturday.

Maybe you should sit in Holy Saturday for a while and feel the reality of the Holy Saturday we are experiencing as a nation. I’ve heard it said we live much of our lives in a Holy Saturday frame of mind. Between the horror of Good Friday and the glory of Easter, that day was lived in questions. It encompassed better disappointment, sorrow, the brutal dawning of hope, exhaustion.

For Christ’s disciples on Holy Saturday, optimism was absent. Friends scattered and mourning. They hiked to Emmaus to get away, or like Thomas, they were too busy to even talk about it. Maybe we’ve reached our COVID Holy Saturday moment.

It was almost easier in the beginning, when we all accepted the shutdown, important for our health and safety. But now the rules seemed to apply to everyone, when we hoped it would end quickly.

Shut downs are up to states, sometimes to cities. The governor of South Dakota tells people at the Mount Rushmore ceremony to disregard social distancing: the Texas governor pleads with his citizens to wear masks. And our numbers, among the worst in the world, frighten us.

Knowing that this pandemic will drag on, we adjust. Our parishes reopen to reopen, but in restricted ways, older folks warned away.

Holy Saturday reminds us this too shall pass. We’re in a limbo world; we neither choose, but we are accepted as Christians. We accept this may be a nadir for our nation right now, a dreary Holy Saturday but one from which we will emerge stronger.

Unlike thosedisciples, who lost their hope, we have the joy of praising our faith: not yet, but of returning in one person has told me about the ease of watching Mass on TV. No dressing up. No crowds. No shame in getting up for water. Others have commented on the selection available to them on the Internet. If they wanted high Church with incense and candles, they could choose it. It didn’t feel like I had been away three months. In an abnormal year, it still felt normal.

For Christ’s disciples on Holy Saturday, optimism was absent. We have the joy of placing our faith and hope in the risen Christ.

(Effe Caldarola writes for Catholic News Service.)

Guest Column/Richard Etienne

Find quiet moments in your life to listen to God speaking to you

I have a memory of my mother saying, sometimes quite forcefully, “Did you hear me?”

I was recently reflecting on a person’s need to be heard, and it made me wonder if we feel that you are being heard and understood? How many times have we had a basic need to be listened to and, maybe more importantly, to feel that the message they are trying to communicate is being received correctly?

But I have noticed there is a good deal of frustration when a person has a need to share something, and it becomes apparent that no one is receiving—much less comprehending—the message being sent. For example, have you ever started to explain something or started to answer someone’s question only to realize they are not listening or waiting for your response? I find this upsetting because it conveys the message that, in some way, I am not there. My presence is irrelevant or not important, or something more important has captured their attention.

Do we spend so much time talking on our cell phones? Is it a human need to be heard by another and validated as personhood? In Psalm 62:2, we hear “O Shepherd of Israel, listen to my prayer.”

There was a video a few years ago that went viral on the Internet where a young boy repeatedly asks to be heard.

This makes me wonder if God has a similar need to be heard as well. I am reminded of the Israelites who rebelled away, or like Thomas, they coupled their sorrow with doubt.

“Every day is Saturday,” he jokingly replied as he filled the dishwasher.

Welcome to the summer of COVID-19. The days blur into one another. Even when you get home each day, Saturday may still have meaning. But if you are working from home, the days blur.

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Maybe you should sit in Holy Saturday for a while and feel the reality of the Holy Saturday we are experiencing as a nation. I’ve heard it said we live much of our lives in a Holy Saturday frame of mind. Between the horror of Good Friday and the glory of Easter, that day was lived in questions. It encompassed better
The Sunday Readings
Sunday, July 19, 2020

• Wisdom 12:13, 16-19
• Romans 8:26-27
• Matthew 13:24-43

The Book of Wisdom provides the first reading for Mass this weekend. Wisdom is the name not only of this book of the Old Testament, but of an entire set of writings. Collectively, the purpose is to convey in human language, and for situations in human life, the wisdom that comes only from God. Always used as a backdrop in reading the Wisdom literature, or in reading any Scripture for that matter, is the admission that humans necessarily are limited. We cannot understand everything. We cannot see everything. Even what we see at times, and perhaps more often than not, is distorted and blurred. We need God. We simply cannot survive without divine wisdom. God offers this wisdom in the revealed Scriptures. This weekend’s reading salutes God, the Almighty, the perfect, and the perfectly just and all-knowing. The reading is highly poetic and lyrical, almost as if it were a hymn. Marvelous for us, this supreme, perfect God, is His offer of himself despite our limitations. We have nothing to desire or to fear if we listen to God, the source of all good. We have nothing to desire or to fear if we listen to God, the source of all good. We have nothing to desire or to fear if we listen to God, the source of all good. We have nothing to desire or to fear if we listen to God, the source of all good. We have nothing to desire or to fear if we listen to God, the source of all good.

Stressed here are our weaknesses and our limitations. Even our prayers are very brief. We cannot see everything. Even what we see at times, and perhaps more often than not, is distorted and blurred. Even what we see at times, and perhaps more often than not, is distorted and blurred. Even what we see at times, and perhaps more often than not, is distorted and blurred. Even what we see at times, and perhaps more often than not, is distorted and blurred. Even what we see at times, and perhaps more often than not, is distorted and blurred. Even what we see at times, and perhaps more often than not, is distorted and blurred. Even what we see at times, and perhaps more often than not, is distorted and blurred. Even what we see at times, and perhaps more often than not, is distorted and blurred. Even what we see at times, and perhaps more often than not, is distorted and blurred.

In the end, God will right all wrongs. Justice will prevail. In the meantime, it can become a great tree.

Reflection
The first step in learning about Christianity is to accept the Church’s doctrine of original sin and its effects on all people. God created everyone, vesting free will in each. Some use this will to be loyal to God; others choose disloyalty. The devil tempts us to sin. So, in God’s creation, people are saints and sinners, blossoming plants or weeds. The devil’s seeds produce weeds.

In the end, God will right all wrongs. Justice will prevail. In the meantime, it can become a great tree.

Parable of the mustard seed, which is tiny. Although only a seed, this insignificant particle has the potential of life and growth. In time, it can become a great tree.

Finally, Jesus gave the Apostles a special and much more detailed lesson. He prepared them to carry the Gospel to the world.

Question Corner
Fr. Kenneth Doyle

Catechism now universally opposes the use of capital punishment

Q
My home state recently made national news with the decision to go forward with the executions of several inmates on death row. As a Catholic, I do not understand the idea of returning death for death, and I see executions as being more about revenge than any kind of justice. Surely life in prison would suffice, and perhaps the inmate might be rehabilitated at some point and even ask forgiveness from the victim’s family. As Catholics, I believe that we are called to more than this—called to advocate for peace, love and life. Can you comment?

A
You make the case against the death penalty with cogency and eloquence. I agree with you completely—and more important, Pope Francis does, too. In fact, in August 2018, the pope directed the wording of the Catechism of the Catholic Church be changed to reflect the fact that, in the Church’s view, the death penalty is now no longer admissible under any circumstances.

Previous to that, the catechism did not exclude use of the death penalty in “very rare, if not practically nonexistent” cases (#2267). That earlier text said this: “Assuming that the guilty party’s identity and responsibility have been fully determined, the traditional teaching of the Church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty, if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggression.”

But in the new wording, at Pope Francis’ direction, the catechism now universally opposes the use of capital punishment. Explaining the change, the new text states: “Today, however, there is an increasing awareness that the dignity of the person is not lost even after the commission of very serious crimes. In addition, a new understanding has emerged of the significance of penal sanctions imposed by the state. Lastly, more positive systems of detention have been developed, which ensure the due protection of citizens but, at the same time, do not definitively deprive the guilty of the possibility of redemption” (#2267).

Q
We are blessed to have a seminarian assigned to our parish for the summer to assist and to learn. He is not yet an ordained priest, yet he wears the Roman collar at Mass and at meetings. This has led to some confusion, with many parishioners addressing him as “Father.” Is it appropriate for him to be wearing the collar? (New York)

A
So the question is: When, in the course of his study, is it permissible for a Catholic seminarian to begin to wear clerical garb, including a Roman collar? And the answer—perhaps unfortunately—is this: There is no universal norm. The practice varies from diocese to diocese and from seminary to seminary.

In my own time in the seminary, we didn’t wear the collar until our final year of study—the same year we were ordained as deacons. Until then, our “dress-up” clothes consisted of a black suit, white shirt and black tie. Today the practice is different, and seminarians seem to begin wearing the collar at an earlier point—in many cases, as they begin their studies in theology (the final four or five years before ordination to the priesthood). In some seminaries, the collar is worn even sooner, especially when the seminarian is engaged in a ministerial function, such as teaching religion or visiting a hospital. In the situation you mention, I don’t see it as a major problem, since some parishioners call the young man “Father.” He should be acting like a priest anyway, getting used to the behavior people expect from one called to a religious vocation.

(Questions may be sent to Father Kenneth Doyle at askfatherdoyle@gmail.com or to Columbian Circle Dr., Albany, New York 12201.)
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 in our archdiocese are listed elsewhere in this issue; Order priests and religious sisters and brothers are listed elsewhere in this issue. Those are separate obituaries elsewhere in this issue. 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 in our archdiocese are listed elsewhere in this issue; Order priests and religious sisters and brothers are listed elsewhere in this issue. Those are separate obituaries elsewhere in this issue.

Rest in peace

COVID concern

A UNICEF worker helps an internally displaced Afghan girl put on a protective mask at a makeshift camp in Jalalabad in late June during the COVID-19 pandemic. (AP Photo/Rahmat Shinwari, File)
By Ann Margaret Lewis

USCCB’s 2020 Natural Family Planning Awareness Week slated for July 19-25

WASHINGTON (CNS)—Natural Family Planning (NFP) Awareness Week is slated for July 19-25 this year and has as its theme: “Live the truth and beauty of God’s plan for married love!”

The weeklong observance is a national educational campaign of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) that celebrates “God’s design for married love and the gift of life and to raise awareness of natural family planning methods,” said a USCCB news release.

The week annually highlights the July 25th anniversary of St. Paul VI’s 1968 encyclical, “Humanae Vitae” (“Of Human Life”), which affirmed Catholic teaching on natural family planning included in a set of virtues in order to be good parents. In that way, they can raise children that are “small followers.”

USCCB’s Natural Family Planning Program is part of the archdiocese’s Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth. Those who understand the Church’s teaching on natural family planning provide clear teaching about God’s plan for married love and the transmission of life. They are knowledgeable about the monitoring by a married couple of the parents of the Blessed Mother. On the other hand, the Church argues that you need to develop quite a bit more than $1 million each. It shows. The Mummy, North by Northwest, The Mummy). Who do you find the most recognizable actor of “paying it forward” as a gift to others, something that appeals to a Christian ethos. In other words, if you like the series, they encourage you to contribute to its further production by sharing it with a friend.

By doing this, Jenkins and his crew have made a complete end-run around the Hollywood system, ensuring his production remains free of tinsel-town marketing constraints. Brilliant. This is a great series to watch if you can. It is available in 50 languages—so far. The first eight episodes were shared on YouTube during Holy Week and Easter and, as of this printing, at least the first episode is still on its YouTube channel. Meanwhile, “The Chosen” app is available through the Apple Store and Google Play, and is consistently ranked in the top 50 entertainment apps on IOS and Android. You can also watch it online at VidAngel or TheChosenTV.

If you don’t have a computer or smart phone or access to the VidAngel streaming service, you can purchase the DVD through the TheChosen.tv website. It’s well worth the cost, and you’ll be contributing to future episodes by doing so. Binge away!

(Amm Margaret Lewis is executive assistant in the electronic Communications of the author of several books. E-mail her at alewis@ archindy.org)
Go forth to transform the world inspired by the Light of Christ!

Recovered from coronavirus, retired priest finds joy in community

By Sean Gallagher

As he approached Holy Week in early April, retired Father John Geis started to carry his own cross. The 84-year-old priest began experiencing symptoms of the coronavirus. He lives in Decatur County which, at the time, was a “hot spot” in the state for infections of the virus. He was soon tested for the virus in Batesville and learned on April 6, Monday of Holy Week, that he had tested positive. His condition was good enough, though, that he did not have to be hospitalized and was able to remain at home. He lived there with his brother Albert, who had also tested positive and later recovered.

He is the only archdiocesan priest thus far to have tested positive for the virus.

Throughout the solemn days leading up to Easter, Father Geis ran a fever. Breathing deeply was difficult. And he had little energy so accomplishing even the smallest tasks was a challenge.

“It really took the sap out of you,” he said.

Father Geis turned a corner, however, on April 12, Easter Sunday. That evening was the first time in about a week that Father Geis no longer had a fever.

“It was wonderful,” he recalled in a recent interview with The Criterion. “It gave me life. I felt that I was going to recover from this. I guess the Lord wanted me to get back to work.”

Work for the past nine years for him has included being a sacramental minister for St. Maurice Parish in Napoleon. As he suffered from the virus, Franciscan Sister Shirley Gerth, St. Maurice’s parish life coordinator, kept in touch with him.

“It was sad news,” she said. “Father John and I had been friends for a long time. I was very fearful that he might end up in a hospital on a ventilator. So, I was most grateful that that didn’t happen.”

Considering his age, previous health challenges he had experienced and that he was living in an area of the state especially hard hit by the virus at the time, the virus posed a real danger to Father Geis’ life. But he wasn’t worried.

“It didn’t bother me all that much,” he said. “I guess about [the possibility of dying], but I didn’t dwell on it. I just wanted to get better.”

Sister Shirley and her parishioners, as well as relatives of Father Geis, were determined to do all they could to help him. Meals were prepared for him and delivered to his home. He also received more than 125 cards expressing parishioners’ prayers and support.

“Maybe that’s why I got better,” Father Geis said with a laugh. “God got tired of hearing people praying for me.”

His own prayer was important to him as he suffered from the virus.

“Going through this brought me closer to God,” Father Geis said. “You depend on his grace, help and healing. God is good. He’s got things in control whether we think so or not.”

He celebrated Mass at home by himself, but the experience helped him recognize the importance of praying with parishioners.

“Celebrating with the community in prayer, is really, for me, the thing that I missed the most,” Father Geis said. “I said Mass here at home. And I appreciated that privilege. But it’s just not like celebrating it with people.”

Prayer remained important for him as he recovered. Even though he suffered with symptoms of the virus for a little more than a week, his recovery time took several weeks.

“It took me a while to get back on my feet again,” he said. “I was totally out of breath. I’d try to go out to walk, and I’d be huffing and puffing trying to get my breath back.”

He had recovered enough that he could return to St. Maurice and celebrate Mass with the parish on June 14, Trinity Sunday.

“It was just a joy to be with the people and to celebrate God’s presence,” Father Geis said. “It really stood out for me. What an experience.”

“I’m not sure if I can put it into words,” said Sister Shirley. “It was so good to see him celebrate the Eucharist. I knew he had such a desire to do that. It was so good to have him back.”

Mary Bultman, a member of St. Maurice Parish, shared in the joy of having back the priest who has celebrated the sacraments in the Batesville Deanery faith community.

“Everybody felt so happy to see him and welcome him back,” Bultman said. “He’s part of our family. We missed him when he wasn’t there. For him to recover from COVID at his age and health situation was like a miracle.”

Father John Geis celebrates Mass on July 5 at St. Maurice Church in Napoleon. The 84-year-old retired priest has been a sacramental minister at the Batesville Deanery faith community since 2011. He is the only archdiocesan priest thus far to have tested positive for the coronavirus. He was diagnosed with it in April, but was able to return to Napoleon to celebrate Mass on June 7. (Submitted photo)