Pope to begin synodal process with Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—The Vatican announced that Pope Francis will formally launch the process of a 2023 meeting of the Synod of Bishops with a Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica. The Oct. 10 Mass, which officially opens the synodal process, will be preceded by a day of reflection in the synod hall, the Vatican said in a statement published on Oct. 1.

The Oct. 9 day of reflection, the statement said, will include “representatives of the people of God, including delegates of the bishops’ conferences and related bodies, members of the Roman Curia, fraternal delegates, delegates of consecrated life and ecclesial lay movements, the youth council, etc.”

According to the schedule released by the Vatican, the day of reflection will begin with a meditation followed by an address by Pope Francis.

It will also feature testimonies by people present at the synod hall, including a young woman from South Africa, a bishop from South Korea and the head of a religious community from France. Participants will also listen to video testimonies from a nun in the United States, a family in Australia and a priest in Brazil.

The theme chosen by Pope Francis for the 2023 Synod of Bishops is: “For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.”

After the pope formally opens the synodal process, the bishop of every diocese should open the process in his diocese on Oct. 17.

In September, the Vatican issued a preparatory document and a handbook for dioceses as part of the global Church’s preparation for the synod.

The diocesan phase will go through Pope Francis for the

2023 Synod of Bishops is: “For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.”

See related article on page 2.

Abortion survivor shares story of Christ’s power at Right to Life of Indianapolis fundraising dinner

By John Shaughnessy

As the keynote speaker at the Right to Life of Indianapolis Dinner on Sept. 28, abortion survivor Gianna Jessen laughed as she warned the audience of 800 people that there wouldn’t be any structure to her talk. While living up to her humorous and honest warning, Jessen’s sometimes-funny, often-feisty and always-faith-filled talk did reflect the realities of life for most people—the miracles, the challenges, the “angels” in our midst, the love, the compassion, the heartbreak, the faith, and the support and the strength we can be for each other.

It’s also telling about Jessen that the first part of her talk didn’t focus on her sharing how the miracle of her life unfolded. Instead, it was directed toward the women and men whose lives have been marked by abortion and her concern for them.

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Catholics across central and southern Indiana are invited to take part in a 10 a.m. Mass on Oct. 17 at Peter and Paul Cathedral, 1347 N. Meridian St., in Indianapolis, that will launch the archdiocese’s participation in the preparation for a meeting of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican in 2023. Archbishop Charles C. Thompson will be the principal celebrant.

The Mass will also be streamed live online on the website of the cathedral at www.ssppc.org/streaming.

The theme of the Synod of Bishops meeting in two years will be “For the Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.”

Pope Francis has asked that Catholics in dioceses around the world pray for the Synod of Bishops, according to their announcement on the joint effort.

To support the effort, the Synod of Bishops is funding a campaign to raise $2 million for an international gathering of bishops to be held in October 2023. The purpose of the gathering will be to offer guidance to the Synod of Bishops that will launch an international gathering of bishops representing various parts of the world.

Ken O gorek, archdiocesan director of catechesis, will oversee the process of gathering the thoughts and comments from Catholics across central and southern Indiana that will then be sent on to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. He said that starting the process with a Mass was an important way of “expressing solidarity with all who will participate in these synod-related conversations at levels ranging from parishes to an international gathering of bishops representing various parts of the world.”

“While the bulk of our local opportunities for participation will be communicated far and wide starting shortly after this Mass,” O Gorek said, “the faithful are welcome and encouraged to join Archbishop Thompson at the mother Church of our archdiocese and help kick off a synod process that will launch throughout upcoming months.”

What is that one thing in your life that brings you closer to God?

Maybe it happens for you while enjoying a special moment with your child. Or working in your garden. Or helping someone in need. Or sitting in silence during eucharistic adoration. Or while teaching, painting, running, playing music or taking a walk through nature.

Many of us have our special moments and situations when we feel closest to God, when we feel his presence more keenly, more deeply. For you, what is that one thing in your life that brings you closer to God—and why? What is a favorite moment in your life when you knew God was there for you?

The Criterion is inviting you to share your answers, thoughts and stories concerning these questions. Send your submissions to john.shaughnessy@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.

**Correction**

On the main page 1 photo of last week’s issue of *The Criterion*, the Junior Daughters of the Congregation of Notre Dame #97 was misspelled as being associated with St. Andrew the Apostle Parish in Indianapolis. They are associated with St. Rita Parish in Indianapolis.

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**Managing Editor**: John Shaughnessy

**Assistant Editor**: Brian Damish

**Executive Assistant**: Amy Spencer

**Staff**:

*Edith C. Neufeldt, assisted by Amy Spencer*
Pope, faith leaders urge nations at climate summit to care for creation

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—High-level representatives of the world’s religions came together with Pope Francis at the Vatican to show their commitment to caring for the Earth and to appeal to world leaders to deepen their commitment to mitigating climate change.

To the strains of Antonio Vivaldi’s “Four Seasons,” a green-covered soil was poured by potted greenery and the colorful frescoes of the Hall of Benedictions, nearly 40 faith leaders signed a joint appeal that Pope Francis then blessed and gave to world leaders to deepen their commitment to caring for the Earth and to appeal to nations at the U.N. climate summit to take concrete steps to address climate change.

The appeal called on nations to: increase their levels of commitment and international cooperation, meet net-zero carbon emissions as soon as possible as part of efforts to mitigate rising global average temperatures; step up climate action at home and financially assist more vulnerable countries in adapting to and addressing climate change; increase their transition to cleaner energy and sustainable land use practices; and promote environmentally friendly food systems and the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.

The religious leaders also pledged that they themselves would promote ecological education, advocate for a “change of heart” in their own communities concerning caring for all of creation; encourage sustainable lifestyles; take part in public debates on environmental issues; and support “greening” their institutions, properties and investments.

They symbolically marked their personal commitment by pouring a cup of soil onto a potted olive tree that will be planted in the Vatican Gardens.

The representatives took to the floor with a brief speech, commentary or declaration, with many detailing what their faith traditions mean to moral imperative of caring for humanity’s common home. At the end of the ceremony, recorded messages and appeals were played from those religious leaders that could not attend the event due to pandemic restrictions.

Saying he wanted to leave more time to hear from everyone, Pope Francis chose to skip reading his speech aloud since he wanted to be able to hear from everyone, Pope Francis chose to skip reading his speech aloud since he wanted to be able to hear from everyone, Pope Francis chose to skip reading his speech aloud since he wanted to be able to hear from everyone, Pope Francis chose to skip reading his speech aloud since he wanted to be able to hear from everyone, Pope Francis chose to skip reading his speech aloud since he wanted to be able to hear from everyone, Pope Francis chose to skip reading his speech aloud since he wanted to be able to hear from everyone, Pope Francis chose to skip reading his speech aloud since he wanted to be able to hear from everyone, Pope Francis chose to skip reading his speech aloud since he wanted to be able to hear from everyone, Pope Francis chose to skip reading his speech aloud since he wanted to be able to hear from everyone, Pope Francis chose to skip reading his speech aloud since he wanted to be able to hear from everyone, Pope Francis chose to skip reading his speech aloud since he wanted to be able to hear from everyone, Pope Francis chose to skip reading his speech aloud since he wanted to be able to hear from everyone, Pope Francis chose to skip reading his speech aloud since he wanted to be able to hear from everyone.

In the full text, the pope said COP26 “represents an urgent summons to provide effective responses to the unprecedented ecological crisis and the crisis of values that we are presently experiencing, and in this way to offer concrete hope to future generations.”

He proposed “three concepts” to guide their joint efforts: “openness to interdependence and sharing; the dynamism of love; and the call to respect.”

“Recognizing that the world is interconnected means not only realizing the harmful effects of our actions, but also identifying behaviors and solutions to be adopted, in an attitude of openness to interdependence and sharing the responsibility and ways to care for others and the environment, he wrote.

Religious and spiritual traditions can help promote love, which “creates bonds and expands existence, for it draws people out of themselves and toward others,” especially the poor, he wrote.

Faith traditions, he said, can help break down “barriers of selfishness,” counter today’s “throwaway culture” and combat the “seeds of conflict: greed, indifference, ignorance, fear, injustice, insecurity and violence,” which harm people and the planet.

“We can face this challenge” with personal examples, action and education, the pope wrote.

Finally, the pope wrote, there must be respect for creation, respect for others, “for ourselves and for the Creator, but also mutual respect between faith and science.”

Respect, he wrote, is “an empathetic and active experience of desiring to know others and to enter into dialogue with them, in order to walk together on a common journey.”

The meeting, “Faith and Science: Toward COP26,” was organized by the embassies of the Kingdom of Bahrain and Italy to the Holy See, together with the Vatican. The U.K. and Italy were co-chairing the summit in Glasgow, where parties from 197 nations are meant to find agreement on how to tackle the threat of climate change. †
The rosary is the perfect prayer

For Catholics, it’s by far the most popular devotion. Catholics throughout the world pray the rosary daily. Holy Cross Father Theodore Hesburgh prayed three rosaries a day after macular degeneration made it impossible for him to read the Liturgy of the Hours. St. Teresa of Calcutta in India always seemed to have a rosary in her hand, as did St. Pope John Paul II. People pray the rosary in front of abortion centers. In many remote places where people can’t get to Mass, they can, and do, say a daily rosary.

Although it’s the most popular devotion, it is not as popular as it was during the middle of the 20th century. Then, families prayed the rosary together usually right after the evening meal. It was known as the “family rosary,” and people knew the slogan, “The family that prays together, stays together.”

That slogan was coined by Holy Cross Father Patrick Peyton, known as the “Rosary Priest.” From the time he was a seminarian until his death in 1992 at age 91, Peyton conducted “Rosary Crusades” in 40 countries, attracting 28 million people.

He also called each of the 50 points of the rosary “a compendium of the entire Gospel.”

The rosary has been an important part of Catholicism for about eight centuries. In the late 12th century, laity who lived near monasteries began to pray 150 Hail Marys in imitation of the 150 Psalms the monks chanted. St. Dominic and other Dominicans popularized the devotion in the 13th century.

In the early 15th century, a Carthusian monk also named Dominic divided the 150 Hail Marys into three sets of 50. He also called each of the 50 points of meditation a rosarium (rose garden) because the rose was a symbol of joy and Mary was “the cause of our joy” for bearing Christ. Thus the name “rosary” became the name of the devotion.

Another 15th-century Carthusian monk, Henry of Kalkar, then divided the 50 Hail Marys into decades with an Our Father between each. A book published in 1483 listed the 15 mysteries that we meditated about through the 20th century except that the fourth glorious mystery combined Mary’s assumption and coronation and the fifth glorious mystery was the Last Judgment. St. Pope John Paul II added the luminous mysteries in 2002.

Although the prayer said most often with the rosary is the Hail Mary, addressed to Jesus’ mother, the main focus is on the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

These are the “mysteries” or events that we think about while praying the rosary. The joyful mysteries include the events in the Gospel according to Luke up to when Jesus was 12, the luminous mysteries are about events from the time of Jesus’ baptism through his institution of the Eucharist, the sorrowful mysteries are about Jesus’ passion and death, and the glorified mysteries are about his resurrection and ascension, plus the descent of the Holy Spirit and the assumption and coronation of Mary.

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La idea de que se les pidiera que aceptaran responsabilidades que debían cumplir, son en la nuestra. Comodidad y la seguridad que esta sociedad nos proporciona. Como la mayoría de nosotros, respetamos la riqueza y deseábamos la comodidad. En la época de Jesús, los discípulos aceptaron los valores religiosos y culturales de su tiempo y se adhirieron a ellos en sus vidas. Muchos de los discípulos tenían familias a las que mantenían y responsabilidades que debían cumplir. La idea de que ellos se les pidiera que aceptaran responsabilidades que debían cumplir, es lo que nos lleva a considerar si es posible seguir a Jesús y no guardar nuestras cosas materiales o dones espirituales, como lo hacen los discípulos de su tiempo.

¿Quién podrá salvarse?” (Heb 4:12–13). El hecho de que seamos administradores, no propietarios, nos ayuda a comprender lo que Jesús dice a sus discípulos (y a nosotros) en la lectura del Evangelio de la misa de este domingo. Para empezar, ¿por qué debemos preocuparnos por entregar los dones que le pertenecen a Dios? ¿Por qué debemos preocuparnos por entregar los dones que nos ha dado gratuitamente nuestro Señor, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha dado, este hombre que nos ha 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Events Calendar

The Villages of Indiana will host virtual information nights on Oct. 25, Nov. 29 for those considering being foster parents.

The Villages of Indiana will host two virtual information sessions for Indiana parents interested in learning more about providing foster homes for children. The sessions are from 7-8:30 p.m. on Oct. 25 and Nov. 29.

The Villages of Indiana, one of the state’s largest private therapeutic foster care providers, supports foster families every step of the way. The agency provides training and 24-hour professional support for families who are willing to provide loving homes for children, especially sibling groups and teens.

To register for the sessions, call 317-773-6500. For information on The Villages, contact them at 800-874-6880 or visit www.villageskids.org.

Webinar to address ‘Financial Success Under Any Circumstance’ on Oct. 13

The Knights of Columbus Midwest Region will offer a webinar titled “Financial Success Under Any Circumstance” at 7:30 p.m. on Oct. 13. The presenter is industry leader Van Sandt.

The webinar will address such questions as how to maximize Social Security, building a legacy for your family, reducing or eliminating income taxes, and how to build retirement income. The webinar is free, but registration is required at cutt.ly/FInancial-webinar. More information is also available at that site.

Ray and Jeanie Beagle

Ray and Jeanie (Duffey) Beagle, members of St. Mary Parish in Greensburg, will celebrate their 65th wedding anniversary on Oct. 13. The couple was married in St. Mary Church in Greensburg on Oct. 13, 1956.

They have four children: Karen Meyer, Kathy Porter, Chris and Rick Beagle. The couple also has 11 grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

Hugh and Donna McLeish

Hugh and Donna (Tuberosa) McLeish, members of Sacred Heart Parish in Clinton, celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on Aug. 27.

The couple was married in Sacred Heart Church in Clinton on Aug. 26, 1961. They have five children: Krista McLeish Grange, Kristine McLeish Slama, Kristopher McLeish, Kristy McLeish Granger, and Kevin McLeish. The couple also has 18 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

Steven and Edith Lecher

Steven and Edith (Bedel) Lecher, members of St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Decatur County, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on Sept. 25.

The couple was married in the former St. Anne Church in Castleton Corner Lane, Castleton on Sept. 25, 1971. They have four children: Jessica Bruner, Cindy Gallagher, Angie Hudepohl, Ria Hudepohl, Michelle Scheider, Melissa, Alvin, Andrew, Carl, and Matthew. The couple also has 16 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Donald and Janice Murphy

Donald and Janice (Green) Murphy, members of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Parish in Indianapolis, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on Sept. 20.

The couple was married in St. Therese Church in Albany, Ga., on Sept. 20, 1971. They have five children: Jessica Bruner, Christine Lopez, Regina Young, Maria, Donald and Michael Murphy. The couple also has 16 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

November 2


November 3

MCL Center, 5520 Castleton Corner Lane, Indianapolis. Solos Seniors. 5:30 p.m., Catholic, educational, charitable and social single—separated, widowed or divorced—age 50 and older, new members welcome, also call about regular Friday night dinner events. Information: 317-796-3805 or 317-243-0777.


The couple also has 31 grandchildren. †

The couple also has 16 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Hugh and Donna (Tuberosa) McLeish, members of Sacred Heart Parish in Clinton, celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on Aug. 27.

The couple was married in Sacred Heart Church in Clinton on Aug. 26, 1961. They have five children: Krista McLeish Grange, Kristine McLeish Slama, Kristopher McLeish, Kristy McLeish Granger, and Kevin McLeish. The couple also has 18 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

They have four children: Karen Meyer, Kathy Porter, Chris and Rick Beagle. The couple also has 11 grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

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Sisters of Providence’s new postulant received into community on Sept. 21

By Sean Gallagher

Leslie Dao was received on Sept. 21 into the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, in St. Mary-of-the-Woods, as a postulant.

Born in Saigon, Vietnam, Dao, 44, emigrated to the U.S. in 1990, settling in Kansas City, Mo., and later moving to California. She is the youngest of 15 children.

Dao earned a bachelor’s degree in sociology at California State University, Northridge, and a bachelor’s degree in social work at the University of St. Louis in St. Louis.

She spent time with another community of women religious and ministered in Texas with Catholic Charities there before returning to Missouri. Beginning in 2014, Dao began ministry as a pastoral associate for immigrants and refugees at St. Pius Parish in St. Louis.

At St. Pius Parish, she learned of the Sisters of Providence and felt discerning a possible vocation to the community. While a postulant, Dao will learn about the practices, traditions and ministries of the Sisters of Providence. After a year as a postulant, she will be eligible to enter into the first year of the community’s novitiate, at which point she would receive the title of sister.
Respect Life award winners offer the ‘justness of a good witness’

By Natalie Hoefer

Mary Howard, event coordinator and recipient of this year’s archdiocesan T. O’Meara Respect Life Award, and the City of Columbus chain of prayer intentions leaders participate in a chain of prayer intentions in Columbus. (Submitted photo).

Respect Life award winners offered the ‘justness of a good witness’

Mary Howard said she never sought an award.

“I just want to do this for the babies,” she said about all the babies and the mothers, working with the mothers.

Despite her look of deep concentration, recognition is what she received.

“Not everyone receives an award for their pro-life efforts,” she said.

Howard was unable to receive the award in person—she was busy living out her pro-life leadership at the Greater Columbus Respect Life Clinic event that same day, an event which she coordinated this year as she has for many years prior.

“I was torn about coming to Indianapolis to receive the award because I want to be with my community,” she admitted in a phone interview with The Criterion.

Howard was recommended for this award by her friends and community of St. Paul the Apostle Parish and the Knights of Columbus Council 46599.

“Mary is a true Christian warrior woman as well as an activist,” they wrote on the nomination form. "Twice a year, in the spring and in the fall, she leads up the 40 Days for Life Campaign at St. Paul (Pro-life). She also coordinates and promotes the October Pro-Life Day in Greater Columbus. She’s the promoter and helps organize her parish attending the annual Indiana March for Life and is active in the Right to Life of Indianapolis and Indiana Right to Life organizations. She is always willing to present pro-life topics to groups, including the Knights of Columbus Council, and encourages her community to be involved and help moms in need.

Mary Howard, 49, said she raised pro-life as one of eight children.

“My mom was very pro-life. I grew up pro-life.”

Most of her volunteer time is spent speaking in public venues to promote the Planned Parenthood abortion center in Indianapolis, where she also serves as a sidewalk counselor.

“I’ve been doing that a long time,” said Howard. “It’s like an honor to be there. I also [obstruct] for people who can’t come.”

There are many reasons people get involved in the pro-life cause, she said. “I just feel like every human has a voice.”

“The right to life is sacred. If you don’t respect life, nothing can be respectful. It’s a moral thing. It’s just not to kill babies.”

In the midst of the effort to respect life are challenges to religious liberty, the archbishop said.

“We must never lose sight and pass away the constitutional right, the moral right, and our voluntary hospitality.”

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DINNER

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“There are women who weep and have grieved for 30 years, 20 years. And I want to say something to you. As I continue on, you may hear a voice from some place inside you, ‘You remember what you did? You will never be free.’ If you hear that voice, you just say, ‘In the name of Jesus, I can be free.’

‘You see, ladies and gentlemen, no matter what you’ve done, there is no other name by which we can be saved, and no other name under heaven that can free us from what we are tormented by. But we must repent. We must repent to be saved. Because you have confessed that sin, I ask you, ‘Why do you torment yourself with something that Christ has thrown into the depths of the sea?’

‘So, if you hear that accusing voice, know that it isn’t coming from me. I have come to tell you a story which only Christ can free you. I have not come to bring you any shame.’

The miracle

Jessen shared that the miracle of her life began when her biological mother was 17 and pregnant with her in 1977. Seeking an abortion 7 1/2 months into the pregnancy, her mother was told she needed a late-term saline abortion. “A saline abortion is a saline salt solution that’s injected into the mother’s womb,” Jessen noted. “The baby gulps that solution, it burns, blinds and suffocates the child, and then the baby is to be born dead within 24 hours. But instead of being born dead, I survived.

I was born alive after 18 hours after being burned alive in my mother’s womb. Born alive in an abortion clinic on April 6, 1977, by the sheer power of Jesus Christ and no one else.

‘The Lord gave me such magnificent proof. My medical records state on them, Born during saline abortion, [on] April 6, 1977, 6 a.m., 2 1/2 pounds.’ And here’s my favorite part, ready? ‘No resuscitation required on arrival at the hospital.’ Jesus said, ‘She’s not going to die. She’s going to go out through her life, and she’s going to proclaim my name because I am hers and she is mine.’

‘Nothing is impossible for God.’

The gift of an angel

Now 44, Jessen shared that one of the reasons she survived the abortion was because she was born at 6 a.m.—and the defining reason she is alive is because of a nurse.

Six o’clock in the morning was a great time to be born,” she told the audience at the Marriott in downtown Indianapolis. “You know why? The abortionist wasn’t at work yet so he couldn’t finish me off. He would have ended my life with strangulation, suffocation or leaving me to die. But a nurse called an ambulance and had me transferred to a hospital. She saved my life. I often wonder if that nurse was human or angelic. I’ll only know when I get home with God.

‘As a newborn, I was placed in the incubator, weighing 2 1/2 pounds. After several months of not dying, they said, ‘This baby girl has a tremendous will to live. She does not want to die.’ That is right. Do I look like someone who wants to die?’

The strength and support of others

As she shared her story from a podium, Jessen was supported on both her sides by two men from the audience, David Liebel and David Certo. She asked for that support as a precaution against falling because she has cerebral palsy. As she rested her arms on theirs, she talked about the most important points of her speech about the strength and support of a woman who changed her life.

During her birth, Jessen was placed in emergency foster care and eventually placed in “a wonderful foster home by a woman named Penny,” she said.

“She was sent from Jesus. She loved me, and her daughter adopted me. I was adopted at 3 1/2, but not before the doctor said to my Penny, ‘Gianna will never be anything more than a vegetable. She will never get out of this bed. She’s never going to walk.’

‘Penny saved my heart. She died nine years ago. She was a single woman who cared for 56 foster children. And I was one. The faith of one woman changed the whole course of my life.’

The quality of life with Christ

As 17 months, I was diagnosed with cerebral palsy, which was caused directly by a lack of oxygen to my brain while I was surviving an abortion.” Jessen noted. “So, I wouldn’t be disabled if I had not survived an abortion. But you can imagine how I feel when I hear the argument, ‘If the baby is disabled, we need to terminate the pregnancy.’ Who are you, healthy person, to look at me and determine for me what my quality of life is?”

Jessen told the audience she has found the true quality of her life by placing her trust in Christ.

“When you need him every single, solitary second of your life, guess who you get? You don’t just get some version of Jesus that’s sort of out there. You get Jesus. And guess what you get with the real Jesus? You get the most awesome quality of life because the power of Christ can rest upon me and my weakness. He is strong on my behalf in this broken world. And I would rather limp through life and let my legs be utilized to be a fisher of men. In all these years, I got to limp so I could come to know my Savior.

‘Bless his holy name. I shouldn’t be walking, and I do. Because the Lord makes the lame to walk, and not just walk. I finished two marathons as well [in 2005-06].’

Then in one of the many moments she injected humor into her talk, Jessen laughed as she shared an aside with the audience at the Marriott in downtown Indianapolis. “You know why? The abortionist wasn’t at work yet so he couldn’t finish me off. He would have ended my life with strangulation, suffocation or leaving me to die. But a nurse called an ambulance and had me transferred to a hospital. She saved my life. I often wonder if that nurse was human or angelic. I’ll only know when I get home with God.

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The path from heartbeat to healing

Gasps could be heard throughout the ballroom when Jessen shared the moment when she met her biological mother for the first time.

“I have forgiven my biological mother for what she had done,” she began. “She came to an event like this, and she said, ‘Hi, I’m your mother.’ I silently prayed to Jesus because it felt as if the universe was crushing me. It was the most difficult thing. I looked at her and said, ‘Ma’am, you need to know that I am a Christian, and I forgive you.’ She said, ‘I don’t want your forgiveness.’

‘You see if she received my forgiveness, she would have to admit what she had done. But that wasn’t my concern. My portion was to forgive. I looked at her again and said, ‘Ma’am, you must need to know I’m a Christian, and I forgive you.’

Jessen’s biological mother again berated her, telling her, ‘You are an embarrassment to this family!’

In that moment, Jessen said she heard a voice speak to her—‘the one I have known since I was 3 years old, the voice of the Lord, my God.’ She said the voice told her to be strong, to stand up for herself.

‘I said, ‘Ma’am, I am a Christian, and I will forgive you, but I will no longer allow you to speak to me in this manner.’ I got up and walked out. My part was finished.’

Her efforts to bring others to Christ weren’t finished. She shared the story of the last gift she shared with her adoptive father, “an alcoholic and an amazing architect.”

“I was able to lead him to Christ over the phone on his death bed,” she said.

‘I say no matter what has been done to you, that all doesn’t matter when you come to Christ. You can change generations. You don’t have to be a victim for the rest of your life.’

A parting thought

Jessen said that the journey of her life—of any life—should be measured by the travels with Christ. There are ordinary people, and there are extraordinary people, and it doesn’t mean you have to be famous,” she said. “Some of the most extraordinary people are hidden. I mean the caliber of person and how much they love Christ, how much they care about them. ‘I owe everything to Jesus.’”

SYNOD

continued from page 1

April, featuring a consultation among local Catholics discussing the preparatory document and questionnaire that the synod office will send out along with guidelines for how the consultation should work. Once the diocesan consultations have concluded, members of national bishops’ conferences will have a period of discernment to reflect and subsequently send a summary of that reflection to the Vatican’s synod secretariat by April.

The listening sessions and discernment are meant to assist participants, mainly bishops, who will meet at the general assembly of the synod in October 2023. †
Parents’ example is key to passing on faith to toddlers

By Jonathan Lewis

Parenting toddlers involves allowing them to transport you into their world of adventure and imagination. Passing along faith to our toddler has involved introducing our child to a Catholic imagination for the world around us. Like a growing gallery wall, each year my wife and I add new traditions and practices to our family spirituality. Here are four ways we have passed on our Catholic faith to our toddler.

Create a spiritual calendar

Our daughter has never been a good sleeper. This required very early on that we maintain consistent schedules and routines to help her cue into bedtime. In a similar way, the Church gives us the Liturgy of the Hours and a liturgical calendar to form spiritual rhythms in our day and year. Families, too, can develop a spiritual calendar. Our calendar includes special anniversaries, family saint days, liturgical seasons and baptism anniversaries.

On a daily basis, our best family prayer time is at night. Our bedtime routine includes thanking God for what happened during the day and praying for friends, family members and anything else that pops into the mind of a 2-year-old.

One simple structure to family prayer is to use these common relationship phrases as prompts: “Jesus, I love you. Thank you for … I’m sorry for … and please help …” As we lay our daughter in her crib, we sing a hymn and add in classics like “Salve Regina,” “Amazing Grace” or simple chants from the Taize community.

Sit up front

Sunday Mass can be a particularly meaningful yet exasperating time to parent a toddler. We have been engaged with religious practice if their own relationship with Jesus Christ and they see an image of Our Lady of Potty Training or St. Mary of the Meltdown. To them, rarely reflect our reality. I would love to have saccharine images of the child Jesus that rarely reminds us of everything that is good, true and beautiful to God.

Direct the heart toward God.

Imagination leads us to remember that nothing is far from God as St. Monica said, or in the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, that “grace builds on nature.” Whenever we practice being kind, patient or saying “I’m sorry,” we are passing faith to our children.

Sometimes a sense of fervor or a limited imagination leads us to think that the only way we share our faith is by spending time in religious buildings or talking about religious things. It’s important to remember that everything that is good, true and beautiful directs the heart toward God.

Unfortunately, our religious iconography rarely reminds us of this. Too often we see saccharine images of the child Jesus that rarely reflect our reality. I would love to see an image of Our Lady of Potty Training or St. Mary of the Meltdown.

While not discouraging us from a living and explicit practice of faith, finding God in all things encourages us to remember that the messy and ordinary work of family life—dishes, walks, laughter and story time—are privileged moments of grace that allow us to participate in God’s goodness.

Lead by example

As I genuflected and walked into the pew one Sunday holding my daughter’s hand, I felt her pull instead of quickly following me in. I looked back to find her also genuflecting, something I had not yet taught her to do. As parents of a toddler, we learned very quickly just how spongible our daughter was. In his historic study on youth and religion, sociologist Christian Smith notes that when it comes to passing on faith to children, parents tend to “get what you are,” that is, young people are most likely to stay engaged with religious practice if their parents do also.

The most important thing that we can do to pass along our Catholic faith is the same, whether we are parenting toddlers or teenagers: recommit to our own relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church. This also means showing our children how we are practicing our faith by stepping into the adoration chapel, listening to a morning meditation together and committing to going to Mass each Sunday. For toddlers, more than any prayer we teach, the example we lead helps build a lasting moral imagination.

As a parent of a toddler and newborn, our family’s practice of faith includes different rhythms and calendars that shape a Catholic imagination. Like the monks of a monastery, our family also gets up at all hours of day and night to call on God’s help. Our chapel is our home, our pews are rocking chairs, our brevities are children’s books. Each messy or mundane act of parenting can become a doorway into spiritual practice, for us and our children, living each moment of family life intentionally as an offering made to God instead of an obligation.

( Jonathan Lewis is vice president of customer operations at Catholic Faith Technologies. He has worked in parish and diocesan ministry for more than 15 years and currently lives in Washington with his wife and two children.)
For Father LeRoy Clementich, Church was community

When Clem first arrived in Anchorage, Alaska, in 1939, some might have mistaken him just as another senior citizen.

No one ever thought of the priest as an old man, and everyone called him Clem. He was 56 when he died in July, back at Notre Dame, Ind., yet it still shocked those of us who knew him back in his Alaskan days.

The last time my husband and I saw Clem, in 2018, we were on a cross-country road trip and picked him up at the University of Notre Dame for dinner. I was delighted to see the campus, and Clem suggested an Italian restaurant nearby.

Unbeknown to him, the restaurant was hosting a style show that night. So, as we sipped our wine, Clem chatted with other churchgoers in chic ensembles sashayed past our table. The next year, when we made the same trip, Clem declined, and his homecoming to Anchorage was cut short.

Parkinson’s disease and age were taking a toll. Clem was born on a ranch in North Dakota in 1924 and attended a one-room country school. In an article I once wrote about Clem, he told me, “I discovered God when out poiling, riding our horse, seeing the clouds come up over the hills. God’s gift of nature overwhelmed me.”

In 1945, with the army in Germany, he served as a chaplain’s assistant. When it was time to leave, he nearly slipped Clem a contact number at Notre Dame and told him to call if he ever thought about the priesthood. Clem was ordained a Holy Cross priest in 1957. He taught at the high school and university levels, studied theology in Belgium, and brought his pastoral touch to many parishes.

Fishing took him on vacations to Alaska where he would always check in with then-Archbishop Francis Hurley, who encouraged him to come to serve the archdiocese.

When Clem asked for his order to change, one of his superiors asked, Are there any problems in your past? In 2005, Catholic Extension, which serves mission dioceses, awarded Clem its “Pilgrim” award for heroic service in the archdiocese.

Not long after his death, the Holy Cross News Service sent Clem’s letter—for 2021—to his correspondents’ list.

“Christmas in July? This wasn’t just Clem’s efficiency at work. He must have written this, given to his superior along with his address list, and said, make sure my friends and I here this isn’t to send to them. Clem was community, and even in death, he was community to know he loved them.

For me, a final lesson from Clem: Real faith is to those who are the youthful ones you think will live forever.

Bedtime stories of saints—comfort and companionship

We never really outgrow the desire for a bedtime story. It just takes different forms when we’re older.


In the past, this could be imparted upon the bare-bones version of darkness. When it doesn’t come with special effects, it flaps on more lights in the listener’s imagination.

Claire Ellendson understood this, in a fundamental way, when she was serving on NET Ministries, an evangelization team in the Catholic TV network.

After an exhausting, exhilarating day of talking to teens about Jesus, she and a teammate would collapse in the house of a kind stranger—a sparsely clothed basement, parallel twin beds in a corner bedframe. The roommate would ask a simple question, a Catholic twist on that universal childhood question: “Tell me a story about a saint.”

She knew there was a deep reservoir of saint stories in Claire, a cradle Catholic from Faribault, Minn., and the third of 10 children.

We are naturally drawn to a good story,” she said. Claire has a weekday podcast she titled “Dead Friend,” which is how Claire sees the saints: like older sisters and wiser friends in heaven.

Each podcast features one saint and results from research and prayer. With this in mind, she opened the story: “When my great-aunt, her pajamas nestled in her apartment in Minneapolis, said ‘it’s got to be into the spirit of bedtime stories,’ she said, laughing. “I’m chilling.”

The goal was to fill an unmit: n words—conversational podcasts—not academic—that highlight the humanity of the saints. Her voice is unpretentious. She’s both eloquent and unafraid to use young-adult speak, describing when a saint “wasn’t down with something” or didn’t “vibe” with someone.

It appears to be working. Since her inaugural podcast, the last August, she’s gathered more than 10,000 downloads—some from far-flung cities across the globe.

Claire was the keynote speaker at a year-anniversary conference by bringing on a special guest: her local bishop, Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda, who discussed his love for St. Joseph.

The list of saints she’s covered is lengthy: St. Maximilian Kolbe, St. Jane de Chantal, Blessed Chiara Badano, St. Lidwina of Schiedam, St. Gemma Galgani, Venerable Elizabeth Kenny, and so on. But she’s got enough to go, and she now fields requests.

Her podcast has been so great because it’s simply: ‘Wow, this is how the Lord worked in their lives!’ And that builds up my faith, it builds up my attitude, putting the back bumper is neither Christocentric nor Catholic.

When it comes to life-and-death issues facing local Catholics, the nation and the world: through the lens of the Gospel and Catholic teaching.

But, instead, it appears that more than ever before, many Catholics—much like the general public—make important the spiritual dimension.

For Catholics who put their faith first, there is one way above all others to view life—the Catholic way. To them, faith is a lens through which we look at spiritual issues facing local communities, the nation and the world: through the lens of the Gospel and Catholic teaching.

To them, faith is a lens through which we look at spiritual issues facing local communities, the nation and the world: through the lens of the Gospel and Catholic teaching.
The Book of Wisdom is the source of the first reading for Mass this weekend. As the name implies, this ancient book was designed to insist that believing in the one God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, was not ridiculous, but in fact the ultimate in wisdom and human logic. This weekend’s reading, an interesting literary technique occurs. Wisdom is presented not as an abstract virtue or reality of the mind, but as a person. Possibly as a result, Christians long ago came to identify the most profound wisdom with the Holy Spirit. Jewish scholars realized at the time that the last analysis gold was of no greater value that sand. Realizing this fact, it was easy to look either with scorn or pity upon people who spent their earthly lives and even acted criminally just to obtain gold. The lust for gold was the supreme idol. Understanding the inevitable worthlessness of gold is true wisdom.

For its second reading, the Church presents a section from the Epistle to the Hebrews. Drawing upon the ancient Jewish notion of material wealth, accompanied by ignoring God and his law, the epistle declares that knowing what God has revealed, and living accordingly, result from the greatest wisdom.

St. Mark’s Gospel furnishes the last reading. It is very familiar to Christians. It is the story of a man who approached Jesus to ask him what was necessary to gain eternal life. Jesus answered that the person truly wishing to have life must obey the Ten Commandments, the great gift of God to the people of Israel through Moses.

Question Corner

Church follows the instruction of Christ in ordaining only men to the priesthood

Q

know that currently women are not ordained as priests in the Catholic Church. I have always wondered why this is, as we live in a society that emphasizes gender equality. I have asked many people about this, but have received vague answers—or answers that don’t fully address the issue.

Would you explain why women are not allowed to be ordained in the Catholic Church? (Virginia)

A

The fundamental reason why the Catholic Church ordains only males to the priesthood is historical. Jesus chose only men in selecting the twelve Apostles and the Church feels bound by that choice made by Jesus. And so, an all-male priesthood has been an unbroken tradition in the 2,000 years of the Church’s history. In his 1994 apostolic letter “Ordinatio Sacerdotalis,” St. John Paul II declared that “the Church has no authority whatsoever to ordain women.”

There are those who say that women might well make better priests because they seem more equipped to minister to people who are more likely to be sympathetic in the confessional. But the debate is not over who might make better priests but over what Jesus intended.

Some might argue that Jesus felt bound by the customs of his day that limited power to males and that, if he were living now, he would have chosen women for priestly ministry.

But the fallacy of that argument is this: Jesus broke all kinds of cultural barriers and regularly rejected societal customs.

He spoke to a Samaritan woman, which was forbidden to Jews; he welcomed Mary Magdalene as one of his closest followers, revealed his risen body to her first and asked her to spread the news of his resurrection; he freed the woman caught in adultery from being stoned.

So, Jesus was clearly not afraid to go beyond the expectations of his time— which leads one to think that if he wanted to select women for the priesthood he would have done so, regardless of what the customs of his day dictated.

The Church’s unbroken tradition of an all-male priesthood has nothing to do with gender and its judgment from which the Church supports, but everything to do with Jesus and the history of the Church.

Q

Can a Catholic priest officiate at the renewal of vows for a non-Catholic couple? (Location withheld)

A

I’ve never seen any rule on this, but if asked by a non-Catholic couple, I would have no hesitancy doing what you say—listening to them repeat their marriage vows and then saying a prayer to bless their union. This, of course, assumes that the couple is in a marriage considered valid by the Catholic Church.

I would not participate if, for example, either of the parties was remarried with a former spouse still alive—because that would be inconsistent with the Catholic Church’s views on marriage and divorce. It’s also important to point out that typically in the Catholic Church, married couples receive a special blessing on significant occasions, such as wedding anniversaries but do not renew their nuptial vows.

The primary reason for this is that such a renewal years after the wedding can bring about confusion if a declaration of nullity (commonly known as an annulment) is sought later by either spouse. This reasoning would apply to anyone in a marriage viewed as valid by the Church, including those who are non-Catholic.

(Questions may be sent to Father Kenneth Doyle at askfatherdoyle@gmail.com and 30 Columbus Circle Dr, Albany, New York 12203.) ❧

BAUYSTA, Maria, 78, St. Gabriel the Archangel, Indianapolis, Sept. 11. Mother of Howard and Myra Bauysta.


BULLOCK, Lorrain, 60, St. Gabriel the Archangel, Indianapolis, Aug. 27. Husband of Aniceh Alean Ortiz.


CASTILLO, Oscar Aldair Arbas, 25, St. Gabriel the Archangel, Indianapolis, Sept. 10. Son of Maya Castillo.


FRIEDMAN, Richard, 60, St. Roch, Indianapolis, Sept. 10. Son of Mayra Friedman. Great-grandfather of four. Great-great-grandfather of one.


Adoration campaign at St. Bridget and St. Gabriel was ‘blessed by the Lord’

By Natalie Hoefer

LIBERTY—it’s 2 o’clock on a sunny Friday afternoon. It’s not a usual time to walk into church, but that’s what Bill and Kathy Heinle did—walked into St. Bridget of Ireland Church in Liberty in the middle of the day.

They did the same thing at the same time the three glorious Fridays.

The Heinles, members of St. Bridget of Ireland Parish, came each time for a very special scheduled appointment—an appointment to be present with Christ in the Blessed Sacrament for an hour, one because I want to spend time with Christ,” said Kathy.

Her husband Bill agreed, saying he liked “to have the time to visit with the Lord.”

The Heinles are among the many parishioners of St. Bridget and St. Gabriel Parishes in Connersville who participated in a 24-hour-a-day, 31-day adoration campaign.

“The goal of the campaign was to help build an awareness of and love for Christ in the Eucharist,” said Father Dustin Boehm, pastor of the two parishes in southeastern Indiana.

The idea grew from a conversation he had with Father Jeremy Gries, pastor of Holy Family Parish in New Albany and dean for the New Albany Deanery.

“He’s the bread of life for the world”

The two friends were discussing capital campaigns—St. Gabriel is in the midst of one called Building the Beacon of Hope.

“That got us thinking, what about doing a spiritual campaign?” Father Boehm said. He noted a 2019 Pew Research Center study that showed only 30% of the U.S. population identify as Catholic believe that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist.

“I was talking about how great it would be to have a spiritual campaign to help turn that around.”

Father Boehm set the start date of the adoration campaign for his two parishes for Aug. 15, not as much for it being the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Mother as for the topics of the Sunday Gospel readings in the weeks leading up to and after that date.

“First, you have Jesus calling the disciples to come and rest,” he explained. “It’s through this great time of prayer to rest in our Lord, to sit and be with our Lord.”

“And that leads into [the Gospel of] John chapter 6, where the Lord gives this enormous discourse on how he is the bread of life for the world.”

“John 6 is a huge portion of Scripture that really informs our theology on the Eucharist. If you want to know what heaven is, come to adoration. This will let us know what heaven will be like, to be with him for all eternity, the source of our joy.”

Father Boehm also noted that spending time in adoration “gives time to examine our priorities. Is prayer, this relationship with Christ, a priority?”

Think on the time put into the parish fair, extracurricular activities, school, work—all these things are good and necessary, but where are you in the whole prayer and resting with God is a priority? [Adoration] is a perfect opportunity to test who your priorities are.”

A frequently-asked-questions sheet was distributed to parishioners of St. Bridget and St. Gabriel answering questions about adoration.

“One person asked if you had to kneel all the time, which of course you don’t,” said Froncowski. “Another asked if there were certain prayers they had to say. It opened up the idea that they can use that time as they wish and still grow closer to the Lord.”

“A different level of prayer”

This concept of leaving adoration time open to the Holy Spirit dawned on Darlene Chewning through her experience during the spiritual campaign.

“At the very beginning, I went in with a plan of giving the rosary and the Divine Mercy chaplet,” said the member of St. Bridget. “I didn’t want an agenda. I decided to let myself do whatever I felt at the time, even if I just stared at the Blessed Sacrament. With an agenda, you’re not open to the Holy Spirit’s agenda.”

Through the 31-day campaign, Chewning developed a love for adoration.

“At first, you think an hour is a long time, but that hour flew by,” she said. “I felt like when I walked out of there in the morning that it was just a little bit of a different person. I was holding onto that feeling that God is ‘right there with me one on one. As I went through the day, I just carried it with me.”

“You think of your life being busy and crazy as your reality. But when I was in church before the Blessed Sacrament, that is the reality, with a capital ‘R.’ So sometimes you have to escape from reality to find that reality.”

Each week, Father Boehm asked the adorers to pray for a different intention, including for the new school year, those suffering from addictions, those who have walked away from the faith, military and first responders, and for a deepening devotion to the Eucharist.

“You really felt like you were actually helping those with addiction and the back-to-school kids and first responders,” said Chewning. “There’s just something about praying there in church in front of the exposed Blessed Sacrament. You really felt like you were directly talking to God and making a direct impact. It’s just a different level of prayer.”

“A stark and welcome change”

Father Boehm said there was no doubt “this effort was blessed by the Lord.”

He heard confirmation of that fact repeatedly during a time of sharing after the final Benediction on the 31st day.

He jotted down people’s responses regarding their experience during the adoration campaign. Certain themes recurred, such as a feeling of peace; a deeper connection to the Lord; a deeper appreciation of God’s love; and “a feeling of Mary in a Martha world—sitting at the feet of Jesus.”

Some noted an improved relationship with their spouse. One commented that they “prayed and read Scripture with my spouse—we’d never prayed together before.” Another shared how a group launched “new kinds of conversation with their spouse. One commented that”

Others appreciated having time to “slow down” and “having alone time.” One person commented that they were “so busy—this was a stark and welcome change.”

Early in the campaign a story was shared on social media about a person who returned to church after years of absence.

“Something inspired her to go out for a walk.” Father Boehm said that story was then walking by St. Bridget’s and saw that the church was lit up. She hadn’t been in there in 19 years, since her grandfather passed away.

“She had no idea that adoration was going on, but had the urge to walk in. One of the guardians [adorers] recognized her and greeted her.”

“Any time, she wouldn’t have been able to get in the church. But because adoration was going on, she got to connect with God.”

Father Boehm hopes to make the 31-day adoration campaign an annual experience.

“In the meantime, adoration opportunities at both parishes will increase from a few hours once a month to 24 consecutive hours at St. Bridget starting on the first Friday of each month, and almost 33 hours at St. Gabriel starting on the first Tuesday.

The Heinles hope to participate in the increased adoration hours, particularly Bill.

“I’ve never done adoration before this,” said the former Lutheran. “I absolutely feel closer to the Lord than I did before.”

The Heinles are among the many parishioners of St. Bridget and St. Gabriel who participated in the 31-day adoration campaign held by St. Bridget Parish and St. Gabriel Parish in Connersville. (Photo by Natalie Hoefer)
My grandmother offered to buy me another ticket to Rome, but I turned her down. I couldn’t throw her good money after bad. All I could think of was sleeping.

 Barely any time had passed when my mom came into the bedroom. The tour company had called and felt awful about everything. They had a seat on a direct flight to Rome, leaving in just a few hours and paid in full, if I wanted it.

 I didn’t want to say yes. I was so tired. But this was a new chance to have things made right. I shook off the sleep and was driven back to O’Hare. Only hours later, I was on my way to Rome.

 The tour company explained that everything would be taken care of for me: they were contacting the chaufferes at the hotel in Rome so that I would be met at the airport by some of my friends and taken where I needed to go.

 While over the Atlantic on the darkened overnight flight, I leaned back in the chair. The ordeal was over—God had provided after all seemed lost.

 Still, I didn’t sleep on the flight, mentally preparing for landing in a foreign country and figuring out how to make my way through customs for the first time. Everything went as planned, and I entered into the arrivals section of Rome’s Fiumicino Airport. I couldn’t help but feel like a little bit of the conquering hero as I strained to pick out my friends. The lost pilgrim had found Italy.

 But there was no greeting party. I walked the distance of the whole place after getting my luggage, wondering what was keeping them. I waited … and waited. I tried to call the hotel, with no luck.

 It turns out that there was a problem with the phone lines in its area. The tour company had never reached anyone as well, and without a cell phone, they were unable to reach me.

 No one was coming.

 Even worse, no one knew I was here.

 As the afternoon wore on, I went to the information desk with a folded piece of paper containing the hotel’s name and address. I asked for directions to get there and after several people helped, they reached the same conclusion: the hotel was not familiar to them, was not on any list or in any phone book, and wasn’t in their computer system.

 Even the road didn’t exist, which meant I couldn’t buy a ride because the taxi drivers wouldn’t know where to take me.

 Finally, one of the men behind the desk gave me a map. He had a guest as to what the area the hotel might be in, and drew instructions for me to take the airport railway to the Termini station in Rome, and from there to transfer to a subway line and travel out from the center of the city.

 It was better than nothing, so I followed the instructions, hugging my suitcases along with me. I made the transfer, then waited until I saw the signs (and put my bags in his trunk).

 By the time I was to my feet, he was whisking up both my suitcases before a weak protest escaped my dry lips. By the time I was on my way, he was passing by a hotel near the airport.

 “No, no,” I started to say.

 “Come on, come on!” he beckoned, smiling. “We look!”

 In a flash, it occurred to me all the places looking for this hotel only to fear defeat and dump me back at this McDonald’s—at night—without a ride.

 But my bags were already in the car and … I had no protest left.

 In my defeat, I quietly got in the back seat, half feeling kidnapped and fully feeling like I was going to be sick.

 This was one of the largest and most complex cities in Europe, with 2 million extra people descending on it. We had no chance of finding this hotel.

 The car sped away and I looked sadly as the last landmarks I knew disappeared around a bend.

 We went three blocks.

 Three blocks.

 “Ha!” yelled the driver. “Look! There is your hotel! See, new road! Not on the maps!”

 I looked, and sure enough we had come upon a fresh new road in a very old city, leading down a small hill and to a hotel still on a half undeveloped plot of land.

 It couldn’t be right. Noting really went through my mind except for the feeling of being very alone—and very, very far from anything I knew.

 Though I was barely conscious of it, my next steps were pretty evident: rest up, then backtrack to the airport. I’d be safe there. Tomorrow I could try to reach the hotel again, failing that, I’d transfer my return flight and get back to the States.

 The magnitude of my stupidity—of having no one else to blame—grew heavy on my shoulders, as did the worry that the airport (or the train line to it) would be closed and I would be on the streets overnight.

 A cab driver pulled up.

 Great, I thought. I already know what he’s going to say.

 Asking if I needed a ride, I silently unfolded the paper with the hotel information on it. He looked it over, furrowing his brow, then shrugged his shoulders.

 “Sorry,” he said in broken English. “Don’t know where that is.”

 And that was it: the last of the longshots.

 I had done my best, and tried my hardest, and even overcome more than a few fears, but it wasn’t enough.

 The generosity of the tour company and the efforts of my friends were truly wonderful, but also not enough.

 And lastly, the prayers—all the prayers, from so many people—they just weren’t enough.

 It felt like I’d waited so much good will. And I hadn’t even left the road’s end for that.

 I’d come all the way to Rome for a large Coke and a view of an empty square: open air restaurants and scurrying shoppers, basilicas and statues, daylight, my heart collapsed.

 We toured the basilicas, explored Roman ruins, shared daily meals and had Mass with the pope in a field.

 And as it turns out, every day that we went to from that hotel we walked to a bus stop that was three blocks away and … on the other side of that McDonald’s.

 Every day, I saw the exact place where I had found the end of my will power; the place where I was too defeated to even protest a cab ride I didn’t want.

 And it didn’t bother me, that dismal wall, because it was now only a silly reminder of a distant misadventure.

 The lesson I learned has stayed with me all this time: that it is precisely that frame that all our efforts finally fail—that God is waiting to save us with graces that reverse the sting of suffering and project optimism even into uncertain futures.

 You would think that the intervening years of adulthood would’ve wrestled this idea away from me—after all, I’ve been to many other road’s ends since then, most of them far more serious and despairing, and in ways I couldn’t imagine. And those times God did not appear. He did not, as before, rescue me. And there are many, many others in the world who find themselves beaten down by grievous hardships—poverty and war and addiction—far too many to blink and say that God will always save us at our most desperate points.

 So why would I continue to believe something that’s been proven wrong again and again? Why keep hoping?

 Why share it with people in a column, for goodness sake?

 It’s a funny thing, and I can only explain it like this: that the hundred of times God has not come are still not as meaningful as the time he did.

 My experience in Rome of being rescued by a miracle of inspiration cannot be taken away or explained into irrelevance. It will always live in my memory, and each time I am disappointed that things don’t go my way I cling all the more to that distant August evening.

 In doing so I persist in the belief that God was trying to tell me something, trying to show me a faint echo of a grander story: one that still stirs my heart, drives my pen, and shapes the way I see the world.

 Perhaps even more, when I pine and twist for things he holds far beyond my grasp, I am still using this story to my innermost thoughts as a reminder that sometimes we must surrender our impossible roads if we ever hope to see God.

 We cannot pick the times that God will give miraculous gifts, but we can rest assured that they do exist, and that God is waiting to save us when our efforts finally fail—that God is waiting to save us.

 That may be a slim line of hope to those at their own road’s end today, but it is hope nonetheless. For the God who allows mysterious suffering also—in moments we do not expect—allows mysterious grace.