Pope, Holocaust survivor talk about the importance of remembering

ROME (CNS)—A month after reading an interview in the Vatican newspaper with Edith Bruck, an author and Holocaust survivor, Pope Francis decided to pay her a visit at her home in the center of Rome.

“I could never have imagined such a thing. When I opened the door, I burst out in tears and we embraced. We were both overcome with emotion,” Bruck told Vatican News after the pope left on Feb. 20.

Bruck, 88, was born in Hungary to a poor Jewish family. In April 1944, they and their Jewish neighbors were rounded up and taken to the Nazi ghetto in Budapest and later that year sent to Auschwitz, where her mother died. Then they were sent to Dachau, where her father died, and on to Bergen-Belsen, which was liberated by the Allies in 1945. She moved to Rome in 1954 and has lived there since.

Her latest book, Il Pane Perduto (The Lost Bread), was published on Jan. 20. In connection with the book’s publication and the annual commemoration of Holocaust Remembrance Day, Jan. 27, L’Osservatore Romano, the Vatican newspaper, published a long interview with her, recounting the horrors of the Shoah, but also the tiny points of light—small gestures of humanity—she experienced during her ordeal.

Bruck said that during the pope’s visit, which lasted almost two hours, she shared her story with him, including the “five lights” she experienced in the camps. But the pope knew all about them. “He knew my book almost line by line.”

According to the Vatican press office, “The conversation with the pope covered those moments of light sprinkled in the experience of the hell of the concentration camp,” and the two spoke of “their fears and hopes for the time we are living in, underlining the value of remembrance and the role of elders in cultivating and passing it on.”

“I have come to thank you for your witness and to pay homage to the people martyred by the insanity of Nazism,” the Pope said.
Fight temptation with faith, prayer, penance, pope says at Angelus

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Christians must never engage in dialogue with the devil, but instead must fight against temptations with the same spiritual weapons Jesus used in the desert, Pope Francis said.

The Gospel account of Jesus’ temptation in the desert, read each year at the beginning of Lent, is a reminder that following in the Lord’s footsteps “is a battle against the spirit of evil,” in the pope’s view on Feb. 21 during his Sunday Angelus address.

“We must be aware of the presence of this astute enemy, who seeks our eternal condemnation, our failure, and prepare to defend ourselves against him and to combat him,” he said. “The grace of God us—we with faith, prayer and penance—of our victory over the enemy.”

The Gospel says Jesus spent 40 days and 40 nights in the desert, which is an important “natural and symbolic environment” where God speaks to the heart of the human person,” the pope said.

However, he said, it is also “a place of trial and temptation” where the devil takes advantage of one’s “human frailty and needs,” and offers an alternate view of the world: “Do not be afraid. We are called to walk in God’s footsteps, renewing our faith in the heart of the human person,” the pope said.

But while it may seem that there is dialogue in the Gospel, he added, Jesus “does not respond with his words,” but rather with the word of God.

“If we enter into dialogue with the devil, we will be defeated,” the pope said.

“Keep this in your head and in your heart. You can never enter into dialogue with the devil, no dialogue is possible. Only the word of God.”

Pope Francis encouraged Christians to “not be afraid of the desert” but instead, seek moments of more prayer and silence.

“Do not be afraid. We are called to walk in God’s footsteps, renewing our baptismal promises: renouncing Satan, and all his works and all his empty promises,” the pope said. “The enemy is crouching there; beware. But never dialogue with him.”

How has the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on your faith?

A year ago, the COVID-19 pandemic began to have a dramatic and often devastating impact on every aspect of life in the United States and around the world. A significant part of that impact extended to the faith lives of people—and their faith communities. It’s an impact that continues today and will undoubtedly continue into the future.

As part of our coverage of the ongoing influence that the pandemic is having on the faith lives of people, The Criterion invites you, our readers, to share your thoughts, experiences and stories of how the COVID-19 crisis has affected your faith—the way you live your faith, the way you celebrate your faith, and whether it has deepened or weakened your faith.

Send your thoughts, experiences and stories to John Shaugnessey by e-mail at jsbaughnessey@archindy.org or by mail in care of The Criterion, 1400 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, IN 46202. Please include your parish and a daytime phone number where you can be reached.

In this ‘Year of St. Joseph,’ tell us how he has influenced your life and your faith

Pope Francis has proclaimed this year as the “Year of St. Joseph,” honoring him for his faithful service to God, his dignity as a worker, and his love and devotion as a husband to Mary and as a foster father to Jesus.

With St. Joseph’s feast day approaching on March 19, The Criterion invites you to share your thoughts and stories about how St. Joseph has influenced your life. Let us know how he has inspired you, guided you or served as a role model in your faith, your family, your marriage, your fatherhood, your work.

Send your submissions to John Shaugnessey by e-mail at jsbaughnessey@archindy.org or by mail in care of The Criterion, 1400 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, IN 46202. Please include your parish and a daytime phone number where you can be reached.

Pope marks 90th anniversary of Divine Mercy apparition

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Marking the 90th anniversary of the apparition of Jesus to St. Faustina Kowalska, Pope Francis wrote a letter to Catholics in Poland expressing his hope that Christ’s message of divine mercy would remain “alive in the hearts of the faithful.”

According to a statement released by the Polish bishops’ conference on Feb. 22, the anniversary of the apparition, the pope said he was united in prayer with those commemorating the event in the Divine Mercy Shrine in Krakow and encouraged them to ask Jesus “for the gift of mercy.”

“Youth have the courage to come back to Jesus to meet his love and mercy in the sacraments,” he said. “Let us feel his closeness and tenderness, and then we will also be more capable of mercy, patience, forgiveness and love.”

In her diary, St. Faustina wrote that she had witnessed a vision of Jesus on Feb. 22, 1931, while she was living at a convent in Plock, Poland.

“Christ, she wrote, had one hand raised in benediction and the other resting on his breast, from which emanated two rays of light. She said she had envisioned these rays—along with the words ‘Jesus, I trust in you’—and venerated them.

Her saintly cause was opened in 1965 by then-Archbishop Karol Wojtyla of Krakow, who—as after his election to the papacy—would go on to be beatified in 1993 and presume her canonization in 2000.

Recalling St. John Paul II’s devotion to St. Faustina Kowalska and Christ’s message of divine mercy, the pope said his predecessor was “the Apostle of mercy” who “wanted the message of God’s merciful love to reach all inhabitants of Earth.”

Pope Francis also marked the anniversary of the apparition during his Sunday Angelus address on Feb. 21.

“Through St. John Paul II, this message reached the entire world, and it is none other than the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, and who gives us as his Father’s mercy,” the pope said.

“Let us open our heart with faith, ‘Jesus, I trust in you,’ ” he added.

February 27 – 11 a.m. Confirmation Mass for youth at St. Michael Parish in Brookville and St. Nicholas Parish in Ripley County at St. Louis Church, Batesville

February 27 – 2 p.m. Confirmation Mass for youth at St. Louis Parish in Batesville and St. Anthony of Padua Parish in Morris at St. Louis Church, Batesville

February 28 – 9 a.m. Mass at St. Mary-of-the-Woods Church, St. Mary-of-the-Woods

March 2 – 10 a.m. Clergy Lenten Day of Prayer at Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish, Greenwood

March 3 – 10:30 a.m. Visit to Our Lady of Providence High School, Clarksville

March 4 – 10 a.m. Leadership Team meeting at Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center, Indianapolis
Climate is mixed for environmental issues important to Church

By Victoria Arthur

Catholics concerned about the environment are tracking a number of bills at the Indiana Statehouse through the lens of “Laudato Si’.” On Care for Our Common Home, the groundbreaking encyclical by Pope Francis that continues to influence the landscape nearly six years after its release. Legislation that would repeal all of Indiana’s protections for state-regulated wetlands is a particular cause for alarm, according to members of the Creation Care Commission of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. Senate Bill 389, which passed the Senate on a 29-19 vote and is now awaiting action in the Indiana House of Representatives, would eliminate safeguards for up to 90% of the state’s wetlands.

Only about 10% of Indiana’s wetlands—those that are connected to a navigable body of water, such as a lake or a river—fall under federal jurisdiction and would remain unaffected. The rest, known as isolated wetlands, are under state control and would become subject to development without any permit process if Senate Bill 389 were to become law.

“This is a very reasonable step in the right direction,” said Benedictine Sister Sheila Marie Fitzpatrick, one of the founding members of the Creation Care Commission and a member of Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove. “We need to do a lot more education and build awareness among all constituents to help people realize the value of wetlands.”

Education and advocacy are at the root of the Creation Care Commission, which was formed in 2015 in response to Pope Francis’ encyclical. In “Laudato Si’,” Pope Francis calls for dialogue and swift action for our human flourishing and for the flourishing of all creation.

“The ICC urges Catholics to reach out to their elected representatives in the House to oppose the bill,” said Sister Sheila Marie.

By contrast, another environmental bill at the Statehouse has received unanimous support by the ICC and other advocates. Senate Bill 373, Carbon Credit Programs, would offer financial incentives to farmers to reduce their footprint and thereby curb global warming.

The legislation would allow Indiana to join other states that operate in the carbon market, which involves companies across the nation seeking to reduce their carbon footprint and thereby curb global warming. These companies offset their environmental impacts by paying private farmers and landowners to preserve trees and conserve carbon in the soil, among other methods of “sequestering” carbon dioxide.

Senate Bill 373 awaits further action in the Statehouse following its initial committee passage. U.S. Sen. Mike Braun of Indiana is proposing similar legislation at the federal level.

“This is a very reasonable step in addressing the causes of climate change and one that has broad bipartisan support,” said Mingus.

Members of the archdiocese’s Creation Care Commission are equally enthusiastic about Senate Bill 373.

“For guidance in this and in everything related to the environment, Shierling looks toward a long history of Catholic social teaching on caring for the earth, which Pope Francis distilled in his revolutionary encyclical,” said Alexander Mingus, associate director of the Indiana Catholic Conference.

Wetlands are a deeply important ecological resource that protect our communities from flooding, help ensure the quality of our drinking water, and provide a necessary home for countless species. We have to recognize how necessary wetlands are for our human flourishing and for the flourishing of all creation.”

—Alexander Mingus, associate director of the Indiana Catholic Conference

Pope’s prayer intention for March

• Sacrament of Reconciliation—Let us pray that we may experience the sacrament of reconciliation with renewed depth, to taste the infinite mercy of God.

See Pope Francis’ monthly intentions at archindy.org/popesintentions.

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The Criterion Friday, February 26, 2021 Page 3
Are you a person of hope?

That question, which recently came to mind after reflecting on a homily, is a simple one. But for many of us, there is no simple answer.

Perpetual turmoil appears to be the norm on the political landscape in our nation’s capital—and in several states across the U.S. for that matter. Many are still concerned about the civil unrest that occurred in many cities last summer, and in Washington at the U.S. Capitol in early January. And we continue to hope and pray we make positive strides as we battle the COVID-19 pandemic, which has left more than 500,000 Americans dead and many families reeling that have been adversely impacted by the illness.

Some may ask, How can “hope” be a part of any conversation when we are dealing with so much turmoil?

The Lenten season is a time of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, a time to closely examine our lives of faith and how we can become more Christ-like in all we say and do. But maybe this year it can also become a season of hope through our actions and prayers.

Our faith teaches us we are to be a people of hope. And the 40 Days for Life campaign happening now offers us a unique opportunity to plant seeds of hope and love where the unborn are concerned.

We’ve heard the statistics, and they are staggering: Since the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion on demand in 1973, more than 62 million unborn babies have been aborted.

The 40 Days for Life spring campaign, which runs from Feb. 17–March 28, is an international effort that seeks to end abortion through peaceful prayer vigils at abortion centers, and to raise community awareness of the consequences of abortion. An annual 40 Days for Life campaign also occurs each fall.

During the 40-day campaign, individuals silently pray during one-hour time slots in front of abortion centers around the world.

For those who think these petitions don’t make a difference, think again. According to 40 Days for Life officials, since 2007 when the campaign began, 18,017 lives have been saved, 211 abortion workers have quit and 109 abortion centers have closed. And since the 40 Days for Life campaign began last week, 15 unborn babies have already been saved from the tragedy of abortion—thanks be to God!
Las lecturas de las Escrituras para el segundo domingo de Cuaresma nos hablan del amor sacrificado de Dios por nosotros. En la segunda lectura (Rom 8:31b-34), san Pablo nos dice que Dios no perdonó a su propio Hijo sino que lo entregó a los poderes de las tinieblas y de la muerte por nosotros. Esto refleja el popular verso del Evangelio de san Juan: “Porque de tal manera amó Dios al mundo, que ha dado a su Hijo unigénito para que todo aquel que en él cree no pierda más tenga vida eterna” (Jn 3:16).

Este mismo amor sacrificado es el que Dios exigió a Abraham en la primera lectura (Gn 22:1-2; 9a, 10-13, 15-18). Incluso sabiendo que Dios rellen los restos de la carne del cordero, él hubiese estado dispuesto a hacer sacrificios por la salvación de su hijo. Y todo ello para que en él no se pierda más tenga vida eterna” (Jn 3:16).

La conclusión de esta poderosa lectura nos ayuda a comprender mejor lo que significa la Transfiguración. Después de que Jesús descubrió su poder total y sus poderes, Jesucristo permitió que los apóstoles contemplasen lo que es la verdaderamente divina. Así, cuando Jesús les ordenó que no cuentes lo que vieron, ellos no lo hubieran hecho de no ser porque vieron el cielo abiertos y la gloria de Dios.

Además, el sacrificio de las Sagradas Escrituras es el que da a cada carne nueva vida eterna. De esta manera, el amor de Dios por el mundo se manifiesta en el sacrificio de su Hijo y en la transfiguración de los apóstoles. Y esto es lo que el amor es: el sacrificio por el bien de los demás.

La transfiguración nos muestra que Dios es un Dios más allá de las tinieblas y de la muerte. Y así, en el sacrificio de su hijo, Jesús se presenta como el verdadero Hijo de Dios, que nos enseña el amor de Dios y nos da la guía para vivir según su voluntad. Este amor es el que nos guía a través de la vida y nos da la esperanza de la vida eterna.
March 3
MCL Cafeteria, 5520 Columbia St, Indianapolis. Solo Seniors, 5 p.m., Catholic, educational, chat, and fun for seniors—separated, widowed or divorced—age 50 and older, new or returning, also call about regular Friday night dinner events. Information: 317-734-7885.

March 4
The Eucharist Source and Summit of Faith, through Old Testament and the Gospels, via Zoom, sponsored by St. Michael Parish, 145 S. Sherwood Ave., Clarksville. Men’s Club Annual Fish Fry, Fridays through March 19 (March 12 and 19), 5-7:30 p.m., take out only, includes baked or fried fish, oysters and shrimp, two sides, adult dinners $7.50, $9.50, children’s dinners $3.50. Information: 317-665-5467.

March 5

Our Lady of the Greenwood Church, 335 S. Meridian St., Greenwood. First Friday bilingual celebration of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. Mass, 5:45 p.m., exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, following Mass until 9 p.m., sacrament of reconciliation available. Information: 317-155-7209, mowen1@hotmail.com.

St. Anthony of Padua Parish, 316 N. Sherwood Ave., Clarksville. Men’s Club Annual Fish Fry, Fridays through March 19 (March 12 and 19), 5-7:30 p.m., take out only, includes baked or fried fish, oysters and shrimp, two sides, adult dinners $7.50, $9.50, children’s dinners $3.50. Information: parish.office@stanthony-clarksville.org or 812-282-2290.

St. Thomas the Apostle Parish Knights of Columbus #15712, 523 S. Merrill St., Fortville. Friday Night Lenten Fish Fry, Fridays during Lent and Holy Week (March 19, 26, April 2), 5 p.m. until supplies last, includes fish sandwich, steak fries, coleslaw, dessert. $10. Information: kev@15712fishfry.com or 317-485-5102.

March 6

St. Michael Church, 145 S. Sherwood Ave., Clarksville. First Saturday Marian Devotional Prayer Group, Mass, devotional prayers, rosary, 8 a.m. Information: 317-665-4674.

March 7
Monthly Virtual Taizé Reconciliation Service, 7-8 p.m., silent and spoken prayers, simple music, silence. Link: Taizé, Sursesse/Province Office Information. 812-235-2952, provcty@aposte.org.

March 8

St. Thomas the Apostle Parish Knights of Columbus #15712, 523 S. Merrill St., Fortville. Friday Night Lenten Fish Fry, Fridays during Lent and Holy Week (March 19, 26, April 2), 5 p.m. until supplies last, includes fish sandwich, steak fries, coleslaw, dessert. $10. Information: kev@15712fishfry.com or 317-485-5102.

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March 12
St. Joseph Church, 1401 S. McCleary Ave., Evansville, Ind. Third Thursday Adoration, 11 a.m.-7 p.m., with Mass at 5:45 p.m.

Our Lady of Peace Cemetery and Mausoleum, 9001 Haverstick Road, Indianapolis. Monthly Mass, 2 p.m. Information: 317-574-8898 or www.catholichceneteries.cc.

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March 13
Mount Saint Francis Center for Spirituality, 510 W. Main St., Evansville, Ind. (Evansville Diocese), on anniversary on Feb. 27. In 1971, the formation of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis in Indianapolis, IN 46202, ATTN: Ann Lewis, or by fax at 317-236-1585.

March 14

St. Michael Church, 145 S. Sherwood Ave., Clarksville. First Saturday Marian Devotional Prayer Group, Mass, devotional prayers, rosary, 8 a.m. Information: 317-665-4674.

March 15
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POPE continued from page 1

Vatican quoted the pope as telling Bruck. “With sincerity, I repeat the words I pronounced in the heart of Yad Vashem [the Shoah memorial in Jerusalem] and pronounced in the heart of Yad Vashem,” he said.

There had long been a “gravitational pull toward the parish—she social life, educational life, the worship life—all revolve around the parish,” Beers told Catholic News Service (CNS) in a Feb. 18 phone interview. “That’s not true anymore. Worse than that, because of the pandemic, people are reluctant to come back. There’s a fear to [come back]... There needs to be something to get them over the hump to come back, to sort of overcome the repellent.”

“The main reason that people will come back to church is for community,” said Amy Ekeh, director of Little Rock Scripture Study, a small-group Bible study program serving Catholic parishes. “If they were already experiencing community as a parish, they’ll come back to that. Small groups is one way in parishes to experience that community.”

Asked whether there is a carrot-or-stick approach needed to entice pandemic-shy Catholics to return to church, Ekeh replied, “I think the church already had to be there,” in the sense of the community parishioners feel. “They’re self-motivated by that. I don’t know if you can create a carrot if it wasn’t already there. And don’t even try the stick!”

Nor is it likely that Catholics would embrace “back to church” on a set date. “Check in: ‘How are you doing. Can you make Mass?” Sister Teresa said, “When it got really challenging, some time—maybe for a long time—to be for its hospitality committee “for a simple thing” for a parish to do would be “a big help. “Jesus didn’t wait on people,” he said. “He went to the people and went to the people—to go to the people and tell them to return to God.”

He added, “Most people’s first move toward going [back to church] isn’t a faith step, it’s a selfish one. What we’ve found in our work with parishes is that people miss a connection. Many people start asking the question of what’s missing in my life, how can I gain this connection. What opportunities are there for us as a parish? We have the only thing that can fill people’s lives, and that’s God. There’s a God-sized hole in people’s lives.”

Both Beers and Sister Teresa say parishes should be phoning parishioners right now.

Beers calls it a “simple act of just connecting with people,” and not just making one call and thinking the job is done.

“Check in: ‘How are you doing. Can we pray for you? What’s an obstacle for you at this time in your life?’” he said.

“Some things are just practical, that people need a bridge. Or people need the Eucharist but they don’t know how, and they’re afraid: ‘How safe is Mass? Have you had any cases?’

Beers said that parishioners should be encouraged to come. “If they were already experiencing that community, they’ll come back. There’s a fear to [come back],” Dwyer said. “If understanding is impossible, knowing rather disbelief and infinite sorrow. Remembering is painful, but I have never shied away from it. Enlightening a single conscience is worth the effort and pain of keeping alive the memory of what has been. For me, memory is living, and writing is breathing.”

PANDEMIC continued from page 1

focus on what you can do,” said Jack Beers, content director for Dynamic Catholic, which seeks to “re-energize the Catholic Church in America by developing world-class resources that inspire people to rediscover the genius of Catholicism.”

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Pope Francis talks with Edith Bruck, a Holocaust survivor and author, during a visit to her home in central Rome on Feb. 20. The pope earlier this month received his second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. (CNS photo/Tyler Orsburn)
**LITTLE WISH**

continued from page 1

The teenager—who knew he was dying from cancer—made a wish to have enough money so he could buy presents for the last Christmas he would share with his family.

Then there is the most memorable wish for Niemiec, the one that she fulfilled when she was 16, the one that marked the beginning of her Little Wish Foundation.

“Every one of the wishes is special because of the kids I’ve met, but the one that will stick with me forever is the very first wish we granted,” says Niemiec, an Indianapolis resident. “It was for my high school classmate who sat in front of me in class. Tia stopped coming to class, and she didn’t come back. She had brain cancer.

“We had finally raised a little money to grant one little wish. Her wish was for an iPod (a digital music player).”

Tia filled the iPod with her favorite songs, a source of joy and connection during a time when she could no longer be with her friends. She died several weeks after receiving her wish, but her influence on Niemiec continues.

“I saw her appreciation and her kindness back to me, and that really made me want to continue doing this.”

In the 11 years since that first wish, Niemiec has granted wishes to children and youths in 14 hospitals across the country, including four in Indiana: Peyton Manning Children’s Hospital at St. Vincent in Indianapolis, Riley Hospital for Children in Indianapolis, Lutheran Hospital in Fort Wayne and Memorial Hospital in South Bend.

While Tia’s impact has stayed strong at the Little Wish Foundation, so have two other influences on Niemiec.

‘My faith continues to help me’

The first of those two influences takes Niemiec back to her days as a student at Queen of All Saints School in the far northern Indiana community of Michigan City.

“I grew up going to a Catholic school through eighth grade,” she says. “It definitely shaped me as a person. I’ve always wanted to help others. That’s what I was taught in my upbringing and always wanted to help others. That’s definitely shaped me as a person. I’ve gone through eighth grade, and seeing how one little thing can make a difference in someone’s life.”

Niemiec says the children’s book was a way of commemorating creating the foundation when she was young—and the impact it’s had. She also hoped it would inspire others to help, to lighten other people’s lives.

Niemiec has made that impact with the help of sponsors, donations and fundraising events. And 100% of the proceeds from the sale of the book go directly to the foundation, whose granting of wishes has included swing sets, musical instruments, sewing machines, shopping sprees, electronic devices and about 50 dogs.

The thank-you notes that Little Wish receives from families show the power of such gifts.

“Thank you for getting Erika an iPad. She plays games and talks with her friends from school. By not attending school, this gives her a chance to see them and she really needed that.”

Another one notes, “I just wanted to thank you again for bringing my son this tremendous joy! He has gone through so much and has wanted this dog for so long. With all the stuff my family has gone through over the last couple of years, it’s really lifting the spirits up of everyone in this family. Please continue to spread this love and kindness to other families.”

While the gifts bring a measure of joy to children, youths and their families, the children and youths who battle cancer continue to have a dramatic influence on Niemiec.

“You want to give them that joy, that moment!”

“I’ve met so many of the kids. I’ve witnessed the darkest moment for a kid, to see how cancer changes their lives,” she says. “When I walk into a room and hear their stories and how their lives have unfolded in battling cancer, it’s really sad. But these kids have a lot of hope. Seeing them battle this gives a perspective on what they’re going through. I admire their bravery.”

In response to them, she tries to provide “a moment of hope, comfort and joy.”

“When you’re a kid and you’re sick, so many special moments are taken away,” she says. “You want to give them that joy, that moment. The best part is getting to see the impact you’ve made when the child gets their wish. You get to see their smile and know you’ve helped in some way.”

She sighs before she adds, “The hardest part is defensively hearing or knowing a child didn’t make it. You see the struggle that they’re going through, that their parents and family are going through. It’s affected me. I’ve witnessed a lot of suffering. We do what we can with the gift we have. We try to give them hope and joy, to make their life a little better.

“I just try to remember that God has a plan for all of us. My faith has made me stronger to keep going”.

So has her relationship with her mother.

“It’s always been an emotional thing”

When a child has cancer, the journey of struggle and hope, of heartbeat and love becomes the same journey for the child’s parents. The 11-year journey of the Little Wish Foundation has also led to a stronger bond between Liz and Therese Niemiec.

While Liz focuses on the creative side of the foundation, Therese handles the business side. On a deeper level, their connection with cancer-stricken children and their parents has reinforced their belief that the child-parent bond should never be taken for granted, especially in terms of the amount of time that children and parents get to share in life.

“It’s just such an interesting and dynamic relationship we have,” Liz says. “We’ve always worked on this together. She’s always believed in my dream and my vision to make the Little Wish Foundation come true. It’s great to have a mother who believes in you so much. Therese gets emotional when she talks about her daughter. Her tears flow as she says, “As a mom, it’s an incredible experience to work with your daughter. From the beginning, it was great to see her start it. And it became my passion, too.”

“It’s always been an emotional thing—just the way it started with the innocence and the pure joy in her heart, to make her want to make a difference in the lives of kids with cancer.”

Both of their thoughts return to the children, the youths and their families.

“To see how this has impacted kids’ lives, I just want to go on,” Liz says. Therese adds, “We keep in touch with some of the families and form a bond with them. That cancer journey is so tough. If we can give them a smile and have tears of joy, it’s worth all the work.

“It just ties into our faith of living a life of giving to others in need. I mean, that’s what Jesus did.”

(For more information about the Little Wish Foundation or to buy a copy of Lizzy Girl and the Big Little Wish, visit its website, www.littlewishfoundation.org.)
The moment is played out time and again in Catholic churches: The music begins. The bridal party processes down the aisle, then all stand for the radiant bride as she enters the nave and the doors to the narthex close behind her.

What happens in the narthex then?

“That’s when I breathe!”

“I can take a breath, and Father takes it from there!”

“So say wedding coordinators from St. Monica Parish in Indianapolis, St. Agnes Parish in Nashville and St. Ambrose Parish in Seymour.

Their is a role that involves many tasks to make a couple’s special day go smoothly. But they are more than just helpers. They are servants in a ministry that supports sacramental marriage.

Four parish wedding coordinators spoke with The Criterion about their role, shared stories both humorous and touching, and addressed the sacrament at the heart of their marriage ministry.

‘This is a sacrament, this is a church’

Being a parish wedding coordinator “takes a servant’s heart,” says 15-year veteran Joyce Brooks, one of several wedding coordinators at St. Monica Parish.

In short, the wedding coordinator’s role is to “serve as a liaison between the parish and the couple and their guests,” she explains. “I want to help keep things smooth and peaceful as I can because this is the day that the bride has probably planned for a year at least, and because it’s a sacrament.”

That effort starts with calling or meeting with the couple well before the wedding date to gather and share information.

“We ask them questions and help to guide them as far as following the rules of the parish,” says Brooks.

It’s during such meetings that the coordinator’s role in supporting sacramental marriage begins.

“We’re not preparing them for marriage or delving deep into it,” says Cheryl Bedwell, parish wedding coordinator at St. Agnes Parish. “But through our conversations, when they ask how to prepare [the church], we always remind them that this is a sacrament, and this is a church.

“So no, you can’t have your dog walk with you down the aisle—someone asked about that once. ... We remind them of the seriousness and sacredness of everything.”

But there is plenty of joy and fun, too, especially starting with the rehearsal.

“I love people, and this is a happy occasion,” says Brooks. “I get to meet [the couple’s] families and learn more about them.”

And sometimes there are surprises. Like the time when, on the day of a rehearsal, Brooks received an “oh-by-the-way” request from the bride.

“She said, ‘We need something to set the flowers on. What can you do to help us?’” Brooks recalls.

She and her assistant scrambled to help. They found some boxes and lace at the church, “and some purple cloth we were pretty sure matched her colors. “We wrapped the boxes and put the lace over it—and it just blended in with the whole décor. It was fun! We just hoped the material wouldn’t slip and everyone would see the flowers were sitting on top of used paper supply boxes!”

‘My back was turned, and I heard a splash’

The day of the wedding arrives, and so do the wedding coordinators—before any of the bridal party.

Wedding coordinators help sacramental marriages get ‘off to a great start’
Pre-Cana Conference, Tobit Weekend and One in Christ program prepare engaged couples for marriage

Couples may announce engagement or marriage this fall in The Criterion

Engagement announcements will be published in a July 2021 issue of The Criterion for couples who are planning to wed between July 15 and Jan. 31, 2022, in a marriage that is recognized by the Church as a valid sacramental or valid natural marriage. Couples who were married in the first half of 2021 in a marriage that is recognized by the Church as a valid sacramental or valid natural marriage may also submit an announcement if their engagement announcement was not published in The Criterion.

The wedding announcement form is available online at www.criteriononline.com by selecting “Send Us Information.” Upload the photo, select the Art section of the form, click “Add Engagement Announcement,” submit the form and include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Due to print quality, Xerox copies of photos will not be accepted. See PREPARATION or your local archdiocese website for details.

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Couples should seek ‘mind of the Church’ when planning wedding liturgy

By Ann Margaret Lewis

A great deal goes into planning for an engaged couple’s wedding day, but without proper focus, couples can make a crucial mistake in this process. Andrew Motyka, director of archdiocesan and cathedral liturgical music, has worked with hundreds of couples as they have prepared for their wedding ceremonies. He points out that the number one mistake he sees couples make when approaching their wedding ceremony is that they “spend a lot of time, energy and most of all money preparing for their wedding, but not nearly as much effort into preparing for their marriage.”

Motyka says it is much to consider when planning a wedding, including cultural pressures. Motyka notes that most couples approach ceremony planning as if they are trying to “make a big show, rather than focus on the sacrament.” This, he says, takes away from the truth of the event.

Of course, the Church requires couples to participate in a sacrament of marriage preparation program prior to the wedding. This program isn’t a mere formality, but something a couple should take seriously. With a solid understanding of the sacrament, Motyka says, a couple can turn their focus to the planning of their wedding ceremony in a more effective way.

Being a Church liturgy, the wedding ceremony is not just about the couple; it is big day, but a celebration of the entire Church, says Motyka. If a couple can recognize that their wedding liturgy, their sacrament, is bigger than just the two of them—that it involves “the mind of the Church” itself—they’ll have an easier and more meaningful time planning and participating in the wedding liturgy and a marriage that make all their effort and time—as much as they’ve had a good experience with the couple to repeat the vows as spoken to them by the celebrant. “But it’s important to be very familiar with what you are promising as a couple.”

Thinking with “the mind of the Church” is equally important when choosing music for the ceremony. For this, Motyka stresses that a couple work closely with their parish music director. “It’s common nowadays for people to go straight to YouTube and come up with their own set pieces for the liturgy,” he says. But music directors “have planned and played for many weddings. They know what works and what doesn’t work. They know the local guidelines of the parish and diocesan church. They also probably know several pieces that [the couple] might have never heard of or thought of before.”

Thinking with “the mind of the Church,” is part of the music coordinator’s job, he says. They should be familiar with Church documents that express what is and is not appropriate for such a liturgy and can guide a couple in making good choices.

“Aren’t you using hymns or psalms, just because it says ‘love’ once or twice?” Motyka asks. It would be better, he notes, to examine pieces that express the fullness of sacramental marriage. He believes the focus on the wedding ceremony being a show rather than a sacrament comes from the wedding industry itself. According to theknot.com, the average cost of a wedding in the Midwest is $20,000-$30,000, which feeds into a $53 billion industry. “We need to nip this trend in the bud,” says Motyka. “Weings are a sacrament, and we need to draw couples, parishes and the rest of the Church into the idea that this sacrament, central to society, doesn’t need to be crushing expensive.”

This cost, he says, is one reason why some people are choosing not to get married at all.

“We could set an example by celebrating weddings without trying to go ‘over the top’ with decorations, flowers, all of the expenses of an elaborate reception, or even a professional wedding planner,” he says. “There is nothing stopping you from getting married on a Sunday. Speak with your pastor.”

Motyka concludes that if we, as a Church, focus on forming good Christians, we should then encourage them to build good marriages.

“You won’t remember too many details from your wedding day,” Motyka adds. “But you will absolutely benefit from the good understanding, formation and work that goes into building a solid marriage.”

“A mother of the bride had brought her daughter’s wedding dress from the wedding gown to the church early on the wedding day,” Armes recalls. “Without the bride knowing, she had also brought her daughter’s baptismal gown and First Communion dress.”

“The photographer came early and hung all three dresses... The sun was shining through a stained-glass window,” says Armes. “I had to tell them, ‘No, just for pictures.’”

That wedding, they made masks with their wedding date, put them in a little package with hand sanitizer and passed them out as the guests arrived. “I thought that was really creative!”

Three dresses, three sacraments

The positive and touching moments far outweigh the chaotic ones, says Bedwell, moments that capture the essence of marriage as a sacrament.

“I remember one wedding where the bride and groom came early to the rehearsal so they could sit in the chapel to pray,” she says. “And they had arranged for the priest to come early so they could go to confession before their wedding.”

Brooks recalls a touching encounter before a wedding that, despite happening early in her time as co-coordinator, remains in her mind.

“I wanted to tell the bride something,” she says. “I started to push the door open to the room where the bride’s party was getting ready. Then I noticed that she and her bridesmaids were kneeling and praying the rosary. It was so beautiful. I’ll never forget that.”

Motyka says, “We need to nip this trend in the bud” when it comes to decorations. “You won’t remember too many details from your wedding day,” he says. “But you will absolutely benefit from the good understanding, formation and work that goes into building a solid marriage.”

The day of the wedding can be pretty busy,” Bedwell admits. “But it’s rewarding to see it all come together for [the couple] and that they had a good experience with their sacrament of marriage. It’s a joy to be a part of that.”

Bedwell echoes Bedwell’s sentiments.

“It’s a sacrament. We can be a part of,” she says. “I’ve seen couples get married and have their first child, and I feel a part of that.

Serving as wedding coordinators is an honor for Armes and Hodge.

“It is a special privilege to share in and be a part of a wedding, the day when two people start a new life together,” says Hodge. “If we can help make the wedding day go as planned, then we feel the sacrament of marriage is solid to a great start.”

There are three currently scheduled for 2021:


(Photos credit: Amy Courts Photography)
WASHINGTON (CNS)—During a Feb. 22 evening program on CNN, Washington Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory offered a prayer for those who have died from COVID-19, asking God to 

“Let us now open our hearts to recall those who have died from the coronavirus,” Cardinal Gregory prayed. “Strengthen those families and friends who remain,” he added, “to comfort one another and to wipe the tears from our eyes. May each one find peace and assurance that the members of our loved ones itself be a blessing.”

The cardinal called it “a great honor and privilege” to offer the prayer at the invitation of Jake Tapper, CNN anchor and chief Washington correspondent for the program “700 at 700: A National Memorial Service for COVID-19.”

It commemorated the milestone reached on Feb. 22 when the United States surpassed 500,000 deaths due to the coronavirus.

More than 1,200 coronavirus deaths were reported on Feb. 22, bringing the nationwide total to 500,103. About 28.2 million Americans have been infected by the virus. Also, as of Feb. 22, close to 13% of the U.S. population has received the first round of the COVID-19 vaccine, and about 6% of Americans have received both shots.

“We pray that—regardless of race, age, religious heritage, economic or immigration status—all people are able to receive the life-saving vaccine to bring an end to our common suffering,” Cardinal Gregory prayed.

He also said that “our hearts are filled with gratitude for our doctors, nurses and emergency personnel,” and prayed that “they remain well and be strengthened.

“May one day we be able to focus on our mutual human dignity.” Cardinal Gregory prayed. “Although weary from so many months of isolation, help us not to lose hope, help us to continue to guard our neighbors as we remember those we have lost in this pandemic.”

Before he said the prayer, the cardinal pointed out that the Catholic Church, like the religious community in general, experienced a disproportionate amount of sadness” due to the coronavirus, and he added that the pandemic “has interrupted the course of our common human dignity.

“We have been brought to a deeper awareness we are one people and this illness, this disease, this virus is no respecter of persons,” he said.

When asked by Tapper what the Catholic faith teaches about helping one another when it is not safe to physically come together, Cardinal Gregory said: “We are Catholic are that we have each other, even under these limited and painful moments when we cannot be with each other, to reach out and embrace and be in the presence of those who are suffering.”

He said “the sacramental reality” of the Catholic faith “is expressed in word and sacrament, in sign and prayer and music,” and “not being able to have a full display of these sacramental signs of our faith is itself an additional sorrow.”

In interviews during recent months, the cardinal has stressed the need to pray for those who have died of the coronavirus as well as their families and friends, and to get the vaccine when it is made available to them.

On Jan. 19, he offered the invocation at a pre-inauguration memorial service beside the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool attended by President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris to remember the 400,000 Americans who had died from COVID-19 at that point.

In a livestreamed Mass in January for the community of Archbishop Carroll High School in Washington, Cardinal Gregory encouraged people to get the coronavirus vaccine when it is made available to them. He said: “We have the vaccines that are effective in helping to protect us, and I urge and plead and invite all of our students, faculty, grandparents, teachers [and] benefactors to make good use of those vaccines, to get vaccinated,” he said. 

President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris stand with their spouses at the White House in Washington on Feb. 22 during a candlelight ceremony to commemorate the grim milestone of more than 500,000 U.S. deaths from the coronavirus. (CNS photo/Jonathan Ernst, Reuters)
School enrollment, hit by pandemic, is at its lowest in 50 years

WASHINGTON (CNS)—Catholic school enrollment figures in the U.S. for the current school year—significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic—dropped 6.4% or more than 111,000 students from the previous school year, which is the largest single year decline in almost 50 years.

The National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) issued highlights from its annual report on school enrollment on Feb. 8. The full report is titled “United States Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools 2020-2021.”

The annual figures show the number of Catholic elementary school student declined by 8.1% from the previous academic year while the decline for Catholic secondary schools was only 2.5%. But the elementary school decline could impact secondary school numbers within the next five to 10 years.

The sharpest enrollment decline was for prekindergarten enrollment at Catholic schools, which went down 26.6% this year from last year.

Current Catholic school enrollment is 1,626,291 in 5,981 Catholic schools. There are 4,812 elementary schools and 1,169 secondary schools.

In the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, total Catholic school enrollment declined from 21,590 in the 2019-20 school year to 20,343 in the 2020-21 school year, according to Mary McCoy, the archdiocese’s interim superintendent of Catholic schools.

“While we would assume the pandemic is responsible for the decrease, but we won’t know for certain until next year when the pandemic is behind us, especially since [the drop] appears to be at the primary level,” McCoy said.

“Twelve schools in the archdiocese did not show a decrease in enrollment, while the high schools show some increase in enrollment but generally nothing significant. We did have a preschool not reopen this year, and several preschools are down enrollment as well. Total pre-kindergarten is down 361 students. Overall, that’s a 17.3% drop. Parents were apprehensive to enroll their child in a preschool program not knowing what this year would look like.”

The challenges related to COVID-19 have forced all schools to educate students differently this past year. More than 90% of Catholic schools nationally have been open for in-person learning and working within sanctioned health guidelines. By the start of the current school year, 209 Catholic schools had closed—many because of COVID-19, but others due to declining enrollment and financial instability.

Some states and cities have seen an uptick in Catholic school enrollment with an influx of transfer students opting for in-person classes and choosing Catholic schools. But the full story is still unfolding as Catholic schools have experienced an overall dramatic decline in enrollment and an increase in school closures.

Only 10 of the 174 dioceses with Catholic schools had an increase of 1% or more in student enrollment: Dutilh, Minn.; Charleston, S.C.; Charlotte, N.C.; Reno, Nev.; Manchester, N.H.; Phoenix, Ariz.; Bismarck, N.D.; Denver; Greensburg, Pa.; and Las Vegas. But the report also noted that none of these dioceses had enrollment increases the year before that, suggesting this might not be part of a trend.

The NCEA report said media coverage of the pandemic’s impact on school enrollment so far “has suggested that Catholic schools and other types of nonpublic schools have benefited from pandemic-induced suspension of in-person instruction. However, NCEA’s research suggests that systems of Catholic schools have largely suffered notable enrollment losses, including the largest Catholic school systems.”

It also noted the broad availability of state-funded parental choice programs did not seem to have an impact on enrollment trends. For example, of the four states with significant parental choice programs—Arizona, Ohio, Indiana and Florida—only Arizona’s Catholic school enrollment remained stable, while Catholic school enrollment in the other states declined.

In the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, McCoy noted that the number of students who received an Indiana Choice Scholarship—a voucher—declined from 8,463 in the 2019-20 school year to 8,333 in the 2020-21 school year.

The report points out that parental choice programs have long been viewed as “a potential solution to increasing challenges of Catholic school viability,” but the current enrollment figures and the decline even in states with choice programs “does not seem to be sufficient enough to turn the tide,” the report said.

Some positive numbers in the current report relate to school waiting lists and school staff numbers. Currently, more schools reported having students on an enrollment waitlist than prior years, but this also could be due to “artificially decreased enrollment capacities in the midst of social-distancing requirements.”

Catholic school staffing did not decline at the same rate as the overall student enrollment decline—decreasing only 2.9%—which was partly due to the availability and utilization of the Paycheck Protection Program, or PPP, in the spring of 2020. Based on NCEA’s research, less than one third of Catholic schools nationally made adjustments to staffing during the pandemic.

The low student to teacher ratio—11:1 in 2020—has long been a feature of Catholic schools, but it also means the cost to educate students in Catholic schools, which costs less than in public schools, has increased as student enrollment has decreased.

One form of relief for Catholic school leaders created by Congress on Dec. 21 is the Emergency Assistance to Non-Public Schools program, which allocates $2.5 billion of funding for nonpersonal expenses incurred as a result of the pandemic. However, schools must choose to take advantage of this program or the second round of the PPP—but not both.

If schools use relief funding for non-personnel expenses, they are likely to see either drastic staffing declines or potentially more enrollment declines as the cost to educate and cost of tuition increase to support retaining current staffing levels.

The NCEA report points out that of the 209 Catholic schools that closed or consolidated at the end of the 2019-2020 school year, elementary schools made up most of this figure—186. Without PPP and school reserve funds, more schools could have closed.

The school closings, many in urban settings, also “disproportionately impacted underserved families and non-Catholic families,” the report noted, which it said was significant because Catholic schools were created to serve immigrant families that were marginalized by other schooling options.

“The erasure of Catholic schools from communities across the nation, particularly underserved communities, amounts to a disruptive divestment of social capital and pathways of opportunity for all families,” the report said, adding it also decreases the “diversity of Catholic school communities that enriches all families regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status or opportunity.”

Concerning the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, McCoy stressed the importance of Catholic schools to their communities.

“Catholic schools have stayed consistent with providing a Catholic education throughout this past school year in spite of the challenges,” she said. “Teachers have gone above and beyond to ensure students stay engaged and fill the gap of those students who fell behind since this pandemic closed our schools last March. We continue to do what we know best—meet the needs of students.”

(Criterion assistant editor John Shaughnessy contributed to this story.)
Open up to the transformative power of prayer in Lent

By Fr. Richard G. Malloy, S.J.

In college, I made Bluto Blutarsky from Animal House look like a choir boy. One night I got rip-roaring drunk, fell backward down a flight of stairs, and split my head open. I spent the night in the hospital and got 12 stitches. My wild man act and partying was getting deadly dangerous.

A couple of nights later on the quad, I looked up at a brilliant, full moon, pondering what the hell I was doing with my life. For some reason, I voiced a simple prayer. “OK, God. If you’re there, do something!”

Nothing happened.

I went back to the fraternity and opened, at random, a small New Testament, the “Good News for Modern Man” translation. I got to some passage from Romans that was incomprehensible to me at the time. So much for prayer.

But in a very curious manner, a few weeks later, I got a summer job as an orderly at a nursing home. Caring for the elderly as they prepared for death filled me with joy. I began to ask the big questions about life, God and why we are here.

That prayer on the quad changed my life.

Welcome to Lent and the call to prayer. Why pray?

Prayer changes what we desire.

Prayer transforms us into those who can live with God forever. Prayer impels us toward metanoia, an ancient Christian Greek term for conversion and repentance, a change in our ways of thinking, doing and being. When we really open our minds and hearts in prayer to the God who creates and so desperately loves us, watch out. Anything can happen!

So, prayer is a risk. We fear that prayer is a waste of time, that prayer doesn’t work. I prayed that I would get a new job or that my mother be cured of cancer, and my prayers weren’t answered.

Or we fear that prayer may really happen! We can be Moses and Mary in God’s plans, giving us tasks and the Scriptures who were caught up deeply and radically as the people in work, that God will change us as of cancer, and my prayers weren’t

Prayer is 20 minutes of silence. Trappist centering exercise, will show itself in our being as an ancient 14th-century mystical text The Cloud of Unknowing, this is always ever greater than us. God is always mediated to us and anything but focusing reality too self-evident would make it impossible for us freely to answer,” “Yes.” God is always mediated to us and is always ever greater than us. Jesuit Father Karl Rahner once asked in prayer if we ever really hear anything but our own internal rumblings? “Surprisingly, he answered, “No.” But what happens is, we pray and then listen. In response, the word God speaks to us is our life.

For good books on a prayer, read Jesuit Father Mark Thibodeaux’s Armchair Mystic, a great introduction on how to actually pray.

St. Ignatius teaches that prayer is like exercise. I go to the gym three times a week, once a year. The lack of results is obvious. Regular prayer, like regular exercise, will show itself in our being more rooted in awareness of God, in service of others, and in the joy and peace radiating in our lives. Actually praying, daily, will get us in spiritual shape, ready to meet the challenges of following Jesus.

People in St. Peter’s Square pray as Pope Francis leads the Angelus at the Vatican on Oct. 25, 2020. Praying daily will get us in spiritual shape, ready to meet the challenges of following Jesus. (CNS photo/Tyler Orsburn)
Well, it is now February of 2021. January, the first month of the year, has 31 days, and in nature, January is named after Roman god Janus, who is always imagined looking out both forward and backward. After our experiences of 2020, we were all anxious to look back, but events of the past year have mixed emotions of what 2021 was starting off.

I recently had occasion to meet a 94-year-old man, and about two months later a 28-year-old, who died very suddenly and tragically at both funerals, I used a song from Jonathan Larson’s Broadway musical Rent. It is used at the end of Act II of the show: “525,600 minutes/525,600 minutes in a year.” Then the song asks: “How does it measure up?”

For each of us, there are most important minutes in our lives—the minutes we die, the minutes we die being the most significant.

So she always asks and holds on to the hope that it’ll be here soon. I wish I had that innocent, joyful, ever-present hope in my weary, jaded, often disappointed heart. I wish I could hold onto the good promises someone made to me and trust them true. As believers in a good God who abundantly provides, we wait in joyful hope. We’re invited to trust in what God has promised. And what is that promise? In what do we hope? Perhaps the hope of new opportunities, or the promise of healing and peace. Maybe the hope of being together, of normacy and routine once again. Every Sunday, we hear the best, most in the hearts of the Our Father, that we wait in joyful hope for something very specific: the coming of our savior, Jesus Christ.

This is our hope: his. His return. Jesus Christ, present to us. Our hope rests in his promise, that he will be with us until the end of the age, and that he will come back so we can be with him. It is only with his return—his very presence in our lives—that we will find the opportunity to worship perfectly, the chance to heal fully, the blessing of perfect peace, united to him. We don’t necessarily know when that “coming” will be. It probably won’t be tomorrow or even next week. But we still hold onto the hope that it will happen—someday. And we pray with fervent hope that we are ready. That we can greet him and say, “I am happy to see you, Lord,” and that he will look at us and say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

We wait in joyful hope and ask, “Will it happen tomorrow?” And we pray diligently that we will welcome the coming of our Savior and continue his return.

And maybe he’ll show up in a battered old ice cream truck blaring a tin jingle, with an assortment of sweet treats ready for us all.

(Katie Prejean McGrady is an international Catholic speaker and award-winning author. She hosts the Ave Explores podcast and lives in Lake Charles, La., with her family)

The Human Side

The power of questions can create hope and meaning.

“A prudent question is one-half wisdom.” This insight by English philosopher Francis Bacon underscores a fundamental principle for coping with today’s challenges: to use the power of the question. Let’s look at some examples of the strength of the question.

Could much of the disunity we are experiencing be due to a lack of questions?

Tribalism is based on the behavior and attitudes that stem from strong loyalty to one’s own group or tribe.

An article in Psychology Today says tribalism is bad when it brings people together “out of anger, jealousy and spite, not for collective well-being.” And it adds that bad tribalism “is easy to provoke but not healthy to maintain. Staying angry is stressful and detrimental to our health. On the other hand, good tribalism is difficult to build,” but when practiced for the common good, it creates inspiring unity. Could it be that bad tribalism is increasing and is a major cause of our unrest?

Our failure to understand tribal behaviors is the result of clever psychological manipulations that are influencing people’s minds.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.” Are many of the world’s images that we consume daily being used without any responsibility for our destiny and that of our children? If so, how do we change this?

As ironic as it may sound, is employing solitude the answer? Is it possible that our ability to develop our interiority is lacking? Interiority is needed to center our prudence and wisdom. Solitary times, divided days, day-tumultuous times?

Have we slipped into an off-the-top-of-the-head atmosphere in which ideas are illogical, twisted and hollow—hasty thoughts at the mercy of a lust for prestige and appeasement rather than being thoughtful and guided by truth? Is in-depthness on the decline? If so, are we giving up prayer to reclaim it?

The hope of raising questions is what makes life worth living. Questions—follow-up questions that create healthy progress and a hopeful “eternity.”

(Father Eugene Hemrick writes for Catholic News Service)
The Second Sunday of Lent/Msgr. Owen F. Campion

The Sunday Readings
Sunday, February 28, 2021

• Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18
• Romans 8:31b-34
• Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18

Monday, March 1
Daniel 9:4b-10
Psalm 79:8-9, 11, 13
Luke 6:36-38

Tuesday, March 2
Isaiah 1:10, 16-20
Psalm 50:8-9, 16bc-17, 21, 23
Matthew 21:1-12

Wednesday, March 3
St. Katharine of Siena, virgin
Jeremiah 18:18-20
Psalm 31:3-6, 14-16
Matthew 20:17-28

Thursday, March 4
St. Casimir
Jeremiah 17:5-10
Psalm 1:1-4, 6
Luke 16:19-31

Friday, March 5
Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a
Psalm 105:15-18
Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46

Saturday, March 6
Micah 7:14-15, 18-20
Psalm 103:1-4, 9-12

Sunday, March 7
Third Sunday of Lent
Exodus 20:1-17 or Exodus 20:1-3, 7-8, 12-17
Psalm 9:1-2, 4, 5, 6
1 Corinthians 1:22-25
John 2:13-25

Q
Priestly celibacy is a discipline of the Church with deep historic roots

My Journey to God

The Word of Truth
By Ron Lewis

The first reading for Mass this weekend is from the Book of Genesis and is about Abraham, a very important figure in the faith of the Jews whom God chose to bless and by whom Jesus reached a sense of their ethnic and personal identities. He is regarded as the father of the Hebrew people. Scholars believe that Abraham actually lived at one time. He is not a myth.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Mark offers the third lesson. It tells the story of the transfiguration of the Lord, a story also found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. In the transfiguration, the Lord’s identity as Son of God was magnificently displayed. Rich symbols abound, each with unmistakable roots in the Old Testament. Jesus stands atop a high mountain. He is as bright as the sun. God’s voice sounds from the sky above. Each circumstance makes clear the fact of Christ’s divine identity. The lesson is that God shares with humans the very essence of the Holy Trinity, so that we all may know God.

Reflection
This weekend, we observe the Second Sunday of Lent. The penitential season is well underway, now nearly two weeks along. Lent is meaningless unless it includes our total and free dedication to forming ourselves with the help of God’s grace according to the image of Jesus, as Paul urged the Roman Christians. It requires absolute faith, trust, commitment, serious thought and deliberate action in prayer, penance and in living each day.

It is worth it. Through the words of Paul, the Church reminds us of life amid hardships. Outright persecution does not beset Christians in America, but modern life is challenging, even daunting. Times are not good for everyone. As were the ancient Roman Christians, we easily may be troubled. Fears, doubts and our own smugness confound our ability to see things clearly and to act in what truly is our best interests. The transfiguration consoles us by telling us that Christ will sustain us. Whatever confronts us on Earth, we have nothing to fear. God is with us in Jesus, the eternal Son of God. His love is real, reaching out to us with reward and strength.

Although almighty, Jesus overwhelms no one. We freely must respond, especially when life is difficult. Lent is the process by which individually and voluntarily we accept the Lord and look ahead beyond our problems, worries and sorrows. 

A
In the Latin Church, the part of the Catholic Church that came to be in western Europe and which is most familiar to us, the discipline of marriage is today a prerequisite for ordination to the priesthood. But that has not always been so; it is a discipline that developed through history. (Even today, married men are permitted to be ordained in Eastern Catholic Churches.) For the first several centuries of the Christian era, it was common throughout the Church for married men to be ordained.

As you mention, St. Peter was obviously married, since Luke 4:38 tells the story of Jesus healing Peter’s mother-in-law. And St. Paul says in his First Letter to Timothy that “a bishop must be irreproachable, married only once, temperate, self- controlled” (1Tim 3:2).

Over time, the Church came to the realization—as you suggest—that a priest is most free to serve the people and his ministry by not having the responsibility of a family, and it was the First Lateran Council in 1123 that finally mandated celibacy for clergy in the Latin Church.

That requirement, and the practical reason behind it, are reflected in the current Code of Canon Law: “Clerics are obliged to observe perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, and therefore are bound to celibacy which is a special gift of God by which sacred ministers can adhere more easily to Christ with an undivided heart and are able to dedicate themselves more freely to the service of God and humanity.” (3077)

Further evidence, though, of the fact that clerical celibacy is not a revealed truth but a matter of Church law can be found in the fact that, in the United States, several Episcopal and Lutheran married clergy who became Catholic have been allowed to be ordained as Roman Catholic priests while still remaining married.

Q
If I was married in the Catholic Church in 1961, but divorced in 1976 with two children. I never had the marriage annulled. I married a wonderful man in 1991. Because of financial considerations. We are both devout Catholic and receive Communion regularly, and I feel that I am a devout Catholic. Fast forward to 2021, and I have met a good Catholic man who was divorced but never had the marriage annulled. We have found a good life together and enjoy each other’s families. I don’t want to remarry because of financial considerations. We want to live together and would like to have this relationship blessed by a Catholic priest. Is there a way that this can take place? Please help. (Illinois)

A
In order for you to do what you want—to have that particular living situation blessed by a Catholic priest—the Church would have to abandon its biblically based teaching that marriage is a permanent commitment. The Church also believes that a couple should not be living together without being married. I recognize your desire for the Eucharist and your eagerness to be a devout Catholic, but to be eligible to receive Communion, one has to be living in concert with the Church’s teachings, including those concerning marriage. Please consider meeting with a priest and discussing your situation. Meanwhile, I will pray that you make a decision about your future based on your deeply held faith.

Question Corner/ Fr. Kenneth Doyle

(Photos by Red Long on Unsplash.com)
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. Order priests and 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.


CAVE, Pauline M., 92, Mary, Queen of Peace, Danville, May 1, 2018. Mother of Cindy Cave Keller, Lisa Elison, Carol Wamsley, Margaret and Don Cave. Grandmother, great-grandmother and great-great-grandmother of several.


HENN, Jr., Carl W., 82, St. Joan of Arc, Indianapolis, Jan. 15. Husband of Polly Henn. Father of Brian Henn, Tessa, Matthew, Allison, Emma, Daniel, Emily, Thomas, Trent, Mandy, Ellen, Gretchen, Laura, Merry and Carl Henn, III. Brother of Karen Stansfield, Eugene, James, Robert and Vincent Henn. Great-grandfather of 19. Great-grandfather of five.


WELLMAN, Sondra (Cornelius), 87, St. Luke the Evangelist, Indianapolis, Jan. 10. Sister of Carol Hutter, David and John Cornelius. Great-aunt and great-aunt of several.

Page 18 The Criterion Friday, February 26, 2021

Providence Sister Jacquelyn Hoffman served as a music teacher for 50 years

Providence Sister Jacquelyn Hoffman (formerly Sister Theodora), a member of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in St. Mary-of-the-Woods, died on Jan. 25 at Mother Theodore Hall on the campus of her religious community’s motherhouse. She was 89.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, a virtual funeral service was held on Feb. 16. Burial followed at the sisters’ cemetery.

Sister Jacobson was born on Feb. 3, 1931, in Fort Wayne, Ind. She entered the Sisters of Providence on Feb. 2, 1950, and professed final vows on Aug. 15, 1957.

Sister Jacobson earned a bachelor’s degree in music at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College and a master’s degree in music at the University of Illinois. During her 71 years as a member of the Sisters of Providence, Sister Jacquelyn ministered as a music teacher for 50 years in schools in Illinois, Indiana and Missouri. When she returned to the motherhouse in 2004, she provided music for Providence Health Care, served as a receptionist at the former Woods Day Care and was a coordinator for the former Ladywood High School in Indianapolis.

She is survived by a sister, Patricia Toomey of Randolph, N.J. Memorial gifts may be sent to the Sisters of Providence, 1 Sisters of Providence Road, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, IN 47876.†
Investing with Faith
Fr. Clement Davis

Planned giving, estate planning help parishes in times of need

Greetings friends! This winter is providing us with an uncustomized taste of cold, snow and ice, and it’s on one of those unfriendly days that I am huddled up in my apartment, keeping warm. So, it’s a good time for me to share some thoughts about planned giving.

Chris Hirschfeld and I, who serve as co-chairpersons of the archdiocesan Catholic Community Foundation (CCF) Planned Giving Committee, have been asked to share our perspectives with you. Much of what I will be sharing about planned giving has been largely formed through pastoring two parishes for more than 36 years. During that time, I was blessed to have two parishes for more than 36 years.

Both parishes faced the daunting prospect of building churches to accommodate actual and anticipated growth, and to do so while maintaining all the parish ministries with their regular expenses. Generosity was called for, and in both cases the challenges were met and our goals were exceeded. We kept the lights on and staff members continued to collect their salaries.

I’ve experienced how energy develops around the idea of growth and the wonder of seeing a parish community unite around a shared vision of what we can be, what we can do, together.

There is clearly excitement when a new building will result from these efforts, but the needs of a parish community are more frequently what is less obvious than a building site. The task of planned giving efforts in the Church is to raise and keep alive the awareness that every parishioner counts, and that everyone’s gift—no matter the size—contributes to the spread of the Gospel.

The spread of the Gospel.

While a building campaign brings financial needs to center stage in a parish, the fact is a parish will often be dealing with regular needs that expand and grow. The St. Bartholomew School and Religious Education ministries in Columbus have been blessed from a Sesquicentennial Educational Endowment Fund established back in 1993, and those benefits have helped our catechetical ministries year after year.

Planned giving goes beyond the annual stewardship campaign. Estate planning is becoming a more common reality, not just for the rich and famous. All of us do well to look beyond our day-to-day needs to plan for the day we are no longer here to make day-to-day financial decisions.

Sometimes our parishioners inform us of their plans to remember the parish in their wills. Sometimes we receive a happy surprise. Such was the case when, just a year ago, we were faced with a pressing need for a technology upgrade for which we hadn’t planned.

It had been the topic of a couple pastoral team meetings, with no solution in sight. Then a letter arrived with a “no-strings” gift from a parishioner who, without having informed us, had included the parish in her will.

A year or so prior, an air handler serving the church sanctuary was plagued with a failing compressor. Technicians from the manufacturer assured us there was no easy or quick fix. Equipment would need to be replaced at the cost of $65,000 to $70,000 that was not in the budget. We would have to raid the savings account or borrow the money. Before that step could be taken, the postman brought the notification that a parishioner who had died months earlier had included St. Bartholomew Parish in their will. The $80,000 check was a totally unforeseen solution to our compressor problem.

These good people, who had served the Church and community so generously, are gone.

Planned giving, estate planning help parishes in times of need.

St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic Church, Carmel, Ind. is looking for a full-time A administrative Assistant to join the parish staff. A position assists the pastor and parishes in the daily operations of the church. A position supports the goal of ensuring efficient operation of the Parish Offices. It is important that this position supports the goal of ensuring efficient operation of the Parish Offices.

• Daily opening and closing of parish administration office.
• Handle a high volume of telephone calls with courtesy, speed, accuracy and patience.

Interested Candidates should email a current resume to apply@setoncarmel.org. Please include at least three references as part of the application.

For a detailed job description, please visit GuerinCatholic.org. Qualified candidates should email a current résumé and cover letter to apply@guerinCatholic.org.

Director of Enrollment Management

The Director of Enrollment Management is a full-time, exempt salary paid position reporting to the President and is an integral part of the school’s leadership team. The Director of Enrollment Management is responsible for planning and implementing a strategic program to market St. Theodore Guerin High School to prospective students and their families; and, ultimately, for enrolling new students in numbers sufficient to meet annual goals. The Director will provide a creative vision and energetic oversight for all admissions and recruitment operations and retention efforts. The successful candidate will have demonstrated ability to coordinate an enrollment management program that will effectively attract, enroll, and retain students who desire to be a part of a dynamic faith based high school.

The qualifications for the position:

• A Bachelor’s Degree is required, and a master’s degree preferred.
• Experience in educational enrollment management preferred.
• Have a collaborative leadership philosophy that works well in a team atmosphere.

Be a practicing Catholic in good standing and personal witness to the Catholic faith by living in accordance with the doctrines and morals of the Roman Catholic Church.

For a detailed job description, please visit GuerinCatholic.org. Qualified candidates should email a current résumé and cover letter to apply@guerinCatholic.org. Please include at least three references as part of the résumé.

St. Theodore Guerin High School is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

Guerin Catholic High School
15300 Gray Road • Noblesville, IN 46062 • (317) 582-0120 • GuerinCatholic.org

GuerinCatholic.org

Planned giving, estate planning help parishes in times of need.

St. Theodore Guerin High School, located in Noblesville, Indiana, is accepting applications for a full-time Director of Enrollment Management. The Director of Enrollment Management is a full-time, exempt salary paid position reporting to the President and is an integral part of the school’s leadership team. The Director of Enrollment Management is responsible for planning and implementing a strategic program to market St. Theodore Guerin High School to prospective students and their families; and, ultimately, for enrolling new students in numbers sufficient to meet annual goals. The Director will provide a creative vision and energetic oversight for all admissions and recruitment operations and retention efforts. The successful candidate will have demonstrated ability to coordinate an enrollment management program that will effectively attract, enroll, and retain students who desire to be a part of a dynamic faith based high school.

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GuerinCatholic.org
Bishops say fellow Texans’ help for one another amid storm is ‘edifying’

AUSTIN, Texas (CNS)—The Catholic bishops of Texas said on Feb. 20 that the generosity of their fellow Texans reaching out to help their neighbors, even while they were also managing their own needs during a historic winter storm, “is truly edifying.”

“We are grateful for the outpouring of concern from around the world for all who have been affected by the severe weather conditions in Texas,” they added in a joint statement issued by the Austin-based Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops, the bishops’ public policy arm.

“We affirm the state leaders who are now paying attention to the underlying pre-existing conditions which have exacerbated the suffering of so many,” they said.

The historic winter storms in February shattered electric plants across Texas, prompting energy providers to force blackouts across the state to preserve what fragile electricity they could generate. At least 58 deaths have been linked to the storms and subsequent power outages.

Record snowfall and single-digit temperatures froze the state’s electric systems, pushing more than 4.3 million into darkness. The outages, first expected to be “rolling” and only a few hours, stretched to days for millions of Texans.

Their homes and cities were ill-prepared to be “rolling” and only a few hours, stretched to days for millions of Texans. Their homes and cities were ill-prepared for such intense winter weather.

On Feb. 20, President Joe Biden approved Texas request for a major disaster declaration, making federal funding available for people affected by the winter storm. News reports on Feb. 22 said millions across Texas remained under boil water notices, and others were seeking financial relief.

Gov. Greg Abbott said on Feb. 21 that “the state continues to distribute aid to Texans while leaders also discuss strategies to ensure its energy system isn’t crippled by weather again in the future,” reported KHOU-TV Channel 11.

The Texas Catholic bishops in their statement said: “Please continue to pray with us for those who have died and been injured; for the first responders and utility workers who are going beyond professional expectations; for the restoration of power, water and food supplies; and for those who face the task of rebuilding and repairing their homes and businesses, as well as our damaged churches and parish facilities, even while all are attempting to remain safe from the coronavirus.”

“May Our Lady of Guadalupe wrap us in her mantle of protection, especially the poor who are disproportionately impacted.”

There are 20 active archbishops, bishops and auxiliary bishops who shepherd approximately 8.5 million Catholics living in Texas, about 30% of the total population.

The bishops said donations to local Texas Catholic Charities agencies would “most efficiently reach Texans.” But they also said donations can be made to Catholic Charities USA at www.CCUSA.org/donate.

On Feb. 19, Los Angeles Archbishop Jose H. Gomez, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, also urged donations to Catholic Charities USA.

“In our Lenten almsgiving, let us find concrete ways to help our brothers and sisters,” he said in a statement.

The archbishop said he joined all U.S. Catholic bishops “in praying for all those who have died and been injured in the recent winter storms. We pray especially for those without power and heat and for first responders who are offering assistance to those with urgent needs.”

“I entrust those who are suffering to the Immaculate Heart of our Blessed Mother Mary,” he added. “May she grant them all comfort and peace.”

INVESTING

continued from page 19

while they lived in our midst, had also planned for the time when they would not be with us. And due to their planning and loving generosity, we have been blessed to be able to devote ourselves to sharing the Good News of our Savior Jesus Christ.