Drawing closer to God
‘God makes his glory known’ through two children and the people who pray for them

(Editor’s note: The Criterion invited our readers to share the special moments in their lives—or the one thing—that has brought them closer to God. Here are some of their stories.)

First of three parts

By John Shaughnessy

It was a time of heartbreak for Helen Stephon, a time when the grandmother first learned that her 3-year-old grandson was diagnosed with cancer.

The diagnosis of leukemia for Theo Quillen came more than a year ago, on Oct. 1, 2020.

Knowing the heartbreak could be overwhelming, Stephon instead chose to focus on hope for her grandson. And she found a special reason to do so nine days later.

On Oct. 10, 2020, Pope Francis had beatified Carlo Acutis, a youth who had dedicated his life to documenting and sharing eucharistic miracles from around the world before he died at 15.

“He and Theo have the exact same diagnosis,” Stephon says. “Theo just celebrated his fourth birthday. Carlo needs one more miracle to reach sainthood. We thought the miracle could...

See CHILDREN, page 10A

See BIDEN, page 2A

Biden says pope told him to continue receiving Communion

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Pope Francis and U.S. President Joe Biden had an unusually long private meeting at the Vatican on Oct. 29, talking about the climate crisis and poverty, but not about abortion, the president said.

Some U.S. bishops have argued that Biden, who regularly attends Mass, should not receive Communion because of his support for legalized abortion, while Catholic Church teaching emphasizes the sacredness of human life from conception to natural death.

See BIDEN, page 2A

Supreme Court could be leaning to allow challenges to Texas abortion law

WASHINGTON (CNS)—During oral arguments just shy of three hours on Nov. 1, the U.S. Supreme Court closely examined—and seemed to have concerns about—how the new abortion law in Texas was framed and is enforced.

The justices were specifically considering if the Justice Department and if abortion providers in Texas can challenge the Texas abortion law in federal court. The law, in effect since Sept. 1, bans most abortions after six weeks of pregnancy and allows individuals to sue anyone involved in helping a woman obtain an abortion.

Among the justices who expressed some unease with the law’s framing were Justices Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett, which could lead to a narrow ruling to enable the lawsuits against the abortion law to proceed.

Such a ruling would not address the broad scope of the law’s constitutionality, but would return the cases to lower courts.

Many of the justices’ comments during two back-to-back cases acknowledged this is a new challenge to face the court, but they drew on one case in particular for some guidance. Many brought up Ex Parte Young, a 1908 Supreme Court case that said state officials could be sued in federal court to prevent them from trying to enforce unconstitutional laws.

Kavanaugh said Texas had exploited a “loophole” in the abortion law preventing it from being challenged in federal court. And Barrett pointed out that the way the law’s enforcement mechanism was designed—preventing defendants from arguing about the undue burden placed on them—seemed in conflict with the court’s previous abortion rulings.

When Kavanaugh asked if states could enact similar laws limiting other constitutional rights, like gun rights under the Second Amendment and free speech rights under the First Amendment, Judd Stone II, solicitor general of Texas, said such laws could not be challenged in federal court either.

See SCOTUS, page 5A
Biden attends Mass in Rome, tells reporters of his admiration for pope

Biden spoke to reporters at Rome’s Palazzo Chigi where he was meeting Pope Francis. The Vatican described the president’s meetings with both the pope and with top Vatican diplomats as consisting of “cordial discussions” with both sides “focused on the joint commitment to the protection and care of the planet, the health care situation and the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.”

They also discussed “refugees and assistance to migrants,” the Vatican said, and “reference was also made to the protection of human rights, including freedom of religion and conscience.”

The pope and the president also expressed “views on some matters regarding the current international situation, also in the context of the imminent G20 summit in Rome, and on the promotion of peace in the world through political negotiation,” it said.

As a result of the meeting, the White House, “President Biden thanked His Holiness for his advocacy for the pope’s peace and those suffering from hunger, conflict and persecution. “He lauded Pope Francis’ leadership in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, its advocacy to ensure the pandemic ends for the world’s poor and those suffering from COVID-19,” and “expressed the hope that the pope’s visit will bring hope to the world.”

The president presented the pope with a signed copy of his message for World Day of Peace 2021, a collection of his major documents, including his document on Human Fraternity, and the book, Why Are You Afraid? Have You Forgotten How to Love? World Facing the Pandemic. The book contains photographs and homilies, messages and prayers the pope delivered during the pandemic, emphasizing the importance of love, hope, solidarity and the common good.

Biden presented Pope Francis with a framed, handwritten “fiddler coin” that had been used by Gamarri, the famous Rome tailor, in 1958, for Jesuits in the United States. The White House was also making a donation of winter clothing to charities in the name of Pope Francis to commemorate the World Day of the Poor on Nov. 14.

Biden also gave the pope a copy of his memoir, Promise Me, Dad: A Year of Hope, Hardship, and Purpose, about losing his firstborn son, Beau Biden, to brain cancer at the age of 46 and a presidential command coin inscribed with the unit of his late son, who had been deployed to Iraq in 2008.

Biden explained the reason for the coin to the pope, “I mean not this is appropriate, but there’s a tradition in America that the president has what is called a command coin that gives to your warriors and leaders and you are the most significant warrior for peace I’ve ever met.”

“I don’t have it, you have to buy the drinks,” Biden said, adding, however, “I’m the only Irishman you’ve ever met who’s never had a drink.”

Later, as the pope walked Biden to the door, he thanked him for the visit and for “this beautiful coin.”

After meeting the pope, Biden went downstairs to meet Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican Secretary of State and Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Vatican foreign minister. In addition to his wife, Jill Biden, the vice president traveled with a 10-person entourage of senior White House staff, including U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his number one national security adviser.

The White House said in a statement that those discussions included “efforts to rally global support for vaccinating the developing world against COVID-19,” and Biden thanked the Vatican for its “leadership in fighting the climate crisis” and for “speaking out on behalf of the wrongly incarcerated, including in Venezuela and Cuba.”

“The leaders committed to continue using their voices to advocate for personal and religious freedoms worldwide,” the White House said.

The Vatican had unexpectedly canceled—about 24 hours before Biden’s arrival—a scheduled livestream of the visit to the objection of reporters. Accredited journalists covering the Vatican have not been present for the beginning and concluding portions of any meetings with heads of state in the papal library since late February 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Christian joy is neither a passing emotion nor an optimistic worldview but a sign of holiness that bears witness to God’s love even in the dire circumstances. Pope Francis said on the feast of All Saints.

“The saints, even amid many tribulations, have experienced this joy and have borne witness to it. Without joy, faith becomes a rigorous and oppressive exercise, and Zakarias falling ill with sadness,” the pope said. Before reciting the Angelus on Nov. 1 with pilgrims gathered in St. Peter’s Square, the pope reflected on the eight beatitudes, which are the path of “humility, compassion, meekness, justice, peace” laid out by Jesus to show all men and women a way “that leads to the kingdom of God and to happiness.”

The Church’s saints, he continued, walked along the path of “joy and prophecy,” which are “two aspects that are proper to this saintry way of life.”

Focusing on joy, Pope Francis explained that achieving holiness is not solely a matter of “effort and renunciation” but instead it is found when people discover that they are “God’s beloved sons and daughters.”

“It is not a human achievement, it is a gift we receive: We are holy because God, who is the Holy One, has come to dwell in our lives,” the pope said. “It is he who gives holiness to us. For this, we are blessed!”

Prophecy is another aspect of holiness underlined in the beatitudes, especially when crying out on behalf of “the poor, the afflicted and those who hunger for justice,” he said. While a worldly mentality can lead one to believe that happiness comes from being “rich, powerful, always young and strong,” Jesus makes a “prophetic proclamation” that holiness can be achieved by “putting his word into practice.”

“Those who believe themselves to be rich, successful and secure base everything on themselves and close themselves off from God and their brothers and sisters, while those who know that they are poor and not self-sufficient remain open to God and to their neighbor. And they find joy,” the pope said.

Pope Francis said the beatitudes are the “prophecy of a new humanity” and a new way of living that would require “making oneself small and entrusting oneself to God, instead of prevailing over others.”

“Holiness is accepting and putting into practice, with God’s help, this prophecy that revolutionizes the world,” he said.†

Cardinal: Protecting human life at all stages is more important than ever

NOTRE DAME, Ind. (CNS)—In an Oct. 27 address at the University of Notre Dame, Cardinal Gerhard Müller stressed the importance of proclaiming the human dignity of every person, from conception until natural death.

This proclamation is particularly necessary in “a secularized society that has surrendered to relativism and thus to the destruction of ethics,” he told an audience of Notre Dame faculty, staff and students.

The cardinal is the former prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, serving in the post from 2012 to 2017. Life on Earth is a “pilgrim state,” he explained, for we are on a journey toward our ultimate goal of eternal salvation; however, this lofty goal doesn’t mean that we have no responsibility toward the world and the people around us.

Cardinal Müller cited the Second Vatican Council document “Lumen Gentium” (the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church”) to explain that the two goals of the Church—go hand in hand: to bring people to Jesus, and to work for “the unity of mankind.”

To this end, he continued, the Church addresses the moral principles of human action to promote the truth that “every human being exists for its own sake and must never be a means to an end.” Rather, “humans are individually called by God, adopted as his children and regarded as his friends,” he said.

The popes, through the centuries, “as universal teacher and shepherd of the Church” have led this effort by the Church to be in the world to “illuminate” and “educate” the conscience of people and to speak up about threats to human freedom, equality and the common good, he said, citing various papal encyclicals.

Cardinal Müller observed that one of the greatest challenges of our time is the protection of all human life, and he said that “the Church is the only community that has always risen to the occasion” by emphasizing Catholic social teaching and moral theology principles.

The Church should not just passively react to problems, he continued. Rather, “all Christian communities can shape the future by emphasizing the vocation of humanity in the story of God’s creation.”

On the other hand, rejecting God degrades humans to a mere biological life form without “objective standards, values and virtues.”

The result is a world based on arbitrary decisions that is ever-changing and weak. “All human life needs to be rooted in more than consensus in order to last and be truly universal.” They must be based on the recognition of an authority that is beyond the reach of man.”

While people of goodwill can and should work together to build a more just world, Cardinal Müller stressed that “we can never replace the final goal of human existence: being with God.”

The cardinal’s presentation was co-sponsored by Notre Dame’s theology department and by the Religious Liberty Initiative of the Notre Dame Law School.

Cardinal Müller was in the United States on a tour to promote his book The Pope: His Mission and His Task (Catholic University of America Press, 2021). The book originally was published in German in 2017, the English version is a translation by Father Brian McNiel.

According to the publisher, the book covers the theological and historical aspects of the papacy and “addresses in particular, those dimensions of the papal office which are crucial for understanding more deeply the pope as a visible representative of the Church’s unity.”†
I do a lot of outreach to the young on behalf of my religious congregation, so I have to be aware of trends in vocations work and the common traits of emerging generations.

So I took some time to review the latest "Study on Religious Vocations," co-sponsored by the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), hoping that it would give me "anaha moment" on how to improve our outreach in our community of Little Sisters of the Poor.

I was struck by a section of the report titled "Intergenerational Living." According to the 2020 NRVC/CARA study, a personal factor is that personally professed members of religious communities are younger than 60, while the same proportion are at least 50 years of age. These are pretty sobering statistics!

I was consolation to read the following testimony from a young religious: "It is beautiful to have all different generations and ethnicities in one community, in one home, where we allow ourselves to see that beauty."

What a hope-filled attitude on the part of a young religious! It really inspired me to stop bemoaning the aging of our religious communities and start seeing the beauty.

As we observe National Vocations Awareness Week on Nov. 7-13, I would like to address a message of hope to my fellow women and religious with me like me, are not so young anymore. May you too take heart in realizing that young people seeking religious life are not as deterred by the older demographics of most of our communities as we thought. They don’t seem to mind that that many of us are older—but they do hope that we will live simply, in solidarity with the poor, and that we will live and pray together in a spirit of joy.

So how do we connect with the young? Let’s take a few cues from Pope Francis. We might begin by striving to become young again. The pope has suggested that we renew our youthfulness at every stage of life.

“As we mature, grow older and become mediocre, we have to seek to renew our youthfulness at every stage of life. That is why the Church invites people of all ages to share in the life of the Church and to find new ways of living the Gospel.”

It is something the pope very often speaks, and it is something that speaks deeply to young people in their vocational discernment.

“Let’s continue to pray for vocations in the local Church.”

Be Our Guest!Sr. Constance Veit, L.S.P.
Joy and encouraging vocations

The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into the harvest" (Mt 9:37-38).

These words from the Gospel of Matthew have been cited by deacons, priests, bishops, religious and the lay faithful when it comes to praying for vocations.

And the above Scripture is also a quotation cited by Father Michael Keucher, archdiocesan director of vocations, in a “by the numbers” fact sheet he shared for National Vocations Awareness Week Nov. 7-13 in the United States celebrates on Nov. 7-13.

During this time, dioceses and parishes across the U.S. are being asked to foster an appreciation for all vocations and pray specifically for those discerning a vocation to ordained ministry and consecrated life.

In his message for the 58th annual World Day of Prayer for Vocation, Pope Francis offered St. Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, as a model for a special awareness week, which the Church in the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ office shared for National Vocations Awareness Week Nov. 7-13.

Like Joseph, many of us are older—but they do hope that we will live simply, in solidarity with the poor, and that we will live and pray together in a spirit of joy.

As we mature, grow older and become mediocre, we have to seek to renew our youthfulness at every stage of life.

We are the stewards of the Earth. To dismiss the pollution of the planet is a dereliction of our Christian duties. To me, that is the most urgent moral argument we have today.

President Joe Biden has made addressing climate change a top priority of his agenda, allotting a large financial commitment of the infrastructure package to address this challenge. Some objectives of the Build Back Better agenda are to cut carbon emissions in half by 2030 and to reach net-zero emissions by 2050.

While I was in attendance at the United Nations Climate Summit (COP 26), advocating, as a world leader, for a global commitment to repair the planet. Time is running out.

Abortion is an illegal and an existential threat to human life. As Catholics, we have an obligation to reduce the numbers of abortion. President Biden has introduced legislation that will help strengthen families: providing pay during family sick leave, enhancing child care for working families and providing health insurance for those who need help, to name a few. These legislations give people options (other than abortion) dealing with an unplanned pregnancy.

Reducing the attacks on the sanctity of human life involves many threats: carbon emissions, abortion, war, poverty, disease, famine and gun violence to name a few. Making these threats illegal in our society is a constant and ongoing struggle in our communities and start seeing the beauty.

Joy must come from within: that joy that is of self to the poor day after day. This joy is something about which the pope very often speaks, and it is something that speaks deeply to young people in their vocational discernment.

Let’s continue to pray for vocations in the local Church.

Let’s continue to pray for vocations in the local Church.
"Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury. For they have all contributed from their abundance, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood." (Mk 12:43-44).

The Gospel reading for the Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time (Mk 12:38-44) tells the familiar story of what has come to be known as "the widow’s mite." St. Mark tells us that Jesus "sat down opposite the treasury and observed how the crowd put money into the treasury." (Mk 12:41). As Jesus watches the people contributing money, he observes that "many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents" (Mk 12:41-42).

The "two small coins" that St. Mark tells us were "worth a few cents" have been identified as bronze mites (lepta in Greek) that are together worth a quadrans, the smallest Roman coin. A mite, or lepton, was the smallest and least valuable coin in circulation in Judea at the time of Jesus, about eight minutes of an average daily wage. This is certainly not a substantial financial contribution, but as Jesus tells his disciples, the widow’s gift is worth far more than the large sums contributed by the wealthy. Jesus does not disparage the large gifts that the wealthy donors, but he does praise the widow’s sacrificial gift of two small coins. Why? Because "she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood" (Mk 12:44). The widow has made a substantive, sacrificial gift. After contributing her two small coins, she has nothing left. The wealthy donors have made significant large gifts that, presumably, will make a difference in the operations of the Temple. But their gifts come from surplus, not substance. In effect, they are giving what is left over after all their other needs are met.

Who is the good steward here? The wealthy who have lots to give and share their wealth generously? Or the poor woman whose small coins are practically worthless? The answer is obvious, but the reasons behind this answer are not always so clear. After all, stewardship is not about money. It’s about giving from the heart.

What did Jesus say to the widow for giving "all she had, her whole livelihood" (Mk 12:44), he is commenting on her disposition, or fundamental attitude, toward life. St. Mark gives us no information about this poor widow’s situation. We can assume she lives from hand to mouth. It’s likely that she has experienced much hardship, disappointment and loneliness. But she is not bitter or angry. She gives freely from the little she has without complaining or holding back. She is generous, as God is generous, giving out of a superabundance of love.

We also know nothing about the wealthy donors. If they are anything like the people who give generously to support the work of the Church here in central and southern Indiana, we can assume they are good, honest, charitable people who want to share what they have with others. In all likelihood, these rich people who put large sums into the treasury are also good stewards who give back to God out of gratitude for their many blessings.

So what is the point of the story? We might say that the Lord is reminding his disciples (all of us) that how much we give is far less important than the impact on the way we live. If we give whatever is left over, nothing much changes in our lifestyle or in our attitudes toward the people we are helping with our charity. On the other hand, if we give, from substance (from our livelihood), we have the opportunity to make a difference, to require a shift in our thinking and our attitude.

Stewardship is about how we give much more than how much we give. This does not mean that we can hold back (giving one small coin instead of two). On the contrary, it means that regardless of our wealth (or lack of it), we are challenged to be responsible stewards who are grateful, accountable, generous and willing to give back to the Lord with increase.

There’s an old Egyptian proverb that says, "As long as your heart is full of love, you always have something to give." Jesus praises the widow’s generosity because of the depth of her love. She is recognized as a generous steward because her sacrificial gifts come from a heart overflowing with love.

Let’s follow her example, giving from substance more than from surplus. Let’s practice the virtue that fills our hearts with love and, so, embrace stewardship as a way of life that is far more valuable than money.†
November 8, 15
St. Therese of the Child Jesus Parish, 750 E. 21st Parish Center, 4720 E. 13th St., Indianapolis. Soup Supper, 6:30-7:15 p.m. prayer and exercise, free. Information: 317-372-1671 or via facebook.com/soupsuppersindy or archindy.org.

November 8-14
St. Susanna’s Women’s Club Online Holiday Auction,办法s and auction are available for viewing online from Nov. 8-14 and in-person on Nov. 13-14 after weekend Masses at St. Susanna, 120 E. Main St., Plainfield. bidding ends 1 p.m. on Nov. 14. Information: 317-830-3333 or www.saintsusannachurch.com.

November 8-12
Benedictus Inn Retreat and Conference Center, 1402 Southern Ave., Beech Grove. Divorce and Beyond support group, 7-9 p.m. six consecutive Mondays, sponsored by archdiocesan Archdiocesan Support Group, 7-9 p.m. six Southern Ave., Beech Conference Center, 1402 St. Elizabeth Seton Parish, 1065 Harvest Ridge St., Carmel (LaFayette Diocese). information and registration: administrateur@saintsusanna.com.

November 8-13
Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish, 335 S. Merrill, St. Greenwood, Rechae Women’s Retreat, 9 a.m.- 5 p.m. Father Mike Keucher presenting, for women of all ages, prayer, speaker, reflection, $20 suggested donation, includes breakfast and lunch. Registration deadline Nov. 10. Information and registration 317-891-2633 or womenforGod@yahoo.com.

November 12
St. Michael Parish, 519 Jefferson Blvd., Greenwood. The Parables of Jesus Study, Thursdays, 1:30-5 p.m., offered by Guadalupe Bible college graduates, bring Bible, online option available. free. Information and registration: ljdarlene@gmail.com.

November 17
Calvary Episcopal Church, 145 S. Troy Ave., Indianapolis. Monthly Mass, 2 p.m. Information and tickets: 317-394-6444 or GreatDivorceOnStage.com.

November 18
St. Joseph Church, 1401 S. Hickory Ave., Indianapolis. Third Thursday Adoration, interceding for women experiencing crisis pregnancy, 11 a.m.-7 p.m., with Mass at 5:45 p.m.

November 19

November 20
St. Michael Parish, 519 Jefferson Blvd., Greenwood. The Parables of Jesus Bible Study, offered by Guadalupe Bible college graduates, bring Bible, online option available, free. Information and registration: ljdarlene@gmail.com.

November 21
St. Meinrad Archabbey, 11441 Hague Road, in Fishers (Lafayette Diocese), is hosting a free Thanksgiving dinner with turkey, mashed potatoes, stuffing, vegetables, rolls and dessert in Craig Willy Hall. (the building behind the church with the flags in front of it) 11 a.m.-2 p.m. on Nov. 25. All are welcome. Bidding ends 1 p.m. on Nov. 25.

November 22
Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. Advent with St. Joseph Day of Reflection with Father Farrell. 8:30 a.m.-2 p.m., $45 continental breakfast, lunch, program, and Mass. Registration: cutt.ly/farrellretreat or ffarrell@pame.org or Events, St. Joseph Parish, 30 S. Downey Ave., Indianapolis, 46222.

November 24
Benedictus Inn Retreat and Conference Center, 1 Sisters of Providence, 101 S. Anthony Dr., St. Francis, In. “Brother Bob’s Bible Study.” Mondays 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., led by Andrew Hennessy, free. Information and registration: mountsaaintfrancis.org/bible- study or 812-923-8817.

November 29
Benedictus Inn Retreat and Conference Center, 1 Sisters of Providence, 101 S. Anthony Dr., St. Francis, In. “Brother Bob’s Bible Study.” Mondays 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.,led by Andrew Hennessy, free. Information and registration: mountsaaintfrancis.org/bible-study or 812-923-8817.

December 2
Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. Advent with St. Joseph Eve of the Year, admitted free. Information and registration: sjohnradomski@gmail.com. This event is open to all college graduates, bring Bible, online option available, free. Information and registration: sjohnradomski@gmail.com.

December 3
Mount Saint Francis Center for Spirituality, 101 S. Anthony Dr., Mt. St. Francis. Painting with Pader, 6-9 p.m last Friday of each month, led by Conventual Franciscan Father Vincent Peterson, includes painting supplies and snack, bring beverage, $40. Information and registration: mountsaaintfrancis.org/ painting-with-the-padre or 812-923-8817.

December 4
Providence Spirituality and Conference Center, 1 Sisters of Providence, Sister Mary-of-the-Woods, St. Mary-of-the-Woods. Faith Thinkers Through the Ages, 9 a.m.- noon, fifth of five sessions, $20 per session, register by Dec. 1. Information and registration: 812-535-2952, grove@pame.org or Events, St. Joseph Parish, 30 S. Downey Ave., Indianapolis, 46222.

December 5
Mount Saint Francis Center for Spirituality, 101 S. Anthony Dr., Mt. St. Francis. “Brother Bob’s Bible Study.” Mondays 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., led by Andrew Hennessy, free. Information and registration: mountsaaintfrancis.org/bible-study or 812-923-8817.

December 6
Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. Advent with St. Joseph Eve of the Year, admitted free. Information and registration: sjohnradomski@gmail.com. This event is open to all college graduates, bring Bible, online option available, free. Information and registration: sjohnradomski@gmail.com.

December 7
Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 5353 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. Advent with St. Joseph Eve of the Year, admitted free. Information and registration: sjohnradomski@gmail.com. This event is open to all college graduates, bring Bible, online option available, free. Information and registration: sjohnradomski@gmail.com.

December 12
Mount Saint Francis Center for Spirituality, 101 S. Anthony Dr., Mt. St. Francis. “Brother Bob’s Bible Study.” Mondays 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., led by Andrew Hennessy, free. Information and registration: mountsaaintfrancis.org/bible-study or 812-923-8817.

December 13
Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish, 335 S. Merrill, St. Greenwood, Rechae Women’s Retreat, 9 a.m- 5 p.m. Father Mike Keucher presenting, for women of all ages, prayer, speaker, reflection, $20 suggested donation, includes breakfast and lunch. Registration deadline Nov. 10. Information and registration 317-891-2633 or womenforGod@yahoo.com.

December 17
Calvary Episcopal Church, 145 S. Troy Ave., Indianapolis. Monthly Mass, 2 p.m. Information and tickets: 317-394-6444 or GreatDivorceOnStage.com.

December 18
St. Joseph Church, 1401 S. Hickory Ave., Indianapolis. Third Thursday Adoration, interceding for women

Batesville Deenial to hold free Adoration Summit on Nov. 27

A Batesville Deenial Adoration Summit will be held at St. Louis Parish, 13 S. Louis Pl., in Batesville, from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. on Nov. 27. The event will include Mass and talks by Mgr. Joseph Schaedel, Father Michael Keucher, Father Daniel Mahan and Father Jonathan Meyer. The summit is free and includes lunch. To come, register by the office of All Saints Parish in Batesville.

Weddings

John and Nancy Walter
Melvin and Sandra Bickets Meissberger

Melvin and Sandra (Bickets) Meissberger, members of Prince of Peace Parish in Madison, celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on Sept. 17, 2020. They have nine children: JoAnn Baker, Angela Elder, Diana Kerr, Denise Sanders, Bob, Jim, Mike, Tom and Tony Walter. The couple also has 23 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren.

The couple was married in SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis on Sept. 17, 1960. They have 10 children: Melvin, Joseph, Amy Fichmer, Debra Gloyd, Julie Underwood and Brian Meissberger. The couple has 10 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren.

John and Nancy (Fugit) Walter, members of St. Mary Parish in Lanesville, will celebrate their 65th wedding anniversary on Nov. 10. The couple was married in St. Anthony of Padua Church in Clarksville on Nov. 10, 1956. They have nine children: JoAnn Baker, Angela Elder, Diana Kerr, Denise Sanders, Bob, Jim, Mike, Tom and Tony Walter. The couple also has 23 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren.

Announcements for couples celebrating 50, 55, 60, 65, 70 or more years of marriage are accepted. Go to cutt.ly/ArchindyMarriage or call 317-386-1585.
Marian starts new program to build up Latino Catholic congregations

By Mike Krokos

Oscar Castellanos le describió cómo interpretar las señales de los tiempos.

"La propuesta [para la subvención] es una respuesta al Enuento [Spanish for 'encounter']," dijo Castellanos, quien fue contratado por la universidad en calidad de director de intercultural ministry que los latinos, y el plan estudiantil, nación de los latinos.

"El propósito [de la subvención] es dirigir a las familias religiosas católicas latinas en todo el estado y más allá, los líderes de la Universidad de Marian en Indianapolis se interesaron con esa sus escritores en la parroquia para organizar pequeñas comunidades de fe.

"La idea es dividir la oferta de cursos, ya que una de las formas de conectar la iniciativa de liderazgo latino que comenzó hace unos tres años aquí en Marian," comentó Castellanos, quien fue contratado por la universidad en calidad de director fundador del programa y cuyo título es director de la Iniciativa para la Renovación Pastoral. Castellanos trabajó anteriormente como director del ministerio intercultural de la Arquidiócesis de Indianapolis.

La iniciativa de liderazgo de la universidad brindó un red de apoyo a los latinos que consideran la subvención de Marian, añadió. Adam Setmeyer, vicepresidente de marca y marketing de Marian, vio que una de las formas de conectar la iniciativa latina de la universidad con la Iniciativa de Cultura de Ohio y Kentucky, se hará de la misma manera.

"Renovación es un esfuerzo por una mejor formación en Marian," asertó Castellanos. El programa ofrecerá créditos universitarios a través de una certificación de dos años mediante 12 módulos, o cursos, sobre "teología y realidades pastorales latinas" en Estados Unidos, dijo Castellanos. Los participantes obtendrán un certificado en Liderazgo Pastoral Latino a través de Marian.

A través de Renovación, los pastores de parroquias que hayan recibido formación pueden ayudar a los líderes de las comunidades para organizar pequeñas comunidades de fe.

La primera etapa del programa, o módulo, comenzará en enero.

"Ministerio es mi pasión. Este es el primer paso en una nueva etapa de liderazgo en nuestra comunidad," añadió Castellanos, quien fue contratado por la universidad en calidad de director de intercultural ministry.

"La propuesta [para la subvención] es una respuesta al Encuentro [Spanish for 'encounter']." Castellanos notó que la propuesta "fue un compromiso para satisfacer las necesidades de las parroquias que son consideradas Hispánicas, Latino- serving congregations."

"Idealmente, esas deben ser tres [personas] por cada parroquia," dijo. "Por ejemplo, podría ser un párroco, los líderes y personal de la parroquia para organizar pequeñas comunidades de fe."

En lugar de hacer un trabajo de graduación o un proyecto final, los participantes recibirán crédito para formar parte de una comunidad de parroquias y líderes de la parroquia para organizar pequeñas comunidades de fe.

"La idea es dividir la oferta de cursos, ya que una de las formas de conectar la iniciativa latina de la universidad con la Iniciativa de Cultura de Ohio y Kentucky, se hará de la misma manera," dijo el proyecto. El primer módulo del programa, o serie de cursos, comenzará en enero.

El objetivo inicial es que participen en la formación de nuevas parroquias con comunidades latinas. El plan, señaló Castellanos, consiste en formar parroquias de la arquidiócesis de Indianapolis, en las diócesis de Evansville, Fort Wayne- South Bend, Gary y Lafayette, y en la arquidiócesis de Louisville en Kentucky.

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Tombs of fallen soldiers are cry for peace, pope says on All Souls’ feast

ROME (CNS)—The tombs of fallen soldiers killed in war cry out to people today to end all wars and to stop the production of weapons, Pope Francis said.

“I am sure that all of those who went with goodwill [to war], called by their country to defend it, are with the Lord,” he said, celebrating Mass on the feast of All Souls, on Nov. 2, at the French Military Cemetery in Rome.

“But we, who are journeying [on Earth], are fighting enough so there will be no more wars, so there will be no more domestic economies fortified by the arms industry?” he asked.

An easing of restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic allowed Pope Francis to resume his usual practice of celebrating Mass on the feast of All Souls in a cemetery—in Rome or nearby—but only about 250 people were in attendance. Last year, he presided over a private Mass in a chapel and then visited and blessed graves in a small cemetery inside the Vatican.

As people visit cemeteries on the feast day, he said, they should take time to pause and realize they are on a journey that will end someday.

The journey of life should not be a leisurely “stroll” in the park nor is it an impossible “labyrinth,” he said, but it is a journey that involves effort and understanding there will be “a final step” at the end of that earthly path.

Everyone is on a journey which entails facing “many historical realities, many difficult situations,” and cemeteries are a reminder to take pause and reflect on the nature of one’s own journey and where it is heading, he said.

Looking at the gravestones, the pope said he sees “good people” who died at war, “died because they were called to defend their country, to defend values, ideals and, many other times, to defend sad and regrettable political situations.

“And they are victims, victims of war which devours the sons and daughters of All Souls,” he said, recalling a number of deadly battles fought in the 20th century.

The graves marked “unknown” instead of with a name show “the tragedy of war,” even though God always keeps the name of everyone in his heart, he said.

Stone emphasized that neither the federal government nor the abortion providers had legal grounds to sue the state in federal court. We are hopeful the justices will clarify that these restraint by allowing the law to continue to save lives, he said.

“The ban on abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy, currently at least 12 other states have legislation banning abortions early in pregnancy, but these bans have been blocked by courts.

When the Supreme Court first ruled against blocking the Texas abortion law, the Texas Catholic Conference, the public policy arm of the state’s Catholic bishops, said this action marked the first time since Roe v. Wade that the nation’s high court “has allowed a pro-life law to remain while litigation proceeds in lower courts.”

SCOTUS

For any questions regarding your RSVP or online donation, contact us at ccf@archindy.org or (317) 236-1482.
By Father Michael Keucher
Special to The Criterion

In speaking to a group of priests responsible for recruiting new seminarians, a saintly priest said this: “If you want Godly men, be Godly men.”

These words have become a motto for me lately. I carry them around with me in my mind and heart. I tell them to my brother priests. I tell them to myself.

Holy vocations produce more holy vocations. Put another way, a saint produces other saints. If priests want more holy priests, then they must be holy priests—and vocations will follow.

Venerable Fulton Sheen commented that seeing a priest kneeling in silent prayer in a sacristy before Mass inspires more priestly vocations among altar boys than a thousand pieces of inspirational literature about the priesthood.

Holy, pious, active, zealous charitable priests generate a future army of priests of the same sort. Brother priests: if we want Godly men in our ranks, we must be Godly men!

What about religious and consecrated women and men? It’s the same here, of course. St. Theodora Guérin, co-patronress of our archdiocese, famously wrote in her journals, “How impiety deadens the heart.” She wrote, too, about the piety and holiness of one sister in particular who had had a profound impact on her vocation: “Sister St. Francis Xavier is necessary for my existence. ... I have need of her advice, of her example, I will even say of her little scoldings.”

Mother Theodore knew it well: holy vocations inspire holy vocations. Her own vocation was proof. And think of how many she has inspired down through the years!

We see this principle of holiness begetting holiness in family life as well. Holy married couples tend to generate other holy families. Married couples in love with Jesus inspire other married couples to be in love with Jesus. This is the logic behind sponsor couples in marriage preparation; if an engaged couple is connected with a married couple on fire with love for Christ, that fire spreads.

Naturally, vocations cross pollinate as well. Many a great priest, for example, was inspired by a great nun or priest, or by the holiness they saw in their parents or other relatives.

All vocations need each other! Holy families need holy priests. Holy priests need holy families. Holy religious need holy priests. Holy priests need holy religious. It works in every direction.

And we must remember: all vocations require holy families in order to come about and grow in the first place!

In this year’s Vocations Awareness Supplement, you will come to meet some folks who have fallen deeply in love with Jesus. These people were each inspired by others and, having been inspired, they are laying their lives down for our blessed Lord in beautiful ways, ways that God has prepared just for them.

Let us pray for them. Now they are inspiring others. And in this Vocations Awareness Supplement, let them inspire you and strengthen your own vocation.

Finally, let us remember this always: if you want holy vocations—which we all want and need—then be holy!

(Father Michael Keucher is vocations director for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. He also serves as pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Shelbyville and sacramental minister of St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Shelby County. He can be reached by e-mail at mkeucher@archindy.org.)

Living a holy life inspires holy vocations in others

Compassion and faith guide deacon, page 4B.

Postulant overcomes speech challenges, page 8B.

Photos from a day in the life of a priest, pages 6B-7B.
Seminarian looks to the guidance of Mary in his journey to the priesthood

By Sean Gallagher

ST. MEINRAD—Through four years of priestly formation, seminarian Jack Wright has never wavered in his conviction that God is calling him to be a priest. God willing, he’ll take a significant step toward the fulfillment of that goal next spring, when he is scheduled to be ordained a transitional deacon.

A member of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Richmond, Wright, 31, has known of God’s call in his life for 12 years. But he had a hard time accepting his vocation during much of that time—so much so that he actually stopped practicing his faith for some years.

What led him not only back to the Church, but even further to a firm embrace of his vocation?

Wright credits it all to a relationship he began to nurture with the Blessed Virgin Mary with the help of a book about her that his grandfather had given him at a time when he had not darkened the doors of a church for years.

“One of the reasons that I’ve felt so solid in my vocation is because of my relationship with her,” he said. “As I’ve been in seminary, I’ve trusted that she’s leading me and that my life is in her hands. She’s acquiring the graces for me that I need to become the priest that God wants me to be.”

“I didn’t want to do it”

As Wright grew up, the Catholic faith gradually took on a more prominent role in the life of his family. By the time he was in high school, he asked God daily what he should do with his life.

For years, the answer to those prayers remained hidden—until his sophomore year at Marian University in Indianapolis.

His awareness of God’s answer came to him rather suddenly in 2009, but in a way that disturbed him.

“I woke up at like three or four in the morning,” Wright recalled. “For some reason, I had this overwhelming awareness that I was supposed to be a priest. That was what God wanted me to do.

“I got up and started walking around campus and was just crying my eyes out, crying like I had never cried before. It wasn’t a joyful cry. It was a cry of misery. I didn’t want to do it.”

This clear awareness of God’s call and his clear resistance to it led him to walk away from the faith.

Most of Wright’s friends didn’t go to Mass. And with conflict about his vocation in his heart, he stopped going to Mass, too.

“Once you skip one week, it’s easier to skip the next week,” he said. “Before long, I stopped going. And it was all rooted in God’s answer to Wright’s prayer—an answer he turned his back on.

“God had shown me what he wanted—which was what I was asking him in prayer to do—and I rejected it,” Wright said. “So, he said, ‘OK. I’ll let you go your way.’ That’s really what happened. At that point, God wiped the thought of [the priesthood] from my mind. I never thought about it again until 2016, many years later.”

“That’s when our Lady entered my life”

In the interim, Wright graduated from Marian in 2012 with a bachelor’s degree in biology and worked for five years for a small chemical company in Indianapolis. While living on his own in an apartment on the northwest side of the city, Wright decided to pick up and read a book his grandfather had given him years earlier by an Italian priest with a deep devotion to Mary. The book, titled To the Priests, Our Lady’s Beloved Sons, included messages that the Blessed Mother had spoken to the priest in his heart:

“I finally picked up the book and started reading it,” Wright recalled. “Something about our Lady’s messages in that book really touched my heart, I guess. I think that it was at that point when I really made the decision to start practicing my faith again and to take it seriously. Looking back on it, Wright sees that moment as a turning point in his life.

“That’s when our Lady entered my life,” he said. “I had prayed the rosary before, and I always felt a kind of vague connection to our Lady. But that’s when she really took over. It started from that book.”

Wright began going to Mass, praying before the Blessed Sacrament in adoration chapels and praying the rosary daily.

In 2016, he had a conversation with a retired priest from the Cincinnati Archdiocese who lived near Richmond who had been a spiritual director for his grandfather.

“He told me that I shouldn’t be afraid to become a priest, to say ‘yes’ to the calling to the priesthood,” Wright recalled. “That was a big moment. I realized that this whole time I think I had just been afraid. It was out of fear that I was saying ‘no’ to the priesthood.”

That message opened a door to a possible vocation.
Sister of Life from Indianapolis calls Jesus ‘the greatest adventure’

By Natalie Hoefer

Laura Zetzl started at Indiana University in Bloomington in the fall of 2010 “ready to take on the world.”

“I wanted to be a wife, a mother with lots of kids,” she said. “I wanted to be a neonatologist. I had it all. But still, I was unhappy, restless and frustrated.”

So began the first steps in the vocational journey of 29-year-old Sister Lucia Christi, who, “God willing,” will profess her final vows next summer as a Sister of Life.

But before the former member of St. Gabriel the Archangel Parish in Indianapolis could start the baby steps of her journey, there was a seed planted, a thought that would give birth to her vocation.

“That phrase kept coming back to me”

While a student at Cardinal Ritter Jr./Sr. High School in Indianapolis, a call to the religious life was far from Sister Lucia Christi’s mind.

“At that point, I’d never considered a religious vocation as an option,” she said.

While at Ritter, she attended short sessions taught by the school’s then-chaplain Father John Hollowell. One day, the topic was vocations.

“A few days later, he said to me, ‘Maybe you’ll be a sister sometime.’ I laughed it off,” Sister Lucia Christi said.

By the end of her freshman year of college, her restlessness and dissatisfaction became unbearable.

“I looked at my dreams and thought, ‘This can’t be it.’ I was mad at God because I thought this was his plan for me. But I never really asked him what his plan for me was.”

So she asked.

“I spent my sophomore year asking him, ‘How have you made my heart to love? What are your dreams for me?’”

“As I started discerning, that phrase ‘Maybe you’ll be a sister sometime’ kept coming back to me.”

Sister Lucia Christi started spending more time in adoration and praying more with Scripture.

“I found that the more time I spent with the Lord, that’s where my heart found joy and rest,” she said. “And Father Hollowell’s question came back.”

At first, she said, she was “totally terrified” at what life as a religious sister might look like. “Jesus was so kind and patient and persistent,” she said. “As I spent time with him and prayed more deeply, I found myself falling in love without realizing that’s what was happening. Finally, I heard Jesus say, ‘Would you be my bride and mother all of my children?’ Finally, I was able to say yes. But then I thought, ‘Now what?’”

“What a way to spend a lifetime”

Sister Lucia Christi spoke with a priest at St. Paul Catholic Center in Bloomington at the end of her sophomore year. After sharing her story with him, he simply said, “I have the perfect order for you—the Sisters of Life.”

She looked them up online, and she knew she’d found her vocational home.

“I read through the whole [site],” said Sister Lucia Christi. “It was an experience of encountering my own heart written out. All my dreams for my life I found in our charism—to love the human person just because they are. Not because of anything they can do or their status, but just because God loves them and created them.

“To live a life of love and joy and invite people into a life where God loves him. To lay down my life so others may live. To be a voice for the voiceless, the elderly, the unborn, the forgotten, those whose lives count for less in the world. To be a sign pointing to heaven. I thought, ‘What a way to spend a lifetime.’ It was everything I wanted without having words to express it at the time.”

Sister Lucia Christi contacted the order’s vocation director, who helped her learn more about the order and about her own heart. “And about my own heart.” She also started spiritual direction with a priest.

“It was pretty clear this is where the Lord was calling me,” she said. “The order requires its sisters to have a college degree, so Sister Lucia Christi dropped her pre-med classes and focused on earning a bachelor’s degree in human biology.”

She entered the Sisters of Life as a postulant a few months after graduating in 2014. See ADVENTURE, page 12B

Sister of Life Lucia Christi smiles while holding a newborn during a Christmas party while serving a two-year mission at the Sisters of Life’s crisis pregnancy center in New York City, where they provide support to pregnant women in crisis and offer continuing support to them following the birth of their children. (Submitted photo courtesy of the Sisters of Life)
Deacon’s combination of concern, compassion and celebration of faith guide his ministry

By John Shaughnessy

There are heartbreaking moments in life when a person appreciates even more what it means to be part of a faith community. For Deacon Juan Carlos Ramirez, one of those poignant moments occurred recently when he received the news that one of his brothers had died unexpectedly.

“I was able to travel to Mexico to attend his funeral, and though I was sad for the loss, I also have the consolation that he is now on his way to the presence of God. And the Holy Spirit showed me—through the words and prayers of many co-workers, friends, family and parishioners—that we should be grateful for the blessed moments we had with him, and we should celebrate his life.”

That outpouring of concern, compassion and celebration of the faith for Deacon Ramirez reflects the same approach that he has given to members of St. Bartholomew Parish in Columbus ever since he began his ministry there after being ordained in 2017. “Deacon Juan Carlos is well-respected by all the various ministry leaders and brings people together for the benefit of the entire community,” says Father Christopher Wedelton, St. Bartholomew’s pastor.

“There are lots of people who hold strong opinions about how things should be done in the Church. Deacon Juan Carlos has an amazing ability to enter into the conversations with people of all backgrounds with patience and kindness. He is a peacemaker and a great example for other leaders—including myself—to look up to. I admire the way he interacts with people with the kindness of Christ.”

Deacon Ramirez says his approach to people and his ministry has been significantly shaped by a moment that happened during his ordination in 2017—a moment when he felt the presence of the Holy Spirit.

“An opportunity to be in contact with God and his people!”

“There were no words,” he said at the time, “but I knew the Holy Spirit was saying, ‘You are now my instrument.’”

Four years into his ministry, the 55-year-old deacon has no doubt that the Holy Spirit guides him in every moment. “The Holy Spirit continuously reminds me that this is not about me, my capability or my capacity,” he says. “It is all about the love God wants to transmit to those in need through us and let them know that he is present in every step of our life.

“Growth, I’ve also been able to make a lot of sense because the way we treat our families should be the same way we should treat everybody else—with Christian love.”

“Father Wadelton also mentions the difference the couple has made in leading retreats for Latino communities have thrived in large part due to Deacon Juan Carlos and Gabby.”

The blessings have been many for the couple, including their three grown children, Karla, Carlos and Oscar. Deacon Ramirez strives to keep a focus on family in his ministry. “Through formation, we frequently were reminded that our first ministry is our family,” he says. “It makes a lot of sense because when you treat your families should be the same way we should treat everybody else—with Christian love.”

Trust in God’s will and mercy

That sense of family extends to parishioners for him. One particular moment stands out. “One time, we were bringing the Eucharist to a home care facility to a great friend who suffered from dementia,” he recalls. “She was so happy to receive it with all the solemnity and respect, reminding us of the presence of God in the Eucharist and in our lives.”

Father Wadelton also mentions the difference the couple has made in leading retreats for Latino members of the parish. “At the end of the retreat, the participants form into small Church communities or ‘iglesiatas,’ ” Father Wedelton says. “Many of the iglesiatas have continued to meet regularly for years, forming strong bonds and spiritual support for each other. The small Church communities have thrived in large part due to Deacon Juan Carlos and Gabby.”

Deacon Ramirez deflected any credit, giving it all to God. An industrial engineer by profession, he works as a quality director at Cummins Inc., in Columbus. He says the reason he wanted to become a deacon was to improve his relationship with Jesus “and help others to do the same.”

“I was terrified that I would be unworthy, not capable and this could be only a personal desire,” he says. “However, through personal and intercession prayer, spiritual direction and discernment—but, more importantly, humility to trust this was God’s will—I was able to accept the invitation to serve and become a deacon.”

Trusting in God’s will has led to the deeper relationship with him that Deacon Ramirez sought. Through formation and studies, I have been able to understand better our faith,” he says. “Through prayers, I have been able to recognize God’s mercy. And through my relationships, I can see he loves all of us. As we know more about our faith, I understand that I have a God that is all merciful.”

For more information on the archdiocesan diaconate program, contact Deacon Kerry Blandford, director of deacon formation, at 317-236-1492 or dblandford@archindy.org!

Deacon Juan Carlos Ramirez says, “The way we treat our families should be the same way we should treat everybody else—with Christian love.” In this family photo, he and his wife Gabriela are pictured with their three children, Oscar, left, Karla and Carlos. (Survival Press)
Our Lady of Grace Monastery’s care for creation rooted in Benedictine spirituality

By Sean Gallagher

BEECH GROVE—The Church’s teachings on care for the environment may seem to be fairly new, only coming amid paths and benches that dot the landscape.

So, when Pope Francis issued in 2016 his encyclical letter, “Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home,” the Beech Grove Benedictines knew right away that the spirit of their community resonated well with what the pope taught in it.

“We human beings are related to every single thing on the Earth,” said Benedictine Sister Angela Jarboe, who helps oversee the Peace and Nature Garden. “Benedict was ahead of the game in that sense.”

Praying together as a community several times a day has been at the heart of Benedictine spirituality since its beginning. Benedictine men and women pray the Liturgy of the Hours and worship together at Mass daily.

Benedictine Sister Marie Therese Racine, Our Lady of Grace’s director of liturgy, said care for creation has become an integral part of that prayer.

“We find ourselves always praying for the creation, the poor, for justice and mercy,” she said. “We’re listening to the world [and its needs].”

Our Lady of Grace has also observed the Season of Creation, a time of prayer for the environment which spans annually from Sept. 1-Oct. 4, ending on the feast of St. Francis of Assisi. Pope Francis began the Church’s participation in the Season of Creation in 2015.

The Beech Grove Benedictines have had Taize prayer services for creation during the season. This year, they used various Masses for special needs found in the Missal, including a Mass for following harvest, for the sanctification of human labor, for the preservation of peace and justice and in time of famine.

“Throughout the season, the prayers for Mass were chosen from those ritual Masses,” Sister Marie Therese said. “Our chaplain, [Benedictine] Father Matthias [Neuman] loves the season and was grateful that we decided to incorporate it into the Mass.”

Benedictines have also at the heart of their charism the virtue of hospitality. So, when guests and the neighbors who live around the monastery come to their gardens, they see a physical witness to the sisters’ value of creation.

“We’ve run programs and given tours,” Sister Angela said. “I feel like my calling is to make people aware of what their surroundings are really about.”

She especially appreciates helping people understand the place of the Peace and Nature Garden in the wider ecology of the area.

“We’re witnessing what Sister Angela said. ‘People come and think that there’s nothing but bugs over there and that they bite. No. They’re pollinators, and they’re not interested in us,’” Benedictine Sheila Marie Fitzpatrick points to the growing efficient use of electricity in the monastery’s buildings, its recycling and care for its grounds as a way of setting an example for those who visit Our Lady of Grace.

She’s especially intrigued about the monastic community currently considering how it can participate in the Laudato Si’ Action Platform, a coalition between the Vatican and sister organizations around the world and people groups beyond the Church to care for creation.

“Benedictine Sister Sheila Marie Fitzpatrick points to the growing efficient use of electricity in the monastery’s buildings, its recycling and care for its grounds as a way of setting an example for those who visit Our Lady of Grace.”

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“Benedictine Sister Sheila Marie Fitzpatrick.”

Sister Sheila Marie never forgets that it’s all creation that comes together. “It’s all creation that comes together. We do it together, as a community. That’s so much of what Pope Francis says throughout Laudato Si’.”

(For more information about Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, visit www.benedictine.com.)

Providence sister’s ‘recalculation’ of life journey leads her to vocation

By Jason Moon

Special to The Criterion

Prior to becoming a member of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Providence Sister Joni Luna felt lost and began a journey of discovering her true purpose.

“As my GPS says, when I have taken a wrong turn, ‘recalculating,’ ” Sister Joni commented. “I recalculated my path and began to pursue my spirituality, which I had negligently left out of my calculations.”

Sister Joni added she has also spent a significant amount of time in recent years studying her heritage, including her Native American background, which has influenced her greatly.

“White Eagle, a Native American who was chief of the Ponca Indians from 1840 to 1914, said, ‘Never fear your journey ahead, for as God has watched over you all your life . . . so God will take you through the dark valley into the light,’” she said. “I am resolved to follow these ancient teachings and live my life in faith, truth, virtue and goodness as a devoted partner to my Creator.”

Sister Joni spent the past year in what is called formal period of initial formation.

“Ours is a religious community,” Sister Joni explained. “I had to undergo a makeover, which included shedding old, unuseful ideas that did not serve me spiritually. I had been blinded to my spiritual life, to my heritage, my culture and my roots. This was where my journey began.”

The journey included many visits to St. Mary-of-the-Woods. She attended retreats and even became a Providence Associate before she eventually knew she was destined to be a woman religious. “It was a journey of faith, of preserving peace and justice and in time of famine.”

JASON MOON is the media relations manager for the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in St. Mary-of-the-Woods. To learn more about life as a Sister of Providence, go to SistersofProvidence.org or contact vocation director Sister Joni Luna at 831-366-2505 or via e-mail at jlu@spomw.org. †

Sister Marie Therese Racine, left, Sister Angela Jarboe and Sister Sheila Marie Fitzpatrick, all members of the order and Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, pose on Oct. 4 in their community’s Peace and Nature Garden. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)
By Natalie Hoefer

JEFFERSONVILLE—We are a pilgrim people, always on the move toward our destination of heaven. Our priests are there to shepherd and guide us, in particular our parish priests. In fulfilling that role, they too are on the move—every day, all the time.

To get a feel for what a day in the life of an archdiocesan parish priest is like, The Criterion shadowed Father Matthew Tucci for a day on Sept. 29.

As pastor of Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and St. Augustine parishes, both in Jeffersonville, and as the new associate archdiocesan director of vocations for the New Albany Diocese, his day was full, lasting as it often does from 4 a.m. until about 8:30 p.m.

The journey included prayer time, a workout, a staff meeting, a funeral, and a visit to Sacred Heart School in Jeffersonville. Mass at a private Catholic academy, adoration and confession followed by a parish Mass, and ended with dinner at the home of a family of parishioners.

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"Today was a pretty busy day," admitted Father Tucci, 34, before heading to dinner. "Some days are busier, and some days are not as busy. You just never know what the Lord's going to throw at you! But it's what you do when you really love your vocation.

And it's what you do when you really love your vocation. "I love being a priest. I do," said Father Tucci. "It's something different every day. You give your life for Christ, and you go where the Spirit takes you. When you do an examen at the end of the day, there's a different reason every day to be thankful for being a priest."

"What you're doing is representing the Lord in a special way, and you're the Lord's presence in those most important times of people's lives, and that shows that God is there in the critical points of people's lives, from birth to death." (Photos by Natalie Hoefer)

†

Father Tucci uses his phone to pray the Liturgy of the Hours in his "prayer chair" in a corner of his room to set up specifically for prayer. "I get up at 4 a.m. Sometimes I work out first, sometimes I say my prayers first. I pray the Liturgy of the Hours, do active prayer, pray the rosary—pray the rosary throughout the day. You have to pray every day, both under the promise you make as a priest and because you can't live a life like this without a life of prayer. It's impossible. That grace you receive from prayer every day is what you need. Sit with the Lord at the beginning of the day and all with the Lord at the end of the day, and then you'll see all the grace he's given you."

Father Tucci holds a staff meeting with Jesus Schuler, left, Tim Seman, Kelly Ueding, and Keri Flowers in the parish office building at St. Augustine Parish. "I do my very best to split my time completely between both of the parishes. As a pastor, I think I really need to do my best to give my all to both. Sometimes administration gets in the way of ministry, and sometimes ministry gets in the way of administration. You have all these grand plans to get all this stuff done, but then all of a sudden you're swept away for three hours." (Photo by Natalie Hoefer)

A young student at Most Sacred Heart of Jesus School in Jeffersonville shows his schoolwork to Father Tucci. "I try to do admin work once a week, do a sweep of the school. I really do wish I had more time to go to the school. I like making kids laugh. It's like feeding them what they need, real joy!"

Father Tucci enters a gym in Jeffersonville. "I do some kind of exercise every day. Sometimes I go to the gym, sometimes I ride my bike, sometimes I go mountain biking."

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by Sara Geer

Special to The Criterion

OLDENBURG—God’s call to be a Sister of Saint Francis came to Hannah Houser through a familiar Disney song that, unbeknownst to listeners, incorporates Franciscan undertones within the lyrics.

“When I was listening to ‘Colors of the Wind’ sang by Mulan, on one day, I realized that God had been calling me my whole life to become a Franciscan sister,” Hannah said.

It was a big realization for her. She started following his call shortly after her first Communion. Then, during her confirmation, the call strengthened and became more apparent to her through prayers and songs.

She said the Blessed Mother Mary was always calling her through songs and that one day she felt Mary wanted her to use another gift to share the Gospel with others at Mass—American Sign Language.

Hannah learned American Sign Language in school while attending St. Rita School for the Deaf in Cincinnati, located about 20 miles from her hometown in Hamilton, Ohio. While not deaf, Hannah was born with a severe speech disability called apraxia that makes it difficult for her to speak.

A teacher and she worked together to start a program at the school to help children with other speech impediments succeed. Hence, sign language became a second language for her to talk with her family, other students and teachers and to use to share her love for following Jesus Christ. St. Rita “holds a special place” in her heart.

“Apraxia is a speech impediment that affects how the messages are sent from the brain to the mouth,” Hannah explained. “So, sometimes what I want to say, and what I do say, doesn’t always connect correctly. I have to remind myself throughout the day to slow down, pronounce and to use proper grammar.”

Growing up in a family of seven and having two loving parents who were also teachers, her disability was never a problem. Yet, when she attended grade school at St. Joseph Consolidated School in Hamilton, other students teased her because of her disability. The experience, however, was not negative for Hannah. Instead, it helped her become who she is today.

“It taught me a lot about how to stand up for myself and to stand up for others,” she said. “I learned during this time how to accept God into my life and how to be a disciple for others.”

God planted other seeds in her journey to religious life as well. The Franciscan charisms that she now lives by daily were not foreign to her growing up. An uncle is a Franciscan priest, and a great aunt was a Franciscan sister. Her mother, grandmother and several aunts were students at the Oldenburg Academy of the Immaculate Conception in Oldenburg, which is a ministry of the Franciscan sisters there. Hannah remembers fondly visiting the sisters and has many Franciscan roots in her life.

“I grew up knowing the Franciscan way of life, and I’m learning how to adopt the Franciscan charisms into my life right now through formation,” Hannah said. Hannah also has a strong love for nurturing animals and caring for the environment, another Franciscan value ingrained in her. She attended college at Muskingum University in New Concord, Ohio, where she studied sociology with a focus on animal and environmental issues. And during the summers, she worked as a camp counselor and taught the nature program at the Cleveland Sight Center Highbrook Camp in Chardon, Ohio, for children, families and adults with vision impairments.

“I was trying to connect my love of animals, and family and many other things from my life,” Hannah said. “Then when I graduated college and met vocations director Sister Kathleen, I found my vocations calling to be a Franciscan sister. It came full circle.”

Franciscan Sister Kathleen Branham, the vocations director at Sisters of Saint Francis in Oldenburg, explained the uphill battle Hannah experienced through gaining acceptance to join a religious community due to her speech disability.

Hannah had written an initial letter to many religious communities introducing herself and asking for guidance with God’s call for her. She had learned writing and grammar differently in school because of her use of American Sign Language. She received many letters and e-mails back stating they could not accept her.

“I was at NRVC [National Religious Vocations Conference] when she must have sent out a letter to several different congregations because we all got the same letter. The grammar due to her speech impediment was terrible,” Sister Kathleen said. “So, many vocations directors said after reading the letter, ‘This is a person we can’t accept’. Yet, they never called or met with her to understand why.”

Sister Kathleen said after reading the letter several times, a red flag went off that Hannah may be deaf.

She was not going to turn someone down until she met her. After an initial meeting, connections and clarifications were made and there was a better understanding for her about Hannah.

“Religious life needs to be more open to listening to everybody,” Sister Kathleen said. “People are called to the religious life regardless if they have a disability or not. And that is what a vocations director needs to do. It’s about walking with them in the discernment process. Is religious life for you? Is the single or married life for you? It really should not be my job to judge if religious life is for them or not. There is no room for judgment.”

Sister Kathleen said accepting Hannah to join the Sisters of Saint Francis has been a gift given to all the sisters. She explained since the community has a history of sisters who are educators, many sisters have volunteered their time to help tutor Hannah with improving her writing and grammar. And the congregation is in the process of expanding its education and evangelistic efforts with introducing American Sign Language classes and having Hannah sign at each Mass.

With the help of Labour Society, an organization that provided financial assistance and spiritual support to pay off $60,000 in educational debt, Hannah has now entered fully into the discernment process and became a postulant in April.

“I love being a disciple of God, walking the faith and living out the Franciscan way of life,” Hannah said. “I didn’t always see it, but God has been calling me to come home my entire life.”

Hannah Houser, a postulant with the Franciscan Sisters in Oldenburg, uses American Sign Language (ASL) by a statue of St. Clare of Assisi on the campus of the sisters’ motherhouse. Although not hearing impaired, Hannah has learned ASL because a disability she has called apraxia can make it difficult for her to speak. (Photo by Sara Geer)
Recreation, humor help Benedictine monks draw closer to God, each other

By Br. Zachary Wilberding, O.S.B.

Special to The Criterion

I guide tours for visitors to Saint Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad in southern Indiana. They often ask, “What do you monks do?” My answer usually includes a very basic introduction to our way of life based on the Rule of St. Benedict, which he wrote about 1,500 years ago.

Following the Rule, our life is focused on seeking God so that prayer is at the center of our life. Our prayer consists of the celebration of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours as a community. Privately, monks are expected to engage in lectio divina: slow, reflective and prayerful reading of Scripture.

Our prayer then calls us forth to work in service of the monastic community and the wider Church and world. The work we do is wide-ranging and includes teaching in our seminary, pastoral work in parishes, leading retreats, maintenance of buildings and grounds, gardening, fine arts and service on the local volunteer fire department.

Hence, one motto popular with Benedictines since the 9th century is “Pray and Work,” or in Latin, “Ora et Labora.” You will see it written in stone at the front of our Archabbey Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln. For most visitors, that is as much of a description as they are seeking. They never seem to ask, “What do you do for fun?” Perhaps the sight of black-robed men processing into church singing Gregorian chant leads people to believe that this is a serious place without room for much levity.

It is a serious place. And it is true that St. Benedict never mentions play or recreation in his Rule. He urges caution regarding laughter, hoping to discourage mockery of others and encourage quiet. However, Benedict is very much in favor of moderation in the monastery. He says that the strong should have something to yearn for, but the weak should have nothing to fear from monastic discipline. Correction of faults should not be too harsh.

Benedict warns that, in disciplining others, the abbot should not rub so hard at the rust that he breaks the vessel. From the centuries before Benedict, we have an ancient story about St. Anthony of Egypt, one of the early monks who lived in the fourth century, that illustrates this point.

A visiting hunter noticed some of Anthony’s monks. Brother Anthony replied, “Put an arrow in your bow and draw the string tight.”

He kept telling the hunter to draw it tighter until the hunter said, “If I make it any tighter the bow will snap.”

Anthony replied, “Put an arrow in your bow and draw the string tight.”

The spiritual life is Jesuit Father James Martin. He says that joy, humor and laughter are “under-appreciated values in the spiritual life.” He continues, “Anyone truly in touch with God is joyful.” As to extreme seriousness he says: “When you are deadly serious, you are seriously dead.”

St. Irenaeus of Lyons famously said, “The glory of God is the human being fully alive.” To be fully alive depends in part on rest, relaxation and delight. This does not mean that you have to spend the day looking for funny videos on YouTube. It does mean being open to the beauty and humor that come our way in everyday life as well as appreciating the occasional joke or funny cat video. The relaxation promoted by humor and laughter goes a long way to supporting the patience and gentleness needed for living in community. Thus, monks pray, work and play for the sake of spiritual, mental and physical health.

At Saint Meinrad, Father Harry Hagan and Brother John Glasenapp find the work of gardening to be a form of recreation. Their work in the garden yields delightful tomatoes, potatoes, cucumbers and Swiss chard for the monks. Brother John Mark Falkenhain fosters attractive flowers and shrubs which give pleasure to the eye. Father Simon Hermann keeps the courtyard mowed so that we can actually see those flowers and shrubs.

Bicycling is a popular form of play for a number of younger monks. Father Simon and Brother James Jensen have participated in a famous long distance bike ride across Iowa called “RAGBRAI.” Brother Nathanial Szidk is fond of running and has participated in marathons as well as our own Saint Meinrad 5K run. Gym exercise also has its adherents, a few of whom, like Father Adrian Burke and Brother Basil Lumsdon, go in for weightlifting.

There are less physically intensive forms of play as well. Brother Francis Wagner enjoys fishing and reading novels. Monks enjoy science fiction, serious novels as well as mystery and crime fiction. For example, I have read all of Lee Child’s Jack Reacher novels.

Movies are popular and available nowadays by streaming. Tastes run from the black and white classics, to foreign films to Disney. Then there are some monks who are avid sports fans and follow their favorite teams. Brother Francis is devoted to the Cincinnati Reds while Father Eugene Hensell supports the St. Louis Cardinals.

Play includes communal as well as individual pursuits. Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, Father Simon and Brother Nathanial often enjoy a game of catch on the lawn after supper as long as the daylight lasts.

Chess is popular in the evening. There is a regular rotation of chess games between Brother Andrew Zimmermann, Brother Maurus Zoeller and Brother Mario Ibison. Sometimes it is best not to ask who won.

Euchre games also draw some eager players. Bananagrams and checkers are also popular.

A person’s sense of humor and fun is individual and personal. We don’t all enjoy the same things all the time. But the joy that results is a part of the monastic goal of seeking God.

(Benedictine Archabbot Kurt Stasiak plays catch on May 23, 2020, on the lawn by Saint Meinrad Archabbey and its Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln in St. Meinrad. Times of recreation can help Benedictines enter more deeply into the work and prayer that is at the heart of their vocation. (Photo courtesy of Saint Meinrad Archabbey)

(Benedictine Archabbot Kurt Stasiak plays catch on May 23, 2020, on the lawn by Saint Meinrad Archabbey and its Church of Our Lady of Einsiedeln in St. Meinrad. Times of recreation can help Benedictines enter more deeply into the work and prayer that is at the heart of their vocation. (Photo courtesy of Saint Meinrad Archabbey)
About Jack Wright

Age: 31
Parents: John and Dotty Wright
Home Parish: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Richmond
Education: Centerville High School in Centerville; Marian University in Indianapolis; Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in St. Meinrad
Favorite Scripture passage: Psalm 23
Favorite saint: St. Francis of Assisi
Favorite prayer or devotion: The Rosary
Favorite book: New Seeds of Contemplation by Thomas Merton
Favorite movie: Into the Wild
Hobbies: Reading and playing basketball

Wright and a member of St. Mary-of-the-Knobs Parish in Floyd County. Their friendship deepened over the summer as both were student chaplains at St. Vincent Hospital in Indianapolis, together with their third classmate, seminarian Joe Neri.

"I am really looking forward to the day we are brother priests," Huber said. "I really appreciated getting to know Jack better and to see him in the chaplain role at the hospital. He was a natural at it, and I think he will be a great brother priest one day."

When asked to give a word of encouragement to young men considering a possible priestly vocation, Wright naturally thought of Mary.

"Growing closer to our Lady," he said. "Give your future to her. Allow her to lead you in whatever direction she wants to."
Christkindlmarkt in Ferdinand is backdrop to follow footprints of faith

By Natalie Hoefer

There’s a chill to the night air as people wait in anticipation on a hillside in front of the Sisters of St. Benedict’s Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, Ind. Finally comes a procession of candle-bearing children piercing the dark to the strains of an Alleluia chorus and a bell choir. The monastery doors open. From the flood of light, the Christmas angel appears to greet the crowd, singing, “Ye men and womenfolk who once were children too, be a child again today and do rejoice.”

So begins the annual Christkindlmarkt festival in the small, German-founded town of Evansville Diocese. This year the evening opening will take place at 6:30 p.m. on Nov. 19. The market itself will take place on Nov. 20-21 in various sites around the town, including the monastery.

The event offers more than 200 booths of hand-created items, antiques, art, Christmas wares, regional food and wines, live entertainment and free tours of the monastery. For more information, including lodging, go to www.ferdinandchristkindlmarkt.com.

The peaceful, hilltop monastery that serves as a backdrop to the festival is a reminder of the region’s strong Catholic presence, which includes Saint Meinrad Archabbey and seminary six miles to the south, and a unique Catholic find 13 miles to the north in Jasper: a geode grotto spanning a half-acre.

So, make a trek to the Christkindlmarkt festival, but carve out time to appreciate these footprints of the faith, as follows.

Monastery Immaculate Conception, Ferdinand

The town of Ferdinand was founded in 1840 by Father Joseph Kundek, a German-speaking Croatian who came to Indiana in 1840 by Father Joseph Kundek, a German-speaking Croatian who came to Indiana in 1840 by Father Joseph Kundek. It is usually known as the Geode Grotto. The Geode Grotto in Jasper, Ind., in the Evansville Diocese, is seen here on May 30, 2020. The outdoor shrine was built as a place of peace and consolation. (CNS photo/Katie Rutter)

The Geode Grotto in Jasper, Ind., in the Evansville Diocese, is seen here on May 30, 2020. The outdoor shrine was built as a place of peace and consolation. (CNS photo/Katie Rutter)

Four Catholic sisters were sent. Within three years, they founded an all-girls boarding school, and one year later became independent of St. Walburg, forming Monastery Immaculate Conception.

The current quadrangle of buildings was constructed between 1863-1867, with other structures built in subsequent years. The large domed chapel—which can be seen for miles—was added in 1924, featuring 47 stained-glass windows and hand-carved Stations of the Cross, all made in Munich, Germany.

The monastery is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Additionally, the grounds offer serene gardens, outdoor Stations of the Cross, a labyrinth, three shrines and a gift shop. Touring the monastery is a must-see. The Sisters of St. Benedict will offer free tours during the Christkindlmarkt from 10 a.m.-noon and 1-3 p.m. on Nov. 20, and from noon-2 p.m. on Nov. 21.

Visitors are also welcome to join the Sisters for Liturgy of the Hours on Monday through Friday at 7:30 a.m., noon and 5 p.m.; Saturday at 8 a.m., noon and 5 p.m.; and Sunday at 10 a.m. and 5 p.m.

Mass is available on Tuesday and Thursday at 7:55 a.m., Saturday at 8:55 a.m. and Sunday at 10:30 a.m. For more information about the Sisters and the monastery, go to thedome.org.

Saint Meinrad Archabbey, St. Meinrad

Saint Meinrad Archabbey was founded in St. Meinrad in 1854 by Benedictine monks from Einsiedeln Abbey in Switzerland. Father Kundek asked them to come to help meet the pastoral needs of the German-Catholic population in the area and to form men for the priesthood.

The latter purpose continues to this day through Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology. There, men are formed for ordained ministry as diocesan and religious order priests who serve in central and southern Indiana and beyond.

The pastoral, manicured grounds and buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places as an historic district. The campus includes the archabbey church, seminary, guesthouse, library, gift shop and more.

A few miles away on property owned by Saint Meinrad is the Our Lady of Monte Cassino Shrine. It was erected in honor of a novena to Our Lady of Monte Cassino credited with saving the village of St. Meinrad from a smallpox epidemic in 1871.

Tours of Saint Meinrad, led by a Benedictine monk, are offered each Saturday at 1:30 p.m. Central Time. The tour begins at the Archabbey Guest House and Retreat Center.

Self-guided tours are available anytime. Free visitor’s guides that include a walking tour of the campus are available at the Guest House, Memorial Lobby or the gift shop.

Visitors are also welcome to join the monks for Liturgy of the Hours on Monday through Saturday at 5:30 a.m. (7:15 a.m. on Sunday), noon and 5 p.m., with Mass at 7:30 a.m. (9:30 a.m. on Sunday). All times are Central Time.

For more information on Saint Meinrad, go to www.saintmeinrad.org.

Geode Grotto, Jasper

Just 13 miles to the north of Monastery Immaculate Conception is the German-founded town of Jasper in the Evansville Diocese.

Approaching Jasper by car, the tower of St. Joseph Catholic Church can be seen for miles. The 141-year-old structure, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is the church for yet another Catholic community founded by Father Kundek. It is usually a must-see when visiting Jasper. Unfortunately, the church is currently closed due to major interior renovations.

Geode Grotto, Indiana

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The Geode Grotto in Jasper, Ind., in the Evansville Diocese, is seen here on May 30, 2020. The outdoor shrine was built as a place of peace and consolation. (CNS photo/Katie Rutter)

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Tours of Saint Meinrad, led by a Benedictine monk, are offered each Saturday at 1:30 p.m. Central Time. The tour begins at the Archabbey Guest House and Retreat Center.

Self-guided tours are available anytime. Free visitor’s guides that include a walking tour of the campus are available at the Guest House, Memorial Lobby or the gift shop.

Visitors are also welcome to join the monks for Liturgy of the Hours on Monday through Saturday at 5:30 a.m. (7:15 a.m. on Sunday), noon and 5 p.m., with Mass at 7:30 a.m. (9:30 a.m. on Sunday). All times are Central Time.

For more information on Saint Meinrad, go to www.saintmeinrad.org.

Geode Grotto, Jasper

Just 13 miles to the north of Monastery Immaculate Conception is the German-founded town of Jasper in the Evansville Diocese.

Approaching Jasper by car, the tower of St. Joseph Catholic Church can be seen for miles. The 141-year-old structure, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is the church for yet another Catholic community founded by Father Kundek. It is usually a must-see when visiting Jasper. Unfortunately, the church is currently closed due to major interior renovations.

Geode Grotto, Indiana

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The Geode Grotto in Jasper, Ind., in the Evansville Diocese, is seen here on May 30, 2020. The outdoor shrine was built as a place of peace and consolation. (CNS photo/Katie Rutter)

The Geode Grotto in Jasper, Ind., in the Evansville Diocese, is seen here on May 30, 2020. The outdoor shrine was built as a place of peace and consolation. (CNS photo/Katie Rutter)

Saint Meinrad Archabbey, St. Meinrad

Saint Meinrad Archabbey was founded in St. Meinrad in 1854 by Benedictine monks from Einsiedeln Abbey in Switzerland. Father Kundek asked them to come to help meet the pastoral needs of the German-Catholic population in the area and to form men for the priesthood.

The latter purpose continues to this day through Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology. There, men are formed for ordained ministry as diocesan and religious order priests who serve in central and southern Indiana and beyond.

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The ‘amazing gift’ of the Eucharist helps a mother find peace

By John Shaughnessy

Jenny Annee had the feeling that something was missing in her life. Even though she had “a loving husband and two children at the time,” she found herself wondering why she “just wasn’t feeling right.”

In the midst of that unsettling feeling, she received a life-changing invitation. The invitation was to attend a Church Renew His Parish weekend at her home parish, Christ the King in Indianapolis.

“Hearing the witnesses of others and their real and love for the Eucharist made me realize I might’ve just been going through the motions at Mass, with a bit of unconscious indifference to what I was experiencing,” she recalls. “In hearing how others went to Mass more than once a week, I started wondering why they would be drawn to that.”

That retreat—and that wondering—would begin the start of what she calls “my real relationship with Jesus Christ.”

That bond grew gradually through the years as she gave birth to three more children. “As my older ones began serving weekday Masses, we had many opportunities to attend more than one Mass a week,” she notes. “I began to realize how close I felt to God each and every time I received his precious body and precious blood. The peace of being in Mass was a peace I yearned for, and I knew it was due to his gift of the Eucharist.”

She would need the peace and power of that gift during one of the darkest times of her life.

“About 15 years ago, my mother died suddenly. The sadness and depression of missing her were so much for me to bear. I started to realize that something was missing in my life. I yearned for the Eucharist.”

“Each time I’m able to receive the Eucharist as often as possible was life-giving, healing and something that truly helped in the grief I was experiencing. I started to realize that when I received the Eucharist, I was close to God and therefore close to my mother who was now with him. Over time, I was able to cope with the pain by being in the ability of the Eucharist to be close to Jesus in the Eucharist.”

Sheer appreciation of the Eucharist—and the impact it has on her life—also increased during the months when churches were closed during the COVID-19 crisis.

“I remember crying and thinking, ‘Please do not take the Lord away from me.’”

Those months without the ability to receive the Eucharist were hard, but I took the opportunity to memorize the scripture. I used to point to say it every day. Fast forward to the first day we were able to attend Mass at an outdoor service at Christ the King. I remember crying and thinking, ‘You were never away from me, and I am grateful now more than ever for the gift of the Eucharist.’”

Jenny Annee

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Rome continued from page 1A

he was happy that I was a good Catholic, and I always keep receiving Communion.

The Vatican did not comment on what Biden reported other than to say it was a “private” conversation.

The last question at Biden’s Oct. 31 news conference at the end of the G-20 summit was whether he said Pope Francis had said should put “to rest” the discussion about his worthiness to receive the Eucharist.

Biden responded, “Look, a lot of this is just personal.”

Rather than addressing the Communion question directly, the president spoke of his admiration for Pope Francis and, particularly, for how the pope “provided great solace” for him and his family when Biden’s son, Beau Biden, died of cancer in 2015.

“There has always been this debate in the Catholic Church, going back to Pope John XXIII, that talks about how we reach out and embrace people with differences,” Biden said. “This [Pope Francis] is a man who has a great empathy. He’s a man who understands that part of his Christianity is to reach out and forgive.” Biden said. “And so, I just find my relationship with him one that I personally take great solace in; he is a really, truly genuine, decent man.”
Grandparents, parents of adult children continue to learn, pass on life’s lessons

By David Gibson

Parenthood always is a work in process. There always seems to be something more and something genuinely important for parents to consider in raising children. Repeatedly, a parent quietly asks: “Who is this child of mine?” I have been a parent for only 48 years. Do I still have lots to learn? Absolutely.

Just as parents of little children continue year by year to reassess their role and its scope, their own parents wrestle with similar challenges. Real life’s unique complications leave parents of adult children, who often are grandparents too, asking what it truly means to take parenthood seriously at this point in life. Long ago, these older parents were their children’s first teachers, role models, companions, authority figures, decision-makers. Their children counted on them for so much! Now they are parents of adult children, who may be parents themselves. How cautious are they about rushing in where angels fear to tread when witnessing an adult child’s problems and major challenges?

Of course, many parents of adult children may be more than happy to exchange their long ago roles for new roles that call for serving as models of support, encouragement and, certainly, commitment and love.

My conversations with other older parents indicate that their relationships with adult children vary across the board. Their interactions reflect their unique personalities and backgrounds.

That means suggestions about how they might interact are only that, suggestions. Notably, however, Pope Francis has made quite a few suggestions for family members to draw upon in their relationships.

Older parents wondering how to keep faith alive in their relationships with adult children may derive inspiration from something Pope Francis wrote in 2016. “It is a profound spiritual experience to contemplate our loved ones with the eyes of God and to see Christ in them,” he advised in the apostolic exhortation “The Joy of Love” (“Amoris Laetitia,” #323).

He added: “This demands a freedom of passivity? Pope Francis commented: “Having time for others, to enter into dialogue, recognizing with a contemplative gaze the presence and action of God in their lives, to hear witness with actions more than with words to the new life of the Gospel is truly a service of love that changes reality.”

It can be assumed that today’s older parents or their adult children possess immunity to life’s difficulties, to times when health issues, financial difficulties or a big job change drain strength from their family.

Several of Pope Francis’ observations in the 2018 apostolic exhortation “Rejoice and Be Glad” (“Gaudete et Exsultate”) seem pertinent here. “Those who put their faith in God . . . do not desert others in bad times; they accompany them in their anxiety and distress, even though doing so may not bring immediate satisfaction,” he said (#112).

The pope remarked, too, that “it is not good when we look down on others like heartless judges, lording it over them and always trying to teach them lessons.” He recommended following this advice of St. John of the Cross: “Rejoice in the good of others as if it were your own” (#117).

Remember, Pope Francis urged, that “Christian joy is usually accompanied by a sense of humor.” Furthermore, “ill humor is no sign of holiness” (#126).

I mentioned attentive listening as a skill for parents of adult children to consider keeping close at hand. Life experience can serve as an invaluable resource too.

If parents of adult children learned from experience that life can be hard, did they also experience tough time periods that turned out surprisingly well? Sharing such memories with adult children can be a way to bring the virtue of hope’s strength into the real-life mix of family life.

If the adult children also are parents, this may be particularly valuable to them as they encounter each new and possibly turbulent stage of life that rises to the surface as their children explore what “growing up” means.

When shared honestly and with a dose of humility, the long view of life’s nerve-wracking moments can be a gift worth sharing with younger family members, one of many ways to allow faith to become visible in interactions across the generations.

(David Gibson served on Catholic News Service’s editorial staff for 37 years.) ♦
NYC provides much spiritual fruit for our parishes

Many parishes and its young people are once again getting ready and excited for the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis on Nov. 18-20. Every two years, it is the largest gathering of our young people through school youths. This year, we have more that our parishes and our archdiocesan delegation from throughout central and southern Indiana.

I am very excited about this year’s conference theme: Altare! The conference will have our young people immerse in the story of the early Church, and the days after Jesus ascended into heaven and his disciples waited for the Advocate whom he promised he would send.

They were in the upper room when “a sound came from the sky like the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting” (Acts 2:2). This family story is going to be a major theme of the conference. Apostles went forth from the room filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages to those who were gathered for the feast of Pentecost. Peter then steps up to deliver a powerful witness that ends in 3,000 people being baptized that day!

Now, we are not expecting 3,000 people to be baptized at NCYC this year, but we are expecting the Holy Spirit to come upon our gathering. We are expecting powerful encounters with our Lord. Our last NCYC gathering in 2019, things have been far from normal—and that is an understatement! Many of our youth have spent time “in the upper room” as they quarantined and/or attended school remotely. This year’s NCYC is a reminder that God enters all of it. God finds us where we are, and God enters into our story.

As our youths return from NCYC, it is crucial to remember that there are not something that separate them from our parish communities. We need to show our young people that their experiences are essential to the life of our community. Here are four ways you can help our young people as they return to the “real world” after NCYC.

• Ask what was one takeaway you gained from NCYC, what speakers they remembered and what messages resonated with them.

• Ask if there is anything you can pray for them about after this experience.

• If you know a youth that participated in NCYC, they might be a great candidate to invite into a liturgical minister role at Mass. A personal invitation goes a long way, and if they say “yes,” make sure to keep in touch through text.

• Often, youth ministers will hold an NCYC recap night for the parish. Make sure you attend, as the parish doesn’t have one, gather some adults and offer to make a meal, so the youth can get together and share their experience.

NCYC is such a gift to our local community, and I urge each of you to find a way we can have a great opportunity to feed off of this energy and see much spiritual fruit in our parishes.

If you are interested in learning more and want help connecting with youth, email your parish NCYC outreach to the parish youth ministry leader or feel free to e-mail me at PattiLamb@archindy.org.

(Paul Sifuentes is the director of youth ministry for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.)

The will of the people

Leafting editorial writers and news anchors have recently been warning us that public approval of the Supreme Court is dropping. They refer to polls conducted by Gallup and the Annenberg Public Policy Center. In June, after a term when the court struck down a Texas abortion law and protected gay and transgender employees, Gallup put the court’s approval rating of 58%. When the court declined to effect new Texas abortion law and Gallup said its rating had fallen to 40%.

It’s pretty clear what’s going on. On Dec. 1, the court will hear arguments in Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization. The question presented is whether the constitutional prohibitions on elective abortions are unconstitutional.

The court has, in other words, agreed to reexamine Roe v. Wade, which was correctly decided. The abortion lobby is warning the court that the very prospect of overturning Roe is already threatening its legitimacy.

In April, President Joe Biden created a commission to recommend proposals for reforming the court, such as adding more justices. It’s not an original idea. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt II had proposed packing the court after he won an electoral landslide (52-3) in the 1936 election.

President Roosevelt argued that the court should be expanded, but he did have reason to think that the court was getting out of its lane. For 40 years, the federal courts and the states had tried to regulate wages, hours and other terms of employment, and the Supreme Court had frustrated their efforts. The court was clearly out of step with the desires of the elected branches of government.

In 1937, Roger Bader, the court argued that the Constitution didn’t allow laws like these. They violated the freedom of contract that was, the court said, inherent in the due process clause.

But the due process clause says nothing about freedom of association. No person can be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law. So, how would one bundle execute (life) or incarcerate (liberty) or fine (property) a criminal defendant without a fair trial? The court, which has never been thinking about minimum wage laws.

Though FDR’s court-packing plan failed, the court eventually stopped supervising even the economy. In 1937, it acknowledged that “the Constitution does not speak of freedom of contract.” From then on, it gave free rein to the democratically elected branches, unless there was some express prohibition in the Constitution.

That is, until 1973. In Roe v. Wade, the court acknowledged that “the Constitution does not expressly mention any right of privacy.” It nevertheless held that such a right might be interpreted into the provision of the due process clause as “a personal liberty.” And this right to privacy, the court said, forbade most kinds of government action with aborons.

According to a report this year by the Guttmacher Institute, states have enacted 1,313 different and numerically sound restrictions since Roe was decided. And for almost 40 years, the court has relied on its unwritten version of the Constitution, “the law of the land,” to strike down laws dealing with when, where, and by whom abortions may be performed; with informed consent laws; with parental involvement laws; with reporting and partial-birth abortion.

The parallels between Lochner and Roe v. Wade are striking. In 1905, the court invoked a right found nowhere in the Constitution to impose its own vision of social justice on the democratically elected branches of government.

Here’s the ironic thing: The court has
The Church accepts tattooing as morally acceptable under certain conditions

Q. I am thinking of getting a tattoo on my arm of my late daughter’s handwriting. Is there anything in Catholic teaching against this? I want to do this for my 75th birthday which is coming up soon. (Kentucky)

A. There is nothing in Catholic teaching that prohibits getting a tattoo. Some point to a passage in Leviticus that says, “Do not lacerate your bodies for the dead, and do not tattoo yourselves” (Lv 19:28). But in its context, that was a Jewish ceremonial prohibition that may have dealt with expressing devotion to a false god. Tattoos that are sexually explicit or satanic would naturally be immoral, as would a minor’s choice to disobey a parent by getting a tattoo. But a tattoo itself, even though it is permanent, violates no moral principle, and I see no problem with the questioner’s getting a tattoo of her daughter’s handwriting as a permanent memorial.

I think it wise, though, for anyone considering a tattoo to ask: Will I still want this on my body 10 years from now?

Q. My brother is 82 years old and gay. He left the Church many years ago—in part, I think, because he believes some myths about how the Church feels about gays.

A. There is a special need, then, for gay people to assure them that they are an essential part of the people of God.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, first published in 1994, says this: “Men and women who are homosexual by nature and who freely choose to be gay—any more than they choose to be right- or left-handed. The overwhelming opinion of psychologists today is that people don’t choose to be gay—any more than they choose to be right- or left-handed. While the Church believes (based on sacred Scripture and its consistent teaching) that homosexual acts are morally unacceptable, the Church also teaches that homosexual inclinations are not sinful in themselves. A person whose orientation is gay has special challenges in living a Christian life, and every help should be given. There is a special need, then, for gay people to be welcomed by their parish communities. In his life and ministry, Jesus regularly reached out to those who felt excluded or marginalized, and the Church is continuing that effort.

One Catholic organization that does good work in this regard is Courage International. Founded in 1980, it helps people who experience same-sex attraction to find fellowship amongst others in ways consistent with the teachings of the Church.

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

My Journey to God

Chrysalis

By Cynthia Leppert

Her body nearly spent,
and her mind clouded with pain
(he slips a little medication into her water

to make her more comfortable,) and her spirit,
oh, now it’s the Spirit’s time …

alternately squirms and rests,

squirming, stretching, pushing

as in a live chrysalis,

answering the call
to freedom at last.

(Cynthia Leppert is a member of St. Christopher Parish in Indianapolis. Photo: Women religious of the Little Sisters of the Poor keep vigil with a dying resident, praying together at her bedside, at the Little Sisters of the Poor St. Joseph’s Home in Palatine, Ill., in this 2016 photo.) (CNS photo/courtesy Little Sisters of the Poor)
Please submit in writing to our office by 10 a.m. Thursday before the week of publication; be sure to state date of death. Obligations of archdiocesan priests serving our archdiocese are listed elsewhere in this section. 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.

BOWLES, Margaret C., 86, St. Lawrence, Indianapolis, Oct. 7. Mother of Chadd, Greg, Jeff, Matthew and Todd Bowles. Grandmother of 12.


LITMER, Carol A., 81, St. Catherine of Siena, Decatur County, Oct. 20. Mother of Clark and Scott Litmer. Grandmother of two.


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Fall conference gives women a spiritual ‘booster shot’

By Sara Geer

Special to The Criterion

“It may have taken you a little bit of a struggle to get here,” Gina Bauer told those present at the 2021 Indiana Catholic Women’s Conference. “Yet, Jesus will take all our tears and doubts and raise it up. The Father is going to accept the gift of our suffering, and the Spirit is going to be released on the Church. We are going forward.”

Bauer, a wife and mother, connected with the more than 400 conference attendees by opening up about her own struggle with anxiety and fear during the COVID-19 pandemic. These feelings, she explained, were “blocking” her from happiness, peace and joy, and needed to be removed to allow grace to fill her life.

“I felt called by the Lord that you wanted to have Padre Pio today, a true lover of our Lady,” Father Blount said. “I felt called by the Lord that the conference attendees needed Padre Pio present even though Padre Pio could not be.

“The room erupted with applause. Joan Noble, a member of St. Peter Parish in Franklin County, saw the relic as a sign that she was “supposed to be here” at the conference, having accepted the offer to attend from a friend. She shared that she attributes praying through the intercession of St. Padre Pio to the curing of her daughter’s cancer 51 years ago from cancer—she had not been expected to live. Now 58, her daughter is a living miracle, she said.

“The day’s schedule included talks in the morning and afternoon. Mass across the street at St. John the Evangelist Church, and a few breaks in between.

Guest speaker Annie Karto, who canted at Mass, also mentioned how wonderful it was to be able to once again celebrate the liturgy in a church completely filled with faith-filled women. “Even today, I was so lifted up by all of you,” Karto said. “You know from the cantor’s podium you can see the reverence, you can see your love and your devotion to our Lord. And your voices, to hear that many voices, how long has it been to hear that many voices together at a church. How beautiful it was.”

From the stage, Karto sang several of her own compositions and invited the women to sing along with her. She explained that when you had a scheduled performance, you understood that last year you wanted to have Padre Pio present even though Padre Pio could not be. Attendees needed Padre Pio present even though Padre Pio could not be.

Finally, Castellanos is looking to parish leaders to embrace what the program will offer. “We’re hoping pastors get involved with the communities at this level,” he said. “What I mean by ‘involved’ … is we’re not going to ask the pastors to do more work. We actually want to take some work out of their busy agendas. This will be an opportunity for them to engage in a different way, to understand more what’s happening at the lower, grassroots level.”

Castellanos, who is working on a doctor of education degree in organizational leadership at Maran, said he is excited to lead the initiative, which he believes is the first of its kind.

“Ministry is my passion. This is my first experience in higher education,” he said. “I was attracted to a program that could bridge pastoral ministry, faith formation, Spanish/Latinx ministry and higher education. It think it’s unique.”

“The hope can we put Marian on the map,” he added. The Lilly grant, which covers a five-year commitment, Castellanos said, shows how the diocese is on the look-out to includes parishes in Ohio and Illinois.

The hope, Castellanos noted, is for participation in both academic and pastoral education.

“We’re trying to put together something real that is going to happen in a Hispanic parish or a Latin-serving community,” he said. “I hope they take that with them. There will be an invitation for them to go really deep into the experience.”

for Missionary Hermit of St. Joseph Father Pio Mandato. He was not only going to speak, but was going to offer individual blessings with a glove of St. Pio of Pietrelcina, popularly known as Padre Pio.

Coincidentally, guest speaker Father Blount started his talk by holding up a relic he brought of an actual habit worn by Padre Pio. He said he felt called by the Lord that the conference attendees needed Padre Pio present even though Padre Pio could not be.

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The Vatican's official statement on the topics the pope discussed with Biden included specific language about what constitutes worthiness to receive Communion and how politicians who support legalized abortion are not worthy to receive.

It would be impossible to think Pope Francis did not know the Biden administration supports legalized abortion and perhaps even that Biden renounced his longtime support for the Hyde Amendment, which bans federal funding for most abortions.

Throughout his political career, Biden has acknowledged the tensions between the Democratic Party and the Catholic Church over abortion, which the Church sees as the taking of an innocent human life.

But the president also must have seen the comments Pope Francis made recently when asked specifically about the question of giving Communion to Catholic politicians who support abortion.

“Abortion is more than a problem,” he told reporters on Sept. 15. “Abortion is murder.”

But the question about giving Communion is not theological; it’s pastoral, he said.

“Communion is not a prize for the perfect,” but rather “a gift, the presence of Jesus in his Church and in the community. That is the theology,” he said.

“If we look at the history of the Church, we see that every time bishops have not managed a problem as pastors, they have taken sides on political life, on the political problem. In not handling a problem well, they took sides politically.”

Archbishop E. Lori of Baltimore, the incoming chair of the U.S. bishops’ pro-life committee and a consultant to the U.S. bishops’ doctrinal committee, which drafted the statement on the Eucharist, told Catholic News Service that he believes the document will be pastoral.

“I think it would be a beautiful thing if, in November, we were to close ranks and say, ‘We are pastors. We love our people. We want to make this an inviting Church and we want to gather people around the altar of the Lord,’ ” he told CNS in late October.

While teaching the truth and upholding the sacred dignity of all human life, “the Church is called to be the great sacrament of salvation and the great sacrament of unity. And if ever there were a time we needed to live up to that deeply theological description of what the Church is, it’s right now in our polarized culture,” Archbishop Lori said. “So we have to be careful of not allowing ourselves to go down no exit, partisan alleys where there is no life at the end of it, no evangelical life, no spiritual fruit.”

(Cindy Wooden is Rome bureau chief of Catholic News Service.)

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**Analysis**

**Pilgrim’s path: Parsing what the president said Pope Francis said**

By Cindy Wooden

Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—If Pope Francis called President Joe Biden a “good Catholic,” as Biden told reporters, a ceramic tile the pope gave Biden may illustrate what he meant.

The painted 12-inch square tile depicts a pilgrim walking along the banks of the Tiber River toward the Vatican. But he is not there yet.

Pope Francis welcomed Biden to the Vatican on Oct. 29, and the two met privately, assisted by two interpreters, for 75 minutes, a record for a papal audience with a head of state.

For more than a year, Pope Francis’ go-to gift for visiting government leaders has been either a plaque depicting a migrant family with the inscription, “Let’s fill our hands with other hands,” or a sculpture of a dove holding an olive branch with the inscription, “Be messengers of peace.”

But for Biden, the pope chose the pilgrim.

As Pope Francis has made clear throughout his pontificate, defining people as good Catholics or good Christians does not mean canonizing them or approving of everything they say and do. Rather, good Christians recognize they are sinners in need of God’s forgiveness and grace, and they are committed to continuing the journey.

After meeting the pope, a reporter asked Biden if he and the pope had discussed abortion. Biden said no, “we just talked about the fact he was happy that I was a good Catholic, and I should keep receiving Communion.”

The Vatican’s official statement on the topics the pope and his secretary of state discussed with Biden included climate change, religious freedom, migration, the end of it, no evangelical life, no spiritual fruit.”

Throughout his political career, Biden has acknowledged the tensions between the Democratic Party and the Catholic Church over abortion, which the Church sees as the taking of an innocent human life.

But the president also must have seen the comments Pope Francis made recently when asked specifically about the question of giving Communion to Catholic politicians who support abortion.

“The president also must have seen the comments Pope Francis made recently,” CNS reported on Sept. 15. “Abortion is murder.”

But the question about giving Communion is not theological; it’s pastoral, the president said.

“Communion is not a prize for the perfect,” but rather “a gift, the presence of Jesus in his Church and in the community. That is the theology,” he said.

“If we look at the history of the Church, we see that every time bishops have not managed a problem as pastors, they have taken sides on political life, on the political problem. In not handling a problem well, they took sides politically.”

Archbishop E. Lori of Baltimore, the incoming chair of the U.S. bishops’ pro-life committee and a consultant to the U.S. bishops’ doctrinal committee, which drafted the statement on the Eucharist, told CNS that he believes the document will be pastoral.

“I think it would be a beautiful thing if, in November, we were to close ranks and say, ‘We are pastors. We love our people. We want to make this an inviting Church and we want to gather people around the altar of the Lord,’ ” he told CNS in late October.

While teaching the truth and upholding the sacred dignity of all human life, “the Church is called to be the great sacrament of salvation and the great sacrament of unity. And if ever there were a time we needed to live up to that deeply theological description of what the Church is, it’s right now in our polarized culture,” Archbishop Lori said. “So we have to be careful of not allowing ourselves to go down no exit, partisan alleys where there is no life at the end of it, no evangelical life, no spiritual fruit.”

(Cindy Wooden is Rome bureau chief of Catholic News Service.)

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