Joyful Witness
An opportunity to remember and pray for our military, page 12.

Joy overflows in cathedral during ordination of two priests
By Sean Gallagher

Transitional Deacons José Neri and Jack Wright felt butterflies as they processed into SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral on June 3 at the start of the Mass during which they would be ordained priests.

This was the day that they had prepared for and prayed about for many years. It had finally come.

All those nerves disappeared for Deacon Wright, though, as soon as Archbishop Charles C. Thompson laid hands on his head—the central ordination ritual that goes back to the earliest days of the Church.

“I knew in that moment that it was Jesus’ hands being laid on my head,” said newly ordained Father Wright moments after the ordination Mass. “From that moment, I’ve just felt really good.”

Newly ordained Father Neri likewise felt “excited and happy” after the liturgy.

A turning point for him during the ordination was when Archbishop Thompson used chrism oil to anoint his hands—hands he would use to celebrate the Mass and other sacraments to help the faithful grow in holiness.

“I got really emotional,” Father Neri said. “My hands were being consecrated to serve the people of God. I’ll be doing this for the rest of my life.”

Catholic schools serve as stepping stones to Catholicism for Indianapolis family of four
By Natalie Hoefer

June and Ramon Toliver were thrilled with St. Lawrence School in Indianapolis. Their sons, Sidney and Justin, were earning high marks, and the non-denominational couple appreciated the faith their boys were being taught.

The Toliver family smiles in St. Lawrence Church in Indianapolis after being received into the full communion of the Church during the parish’s Easter Vigil Mass on April 8. (Submitted photo)

See ORDINATION, page 10
See FAMILY, page 15
Criticism readers embrace the joy of God's abundant blessings

(Editors note: ‘The Criticism invited our readers to share a favorite Bible verse or a favorite quote that helps remind them of God’s presence in their lives and/or helps center them in their relationships with other people. The response has been overwhelming and has come from across the archdiocese. As always, our staff feels blessed by our readers. Here is part eight of the series, the last story featuring the responses we received.)

By John Shaughnessy

Janine Schorsch believes we all have a defining choice about the way we choose to live each day. “Muddle through the day, one foot in front of the other, waiting for it to be over. Or search for the abundant life of blessings” that God offers us every day, she says. Schorsch’s choice to embrace the joy of God’s abundant blessings flows from her favorite Bible verse, John 10:10, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

“God is not stingy,” says Schorsch, a member of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross Parish in Bright. “God wants to bless us with a joy beyond our asking. Life can be difficult. We are often faced with challenging circumstances. It is a very common, human reaction to focus on all that is wrong, leading to depression and hopelessness. But that is not God’s plan for me or anyone. I begin each day with a gratitude list. Sometimes it is as huge as my brother’s scan showing no cancer in his lungs, or as small as seeing a robin. ‘With God’s grace, I have always been able to find a blessing. Sometimes it is not apparent until years later, but I know it will be there. I find comfort in God’s assurance that his plan for me is good, without exception.’

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—Janine Schorsch

Wanted: Your nominations for the archdiocese’s annual Legacy Award

The list is an impressive one. Former archdiocesan chancellor and longtime Catholic schools’ leader Annette “Mickey” Lentz, the late Msgr. Paul Koetter, longtime St. Monica Parish religious education director Mary Jo Thomas-Day, and the late Deacon Marc Kellams, who served as corrections ministry coordinator for the archdiocese. All were recognized in recent years by the archdiocese as Legacy Gala award winners. Do you know a faith-filled individual or couple—like the group listed above—who has established a legacy through their involvement in Catholic ministry? If so, the archdiocesan Office of Stewardship and Development is seeking nominations for the Legacy Gala award for 2023.

‘Your every act should be done with love’

The card that arrived from Charles Waltermann came with this quote from 1 Corinthians 16:14, “Your every act should be done with love.”

A member of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Richmond, Waltermann also included two other Bible verses that he sees as antitheses to a prevailing human weakness.

“We humans can be so judgmental and harsh on our fellow humans than we can be on ourselves,” he says. His first recommended Bible verse is from Psalm 95:8, “If today you hear God’s voice, harden not your hearts.” The second verse he shared is from Matthew 9:13, “Go and learn the meaning of these words, ‘It is mercy that I desire, not sacrifice.’ ”

A song of comfort

Marilyn Caldwell isn’t sure where she first heard the verse, but the member of Mary, Queen of Peace Parish in Danville knows the words always provide a source of comfort for her.

“No and then when I am discouraged, I sing to myself these words: ‘Thank O my Father For giving us your Son And leaving us your Spirit Until our work on Earth is done.’

“Our shared goodness, our gracious God”

When Mike Cecil came across what would become his favorite quote, it also represented a major turning point in his life.

“This quote provided me with an ‘aha’ moment and fundamentally changed how I view life, religion and my relationship with God,” says Cecil, a member of St. Philip Neri Parish in Indianapolis. “The ‘gotcha’ of my youth, who seeks only to judge, is replaced with a loving, caring, understanding God.”

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New Catholic at St. Michael Parish in Charlestown finds ‘purpose in life’

By Natalie Hoeter

Haley Cady was in high school when the COVID-19 global pandemic closed schools to close its doors and move to an online format. “It wasn’t working out for me,” says Cady, 19. “I didn’t talk to my friends. I left high school, and I just started watching videos online.”

They weren’t just any videos—they were videos about Christianity. Cady, an atheist, felt called to search for meaning in life.

“I looked at [other faiths] a little,” she says. “But once I found out about the Catholic faith, it didn’t make sense to look at others because they weren’t the one Christ founded.”

Her search led her to the Catholic faith and to St. Michael Parish in Charlestown. On April 8, she was welcomed into the full communion of the Church during the Easter Vigil Mass at St. Michael Church.

“I’m a very shy person,” Cady admits. “But God gave her the grace to start her search alone, and the blessing of help along the way.

“I just knew I was home”

Cady says her virtual search did not last long before she found and believed in the Catholic faith.

“Everything about it made sense—it was the first time things made sense,” she says. But Cady encountered some hurdles in her desire to become Catholic.

“I didn’t know anyone who was Catholic, and I wasn’t sure where to start,” she says. “I just knew this was Catholic, and I wasn’t sure where to start.”

She went to a Christian church close to her home for a while before she signed up for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) program at St. Michael.

“There was a challenge because I didn’t have my driver’s license,” says Cady. She gives credit to her parents who, despite their own lack of belief in God, faithfully drove her daughter to RCIA classes and Mass at the parish.

Cady admits to being nervous at first about worshipping at Mass, “especially the standing and kneeling.”

“But she adds, “I just knew I was home. Everyone was just really nice. I didn’t have that at the church by my house.”

One person in particular helped Cady feel at home—St. Michael’s pastoral associate Jessica Sarver, who became Cady’s sponsor.

“The day we first met for coffee, I was expecting Haley to have a lot of questions,” she says. “Instead, she had already found the answers to most of her questions on her own. She knew she wanted to become Catholic and was willing to do whatever was required of her.”

Though it wasn’t required, Cady took Sarver’s suggestion of getting involved in the parish by helping with Sunday school for fourth- and fifth-grade students.

“I have one older brother, so I’ve never been around kids,” she says. “I always wanted a big family, so it was great to be there and help”—a volunteer effort she plans to continue now that she’s obtained her driver’s license.

But Cady also listened to the children’s lessons. There was “a little overlap” with what she was learning in RCIA, she says, “but most of what I heard was new.”

One important lesson she learned through RCIA was a better “understanding of human nature.”

“Why we are the way we are and why the world is how it is, is all the result of the fall,” says Cady. “There’s a reason why we’re here. That opened my eyes to the fact that there’s purpose in life.”

“The rest of my life to learn and grow”

Cady’s desire to become Catholic was fulfilled during St. Michael’s Easter Vigil Mass on April 8, when she received the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist.

“I was really nervous, but trying not to let that get in the way of understanding what was actually happening,” she says.

“What actually happened” goes much deeper than the physical acts of receiving her sacraments of initiation.

“Becoming Catholic has changed me and how I am, my outlook on life,” she says. “Before I came to the faith, I had a hard time understanding what the purpose of life was, and whether there was any meaning in it.

“After entering into the faith, my whole outlook on the world changed. I’m now able to see the significance of life has in a way I hadn’t before. Even more so on the individual level, that everyone was made for something, that they have their own vocation, and that we’re all part of a story bigger than ourselves.”

Cady admits she has “more room to grow” in her faith, “more room to grow in my faith. But with how much I’ve changed, I’m excited to see how much more I can change.”

And she’s excited about how much time she has to continue changing.

“I’m really grateful to start this journey so young,” Cady says. “When I was hearing peoples’ testimonies in RCIA, when they started, they were already married and had kids. It’s nice to start this journey now, so I have the rest of my life to learn and grow.”

In a bulletin piece introducing Cady to the parish prior to Easter weekend, she shared about her journey, including these closing lines:

“Anyone who knows me, knows I’m not the most outgoing of persons. I’m about as shy as a person can be, so this process hasn’t always been the easiest for me, which is why I am so grateful for everyone who has helped me on this journey. I don’t know how I could have done this without them.

“This process has changed me so much, it’s beyond words. It is truly by God’s grace that I am where I am today, and for that I am eternally grateful.”

Father Jeyaseelan Sengolraj, administrator of St. Michael Parish in Charlestown, baptizes Haley Cady during the Easter Vigil Mass at St. Michael Church on April 8. (Submitted photos by Jennie Lathem)
Have we reached out to others, as if they were Christ in disguise?

We just celebrated Pentecost, the birthday of the Church, two Sundays ago, and have returned to Ordinary Time on the liturgical calendar. Like the Apostles at that first Pentecost, we, too, have been commissioned to fulfill the Church’s mission of evangelization on the Earth.

The Holy Spirit, which descended on Jesus’ disciples, has descended on us again, and have returned to Ordinary Time of humanity as we journey together through this life.”

As the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) states on its website: “The corporal works of mercy are found in the teachings of Jesus and give us a model for how we should treat all others, as if they were Christ in disguise. They ‘are charitable actions by which we help our neighbors in their bodily needs’ [United States Catechism for Adults]. They respond to the basic needs of humanity as we journey together through this life.”

Our reflections could include the spiritual works of mercy as well. Have you instructed the ignorant? Comforted the sorrowful? Befriended the stranger? Comforted the sick? Visited those in prison? Buried the dead? Sheltered the homeless? Visited the sick? Bore wrongs patiently? Forgiven injuries? Comforted the doubtful? Admonished the sinner? You instructed the ignorant? Counseled the doubtful? Understood the weak? Prayed for the living and the dead? The USCCB states: “The spiritual works of mercy have long been a part of the Christian tradition, appearing in the works of theologians and spiritual writers throughout history. Just as Jesus attended to the spiritual well-being of those he ministered to, these spiritual works of mercy guide us to ‘help our neighbor in their spiritual needs’ [United States Catechism for Adults].

Our faith instructs us that “love of God and love of neighbor” are the two greatest commandments, and making a commitment to fulfill the corporal and spiritual works of mercy offers a beautiful witness as missionary disciples to do just that. These can also be opportunities to bring light to situations that are enveloped in darkness.

The time after Pentecost should also be a time to follow the Holy Spirit, because everything is on the move— including the Church. That movement should include us as well. If you’ve heard Archbishop Charles C. Thompson speak or read any of his writings during his nearly six years as shepherd of the Church in central and southern Indiana, you know he likes to reference Pope Francis and our universal shepherd’s wisdom.

One word the archbishop has consistently used as he talks about the mission of the Church, citing the Holy Father, is “accompaniment.” We are called to accompany our brothers and sisters on their faith journeys, Archbishop Thompson has said on many occasions, and that implies “movement,” he has noted.

As we continue marking Ordinary Time, let us pray it is a Spirit-led time for all of us, a time to allow God’s grace to move us and work through us. As St. Maximilian Kolbe, the saint of Auschwitz, wrote, “My little children, remember, holiness is not a luxury, but a simple duty. Holy Spirit, guide our lives, and let your wisdom fill our hearts. Pour out your love on us, so we can share it with others. And in this process, may we be instruments of saving grace to others.”

—Mike Krokos

Letters Policy

Letters from readers are published in The Criterion as part of the newspaper’s commitment to “the responsible exchange of freely-held and expressed opinion among the People of God” (Communio et Progressio, 116).

Letters from readers are welcome and every effort will be made to include letters from as many people and representing as many viewpoints as possible. Letters should be informative, relevant, well-expressed and temperate in tone. They must reflect a basic sense of courtesy and respect.

The editors reserve the right to select the letters that will be published and to edit letters from readers as necessary based on space limitations, perspective, sensitivity and content (including spelling and grammar). In order to encourage openness, anonymity from readers is requested. Frequent writers will ordinarily be limited to one letter every three months. Concise letters (usually less than 300 words) are more likely to be printed.

Letters must be signed, but for serious comments may be published without signature.

Send letters to “Letters to the Editor,” The Criterion, 1400 N. Meridian Street, Indianapolis, IN 46202-2367. Readers with access to e-mail may send letters to criterion@archindy.org.
Comencemos con entusiasmo el año parroquial del Renacimiento Eucarístico
June 13
Church of the Immaculate Conception, 141 W. State Road 48, in Bloomington, on June 16.

June 14
Abbots Ford Retreat Center, 1305 N. Delaware St., Indianapolis. Theology on Tap, 6-9 p.m., in person or via Zoom, 2-3:30 p.m. Franciscan Sister Olga Wettekind presenting, freewill donation.

June 15
Our Lady of Peace, 9001 Haverstick Road, Indianapolis, Mass, 2 p.m.

June 16
Northside Events and Social Club, 2108 71st St., Indianapolis. Catholic Business Exchange, presenter Tjoko family, 6:35 p.m., Mass 7 a.m., buffet breakfast and program following, 25 members present.

June 17
Gifford Park, 10700 Bono Rd., Terre Haute. Quick Quok Trail Run, 6:30-7:30 a.m. registration, 8 a.m. 5k race, benefiting Terre Haute Catholic Charities, chip timing, refreshments, register by June 11 for T-shirts, $30 individual, walk-ups welcome; $100 families of 6 or more.

June 18

June 21
Mount Saint Francis Chapel, 435 W. Troy Ave., Indianapolis. Mass, 2 p.m.

June 22
Victory Field, 501 W. Maryland St., Indianapolis. Catholic Night at Victory Field, 6 p.m. gates open, 7:05 p.m. game start, Indianapolis Indians vs. Columbus Clippers, benefiting St. Vincent De Paul Society of Indianapolis, Thursday Thurday discount food and drink, $10 (plus $2.50 service fee) for Vive ticket block tickets. Tickets: flyvium.com/event/SaintVincent622. Information: 317-524-7697 ext. 238, flyvium@indypack.com.

June 23-24
King the Christ Parish, 5854 N. Crittenden Ave., Indianapolis. Summer Spirituals 101 St. Anthony Mount Saint Francis Center for Spirituality, Pump House Studio, 101 St. Anthony Dr., Mt. St. Francis. Bluegrass Jam, 5:30 p.m., free. Information franciscansusa.org/bluegrass-jam.

June 26
Archdiocese of Indianapolis, 335 S. Meridian St., Indianapolis. Catholic Charities Refuge and Immigration Services Volunteer Information Session, 10-11 a.m., refreshments provided. Information, registration: cutt.ly/CBB3SS, Laura Sheehan, lsheehan@archindy.org.

June 29
Benedict Inn Retreat & Conference Center, 1402 Southern Ave., Beech Grove. Peace and Nature Garden Walk, 7-8:30 p.m., Benedictine Sister Angela Jabor presenting, free will donation. Information: benedictine.org/events, benedictine@benedictine.org, 317-788-7581.

June 30
Mount St. Francis Center for Spirituality, 101 St. Anthony Dr., Mt. St. Francis. Painting with Father Padre Pau Clariana, 6-9 p.m. Conventual Father Vincent Peterson facilitator, painting supplies and snacks provided, bring beverage to share, registration required. $40, limited to 12 participants. Information: registration, lukyvd0832@palm. net or communication@ moundsfranciscans.org, 812-923-8817.

July 5
Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 22143 Main St., Oldenburg. Complimentary Prayer, in person or via Zoom, 2-3:30 p.m., Franciscan Sister Olga Wettekind presenting, freewill donation. Information, registration: 812-933-6437, center@oldenburg.org, oldenburg@franciscanscenter.org.

July 7
Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 22143 Main St., Oldenburg. A Day of Quiet Renewal, 9 a.m. -$20, $70 with spiritual direction. Information, registration, 812-933-6437, center@oldenburg.org, oldenburg@franciscanscenter.org.

July 8
Oldenburg Franciscan Center, 22143 Main St., Oldenburg. The Art of Living with Death, 9:30-11:30 a.m., psychologist Richard Brenden presenting, $30, $45 with CEU. Information, registration: 812-933-6437, center@oldenburg.org, oldenburg@franciscanscenter.org.

July 10, 17
Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 3555 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. The “Chosen” Escape Room Experience, Discussion and Dinner, 5:30-8:30 p.m., fifth and sixth of eight Monday sessions (Aug. 7), episode viewing and discussion, $18 per session, includes dinner, popcorn and refreshments. Registration: filmetrofitretreat.com/events, 317-545-7681, jacolms@archindy.org.

July 11
Benedict Inn Retreat and Conference Center, 1402 Southern Ave., Beech Grove. Personal Day of Retreat, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., $40, includes private room for the day and lunch, spiritual direction available for additional $50, must be scheduled in advance. Information, registration: benedictine.org/events, 317-788-7581, benedictine@archindy.org.

Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, 3555 E. 56th St., Indianapolis. Divine Wine and Mandalas, 5-30 p.m.-9 p.m. art therapist Kris Scrives presenting, $45 includes meal and program. Registration: filmetrofitretreat.com/events, 317-545-7681, jacolms@archindy.org.

July 13
Mount St. Francis Center for Spirituality, Pump House Studio, 101 St. Anthony Dr., Mt. St. Francis. New Horizons: Emerging Artists Discussion Panel, 6 p.m., featuring four local artists in exhibit, gallery hours.

June 16-18 retreat in Bloomington will focus on hearts of Jesus and Mary

“Journeys of the Sacred Heart” is an annual retreat offered by the Benedictine Sisters of St. Mary of the Woods, part of the Congregation of St. Mary of the Woods.

The retreat will be led by Franciscan of the Immaculate Father John Lawrence Polis. Each day includes retreat sessions and the opportunity for Mass, confession, adoration and time for prayer.

The cost is $50.70 for those ages 18 and older. Those ages 18 and younger may attend with a parent. The cost includes Saturday lunch and dinner. Overnight accommodations are available for an additional cost.

For more information or to register, call 812-825-4642, ext. 1.

Wedding Anniversaries

WILLIAM AND JEAN (KENNARD) WISE, members of Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ Parish in Indianapolis, celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary on April 18.

The couple was married in St. Therese of France, Portugal and Spain for a list of events for the next four weeks as reported to The Criterion, log on to www.archindy.org/events.

The Criterion Friday, June 9, 2023
By John Shaughnessy

For 126 years, the students, families and staff of Holy Cross Central School in Indianapolis have embraced its impact on their lives and their faith with a combination of pride and love.

And as the last week of the school’s existence started on the morning of May 22, the students and staff showed their love and pride in the messages that were emblazoned on the fluorescent lime T-shirts that they all wore into the school Mass on that day.

The words on the front of the shirt proclaimed, “You never go up with all your heart,” while the back of the shirt simply stated, “Holy Cross Central, 1897-2023.”

The words on the front of the shirt reflected the dual cultures and languages that mark the lives of so many Holy Cross students.

And after receiving their diplomas on the gym’s stage that has a huge Celtic cross painted on the main wall, the graduates carried a rose with them as they walked into the rows of seats where their loved ones beamed at them. In 13 touching moments, each graduate gave their rose to someone special in their lives—and soon were enveloped in a bear hug filled with tears, with both youths and adults not wanting to let go of each other.

“Here is what I know for sure,” she said directly to the graduates. “Home is not a place. It’s a feeling. Home is the center. I wish you all the best, and be my guide, hold me to your side. And I will love you to the end. And yet my heart forever is wandering. Jesus, be my guide, hold me to your side. And I will love you to the end.”

Standing nearby, Da’iona added, “I’ll miss my friends and my teachers. They made a big difference in my life. They helped me accomplish a lot of things, and they supported me. Being here has meant a lot to me.”

As the 13 graduates of the Holy Cross Class of 2023 left the gym that evening, they did so as part of a remarkable, extended family of people who had found a home in Holy Cross Parish and its schools. The students and families embraced that connection of faith and family with deep love and pride.

As the graduates and their families headed home, that love and pride were captured in the huge signs on the sides of the school: “Una Vez Santa Cruz” and “Siempre Santa Cruz” and “Holy Cross Central” and “Always Holy Cross.”

Holy Cross families find new home for their children in nearby Catholic schools

By John Shaughnessy

As Holy Cross Central School in Indianapolis closed on May 26, most of its families have already enrolled their children into parochial schools for the 2023-24 academic year, according to archdiocesan school leaders.

The unusual school year included families choosing St. Andrew’s and the Apostles School in Indianapolis. (Those interested in registering their children in those schools can call 317-832-4890.)

Holy Cross families have also enrolled their children into other parochial schools: Our Lady of Lourdes School, St. Philip Neri School and St. Therese of Lisieux School, according to archdiocesan school leaders.

“We are very appreciative of the surrounding Catholic schools that have made room in their schools, and enrolled in other services or supports, to help support our Holy Cross students and families,” said Ronda Swartz, executive director of the archdiocese’s Mother Theodore Catholic Academics, which provides education at Holy Cross Central, Holy Angels and St. Philip Neri schools for the 2023-24 school year.

Swartz also said that because the staff members at Holy Cross Central School “will go on to other Catholic schools to teach and work,” an all-school Mass with Archbishop Charles C. Thompson on May 22 and the eighth-grade graduation on May 24 were among the last chapters of the storied history of Holy Cross Central School and the former Holy Cross Parish, which was merged into nearby St. Philip Neri Parish in 2014.

According to the letter sent to Holy Cross families in January, the closing of Holy Cross Central School was a difficult decision made by Father Jeffrey Dufresne, the pastor of St. Philip Neri. The decision was connected to the physical deterioration of Holy Cross Church.

In part, the letter to the Holy Cross families stated, “When Holy Cross Parish was merged into St. Philip Neri Parish in 2014, all Holy Cross assets and liabilities became the assets and liabilities of St. Philip Neri. At that time, St. Philip Neri began to work with community partners to address the future of the Holy Cross Church building; however, a satisfactory solution did not emerge. Therefore, after several years of prayer and consultation, Father Jeffrey Dufresne, the pastor of St. Philip Neri, determined that it was in the best interest of the parish to seek a new owner for the entire Holy Cross Campus. The sale of the property will strengthen the financial position of St. Philip Neri to continue preaching the Gospel and serving the people of the Near Eastside.”

In January, Holy Cross Central staff and archdiocesan school leaders strived to help families transition their children to another Catholic school in Indianapolis for the 2023-24 school year.

Change is not easy, but it is one thing we can be sure of,” Swartz said.

“I was reminded as I attended the final Mass at Holy Cross Central School that change in our lives is inevitable,” Archbishop Thompson did a wonderful job recognizing that change is hard and uncomfortable. He did an even better job as our leader reminding us that Jesus is always with us, in the good times and the bad times.”
Retired Father James Boksa exchanges a sign of peace with newly ordained Father Jose Neri during a June 3 ordination Mass in SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson ritually lays hands on transitional Deacon Jack Wright during the June 3 ordination Mass. Assisting at the Mass is Father Patrick Beidelman, right, rector of SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral. (Photo by Mike Krokos)

Catholics from across central and southern Indiana kneel in prayer on June 3 in SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis while Archbishop Charles C. Thompson prays the eucharistic prayer during a Mass in which he ordained Father Jose Neri and Father Jack Wright as priests. They join him at the altar as concelebrants. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson prescribes a homily during the June 3 ordination Mass in SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis while concelebrating priests and transitional Deacons Jose Neri, second from right, and Jack Wright listen. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

Retired Father James Boksa exchanges a sign of peace with newly ordained Father Jose Neri during a June 3 ordination Mass in SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis. Father Jack Wright was also ordained during the Mass. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson ritually gives a chalice and paten to newly ordained Father José Neri during the ordination Mass on June 3. Assisting at the Mass is seminarian Isaac Siefker, center. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

Newly ordained Father Jack Wright kisses a family during a reception at the Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center in Indianapolis following the June 3 ordination Mass. (Photo by Mike Krokos)

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Transitional Deacon Jack Wright, foreground, and José Neri lay prostrate in prayer during the praying of the Litany of the Saints during the June 3 ordination Mass. (Photo by Mike Krokos)

Newly ordained Father Jack Wright blesses a family during a reception at the Archbishop Edward T. O’Meara Catholic Center in Indianapolis following the June 3 ordination Mass. (Photo by Mike Krokos)

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Transitional Deacons Jack Wright, foreground, and José Neri lay prostrate in prayer during the praying of the Litany of the Saints during the June 3 ordination Mass. (Photo by Mike Krokos)

Father Michael Keucher, second from left, and Father Eric Augustinlay ritually lay hands on transitional Deacons José Neri and Jack Wright during the ordination Mass on June 3. Father Keucher is archdiocesan vocational director. Father Augustinlay is archdiocesan director of seminarians. Assisting during the Mass is seminarian Isaac Siefker, left. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

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The ordination and joy of these two new priests overflowed also from the hearts of their friends and family, dozens of priests, deacons and religious who serve in the archdiocese and Catholics from across central and southern Indiana who filled the cathedral for the ordination Mass. And Archbishop Thompson, too.

As the last ritual of ordination began—an exchange of the sign of peace of the archbishop and the priests at the Mass with the new priests, now wearing priestly vestments—Archbishop Thompson turned to the congregation and said: “Don’t look good? I get to be the first to welcome them.” The congregation responded with spontaneous loud applause that lasted for more than 20 seconds.

The challenge and joy of the priesthood

In a liturgy that celebrated the priesthood, Archbishop Thompson reflected in his homily on both the glory and the challenge of priestly life and ministry, frequently reminding the transitional deacons seated before him of how the priesthood is rooted in Christ.

The ordination promises of prayer, celibacy and obedience the transitional deacons were about to make, Archbishop Thompson said, “lack any quality of integrity apart from keeping one’s focus on Jesus Christ, the great high priest, good shepherd and healer of souls.”

“We belong to something greater than ourselves,” Archbishop Thompson said. “Not just this archdiocese. Not just the universal Church. But always to Christ, always a priest in his image.”

In being a priest conformed to Christ, Archbishop Thompson called those he was soon to ordain to be “particularly attentive to the vulnerable and those on the margins of society.”

A priest, he said, “must be an instrument of mercy, a bridge-builder and reconciler both within and outside the confessional. He must never forget that he is merely an instrument in leading others to encounter the person of Christ in our time.”

Looking up at the transitional deacons, Archbishop Thompson added, “We can never get in the way of that relationship, but always be the one that facilitates that intimacy.”

Later, Archbishop Thompson listed qualities a priest needs to have to meet the challenges of evangelization in the 21st century.

The priest must be capable of collaboration, dialogue, listening, walking with others, teaching truth with charity, responding rather than reacting and, most importantly, being Christ-centered rather than ego-centered or ideology-driven.

“If this sounds a bit overwhelming, that’s because it is—apart from the grace of holy orders, prayer, humility, ongoing formation, continual conversion and fidelity to the magisterium of the Church.”

After placing such a challenge before the transitional deacons, Archbishop Thompson concluded his homily with gratitude and a prayer.

“We give thanks and praise to God for those before us who courageously and generously respond to the call to the sacred order of ordained priesthood,” he said. “We pray that those men prove to be holy and faithful priests who remain faithful to Jesus Christ, head and body, drawing continued grace from word and sacrament to carry out his mission in service to the people of God. In fidelity to Jesus Christ and his Church, may our brothers exude the joy of the priesthood.”

“A wonderful apostle for Jesus”

John and Dotty Wright were filled with joy at their son’s ordination.

“We looked at each other this morning over breakfast and said, ‘You know, when you really think about it, this is the very, very best day of our life,’” recalled John Wright after the ordination Mass. “It’s not even close.”

Dotty Wright spoke of her high hopes for her son.

“He’s a wonderful apostle for Jesus,” she said. “He’ll bring so many souls to Jesus. It doesn’t get any better than that. I think he’s going to make a wonderful priest.”

Jack Wright, Father Wright’s grandfather, did much to guide his grandson back to the faith when he was a young adult and to nurture in his heart a love of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

At the start of the ordination Mass, he offered a prayer to Mary for his grandson.

“I asked her to pray for Jack, to guide him and help him be a good priest for Jesus,” Jack Wright said. “I know she will.”

Rita Wright, his grandmother, called the ordination “a dream come true.”

“I think he’ll be a wonderful priest,” she said. “He’s just so humble and such a good boy. When they called him Father Jack today, the tears flowed. It was awesome.”

The June 3 ordination was a special one for Father John McCaslin, pastor of St. Monica Parish in Indianapolis. It’s the home parish of Father Neri and where Father Wright will serve as parochial vicar starting in July.

“It’s very exciting,” said Father McCaslin. “I’ve known Father José for years as a seminarian. I’m excited and happy for him and for our community to get to celebrate with him. I’m looking forward to having Father Jack join us and work in the field together to serve the community at St. Monica.

Father Todd Goodson was Father Neri’s pastor at St. Monica when the new priest was a high school student. In July, Father Neri will join him in ministry at Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish in Greenwood.

“I’ve watched him over the years,” said Father Goodson of Father Neri. “He’s got a great family who has nurtured him in his faith. It’s been great to watch him go from your average high school kid to a priest who’s ready for ministry and excited to do it.”

Father Todd Goodson’s mom, filled with emotion as she spoke about her son after the ordination Mass.

She recalled how when her son was a little boy growing up in Mexico, he would sneak away from home to attend prayer services at their town’s church on Sundays with her mother, Father Neri’s maternal grandmother.

“I didn’t understand [why he did this],” Lopez recalled. “He would do that with my mother from a very young age. … Now I realize, he was called to the priesthood.”

Her mother watched a livestream of the ordination Mass from her home in Mexico.

“She is praying a lot for him now, that he will be a good priest for our Lord,” Lopez said. Lopez is adding her prayers for her son.

“We pray that he will be a good priest, that he keep God at the center of his life,” she said, “and that he takes the responsibility that God has given him to save many souls, that many souls are saved through his words and by his example, more than anything.”

Father Neri’s father, Apolinar Neri, said he is praying that his son will be “a good priest, and that God guides him where he has put him. He has been with him since he was young. [I pray that] he moves forward as a good priest with a good parish community.”

Father Neri is looking forward to beginning ministry at Our Lady of the Greenwood.

“I’m excited,” he said. “I’m super happy for my assignment to Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish with Father Todd Goodson. He was the first priest that I approached to talk about to the priesthood. He’s been very supportive.”

For Father Wright and Father Neri, their ordination was the culmination of years of formation, and the doorway to an exciting future.

“It’s exciting,” Father Wright said. “There are so many things in front of us that we haven’t done before.”

(You can find more information about a vocation to the priesthood in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, visit HearGodsCall.com.)
Holy Spirit enlivens the Church through sacred Scripture

By Stephen J. Binz

(OSV News)—The Bible is the “word of the Lord”: an inspired library of narrative, poetry, letters and literature that God has spoken to us, to benefit our lives. So, why is it that many Catholics encounter Scripture only during the readings at Sunday Mass? Pope Benedict XVI understood the challenge of making Scripture an intimate part of our daily lives, which is why he issued a personal plea to each of us to live more fully and consciously in the word of God, “so that the Bible may not be simply a word from the past, but a living and timely word.”

In his 2010 apostolic exhortation “Verbum Domini” (“The Word of the Lord”), Benedict emphasized three things: individual Bible reading, using Scripture in liturgy, and teaching and employing the word in the Church’s expanding mission to the world. He recognized that looking at the historical nature of salvation in what is called “historical-critical research” is important, but he also stressed that the divine element of Scripture is essential.

Benedict reminded us that we must avoid a split between scientific exegesis and lectio divina (a prayerful way of reading Scripture) as well as between the literal and spiritual senses of Scripture, so that we may experience the word of God, living and addressed to each of us in the here and now.

The ancient practice of lectio divina consists of establishing a dialogue through reading God’s word and responding to that word in prayer. As St. Augustine said, “When you read the Bible, God speaks to you. When you pray, you speak to God.”

The process involves several movements: A person reads a passage of Scripture, meditates on the words, prays to God in response to them, contemplates God’s gift of a changed heart and finally arrives at some self-giving action.

Origins, one of the earliest masters of lectio divina, encouraged people studying the Bible to “search diligently and with unshakable trust in God for the meaning of the divine Scripture, which is hidden in great fullness within.”

Pope Benedict encouraged prayerful Scripture reading for individuals, along with actions that he hoped would deepen their relationship with Jesus. Those actions include having a Bible in every home.

The New American Bible is most often used during Mass in the United States, while the English Standard Version (Catholic Edition or Second Catholic Edition) is gaining ground in other countries such as the United Kingdom and India. The Revised Standard Version (Catholic Edition or Second Catholic Edition) and New Jerusalem Bible are also widely used.

Catholic Bibles—from which all other Bibles have emerged—contain certain books that are not in the Protestant canon, so be sure to use a Catholic edition.

Pope Benedict recommended knowledge of biblical personages, events and sayings, including memorization of some key verses. Practicing lectio divina exposes us to many verses that can become part of our personal spiritual treasury. Some verses to commit to memory might include: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:39); “Whatever you do, do all for the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31); and “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119:105).

Benedict suggested Catholics use Scripture as a source of guidance to problems, a response to our questions, a broadening of our values, and the fulfillment of our aspirations. He also encouraged the whole Church to realize the movements of the Holy Spirit, explaining that the same Spirit who acted in the incarnation of the Lord, guided the Church an intimate part of our daily lives, which is why he issued a personal plea to each of us to live more fully and consciously in the word of God, “so that the Bible may not be simply a word from the past, but a living and timely word.”

Pope Benedict also exhorted the Church to recover its missionary nature, reminding us that the word engages us not only as hearers of divine revelation, but also as its heralds. He called for an increase in ecumenical study amid discussion and celebrations of the word of God. He reminded the Church of Jesus’ prayer to the Father that his disciples might be one, so that the world may believe (Jn 17:21), and promoted the shared listening to Scripture in ecumenical work.

Pope Benedict wrote: “Listening together to the word of God, engaging in biblical lectio divina, letting ourselves be struck by the inexhaustible freshness of God’s word which never grows old, overcoming our deafness to those words that do not fit our own opinions or prejudices, listening and studying within the communion of the believers in every age: all these things represent a way of coming to unity in faith as a response to hearing the word of God.”

(Stephen J. Binz is a biblical scholar and an award-winning author of more than 60 books.)
An opportunity to remember and pray for our military

It’s Memorial Day weekend. Friends are visiting from out of town. We spend a glorious day at the lake house of another friend. We eat, drink and enjoy a three-day weekend. We dutifully and proudly display our American flag every Memorial Day. I’ve said a quiet prayer after viewing a social media post of someone who lost their life. It has been the extent of our observance this Memorial Day.

This Memorial Day was a bit different. Not that I did anything earth-shattering, but I certainly gave more thought and prayer this year.

You see, about three months ago, when visiting friends in Columbus, Ohio, on a lazy Saturday afternoon with no plans, we decided to check out the newly opened National Veterans Memorial and Museum.

As we crept through the displays, I found myself overcome with emotion. I didn’t really have any expectations for this museum experience, but I quickly found myself drawn in by the personal connections. Veterans carefully undertook to tell the stories of these veterans who served in horrific wars. The entire display is told through carefully undertaken thought and prayer this year. But I certainly gave the holiday more weight.

My father served in the Army at the close of World War II. My father-in-law served in Korea. Our cousin’s husband served in Vietnam. Some of them described much detail about that time in their lives. While I’ve always had a healthy respect for those who are called to duty, I really haven’t known anyone who has personally shared what they went through. I have to admit, that has been the extent of my knowledge.

As we crept through the displays, I listened as one man said, “Hey, I served with that guy,” while poring over a photo. Another, when viewing the Vietnam display, bowed his head and seemed to only verbally get out a “man.” But his teary eyes spoke volumes. At times, they laughed and punched each other in the arm, recalling funny incidents. At other times, they were completely silent, lost in their thoughts and remembrances; and the air was somehow heavy.

At the end of the museum, we came to an art display of paintings, sculptures, drawings and 3D models created by veterans using art as a means to cope with their post-traumatic stress disorder. At this display, I finally found one of the groups of people I am sure served in the military. They answered alternatively, and I think I heard for the first time they were in service. They said they were there in honor of the funeral of a military buddy, and while I didn’t get to know any more about them, I found I was trailing behind a group of four men. I couldn’t help but overhear their conversations, and all of a sudden, I was transported to their firsthand thoughts and poignant accounts of soldiers—from all branches of the military—who bravely served our country throughout America’s history.

Honoring the so-called “Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence” after all. After a back- and-forth that caught national attention, the baseball franchise has ultimately decided to support the Community Hero Award to the LGBTQ community group at the stadium’s Pride Night, to be held on June 16. We were not aware, the “Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence” is a group of gay men who dress as Catholic nuns and whose mission is to simply embrace what is, rather than force them to do anything else. It enables us to celebrate and accept our differences.

Twenty Something/ Kristina Capecci

The U.S. Postal Service just released a stamp that bursts with nostalgia: a homage to the beloved author and illustrator Tomie dePaola. It depicts his first published character, Strega Nona, who earned him a Caldecott Honor in 1976, clutching her pasta pot and smiling at the viewer.

The stamp inspired me to sit through my Tomie dePaola collection—his saint books, his condensed histories, his quirky stories and spooky tales. So much of Tomie’s Catholic upbringing appears in his richly colorful folk art—the nuns and friars, the churches and baptisms—and the depiction of family life often mirrors his own Irish–Italian rituals.

Tomie treated young readers with interesting, heartfelt, and profound questions about life and death with books like Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs and laughably beautiful The Clown of God.

Painting in his New Hampshire studio in a 200-year-old barn, Tomie worked out his own aging. Books like New One Foot. Now the Other and Quiet celebrate a gentle, slower pace. The timbre of some later books capture his philosophy of life: Angels, Angels Everywhere, Let the Whole Earth Sing Praise and Look and Be Grateful.

Tomie was once asked to offer advice for authors of children’s books. Advice for artists often doubles as advice for living.

"If I look at my early things, it’s not there yet,” Tomie said. “I’m too full of myself, too full of showing off, showing how well I could crosshatch, for instance. I think that’s the progression of a young artist to an older artist. I think I—suddenly find the heart of the work.

In the age of Instagram, not showing off can feel counter cultural. We view other people’s carefully curated feed of all that is fun and perfect, then film at golden hour and put to acoustic music. We are tempted to play along.

All ages are guilty. We show off on playgrounds and in boardrooms. We brag, we take it, we one-up each other.

Overcoming the desire to show off is a turning point in the spiritual life. It is the beginning. It’s a launching pad for all wonderful opportunities for the development of a craft or a relationship. It enables us to say important things.

We don’t like that. “I’m scared.” I need help.” I was wrong.”

We can confess fear and remorse, and we can express what we are called to.

“I’m excited! Let’s do it!”

“I love you!” “I want to be with you.” (My favorite kindergarten teacher says this to me, and it feels like the ultimate compliment.)

There is freedom in reaching this point and not needing to be perfect. We can simply embrace what is, rather than force what we want it to be. It’s easier. It’s more difficult. We can presumably have more fun. We can simply embrace what is, rather than force what we want it to be.
The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, Corpus Christi / Msgr. Owen F. Campion

The Sunday Readings
Sunday, June 11, 2023

- Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a
- 1 Corinthians 10:16-17
- John 6:51-58

This weekend, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, or as it is traditionally known by its Latin name, Corpus Christi. Feasts in the Church have a dual purpose. They call Catholics to celebrate with faith the person or event recalled by the Church. They also are opportunities for the Church to instruct the faithful in a point of belief considered particularly important, as drawn from the experience of Jesus or the saint commemorated, or from a doctrine held by the Church.

In this weekend’s feast, the Church invites us to join in the celebration of the Eucharist as we participate in the Mass and receive Communion, and the Church instructs us about the Eucharist.

As its first reading, the Church presents a passage from the Book of Deuteronomy. One of the five books of the Torah and heavy with references to the Exodus, Deuteronomy recalls the passage of the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery to the promised land.

Moses, the central figure, speaks in this reading, reminding the people that they owed their survival to God. When they were lost in the barren desert, with no hope for finding food, God gave them manna to eat. God guided them through the wilderness.

For its second reading, the Church gives us a selection from St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians. The synoptic Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark and St. Luke record the Last Supper in detail.

The Lord spoke these words, almost certainly, in Aramaic. They were recorded in the Gospel in Greek. The English version is a further translation. Despite the lost and translated, it is clear that Jesus spoke of the Eucharist as we understand it today. He used no symbolic phrases, no vague suggestions that the Mass merely remembers his self-sacrifice on Calvary. He said, “I am the living bread come down from heaven.”

The Eucharist is the flesh and blood of the risen Lord. The link between the Eucharist and the Lord’s sacrificial gift of himself on Calvary is clear from the text. The Eucharist is the flesh of Jesus given “for the life of the world.”

Reflection

For centuries, the Church has called the physical consumption of the eucharistic species as “holy Communion.” Of course, it is holy. It is Jesus, the Son of God, and the Savor.

“Communion” is a further, more deeply descriptive term. This term’s incorporation of “union” is clear. In receiving the Eucharist, we are united with Jesus. We receive the “body, blood, soul and divinity” of Christ into our very body and soul. It is the most complete of unions.

The first syllable recalls the Latin preposition “cum” or “with.” In the Eucharist, we unite with Christ. Catholic piety always has celebrated this fact. We are also united with other believers, with the community of believers, which we know as the Church.

God has given us the Eucharist as manna was God’s gift to the Hebrews. We rejoice that, in Communion, we are united with the Lord. Important to remember, we are united with the whole Church and we act as part of the Church.

My Journey to God
Let Me

By Lynnell Chamberlain

Let me share my love with all the world.
Let me never bring you shame.
Let me live my life praising you,
Not seeking someone to blame.
For all the woes that come to me
Are gifts that help me change.

My problems aren’t the problem,
My attitude toward them is,
For problems show my weaknesses
And provide the spiritual grist
To grow in love and enlightenment,
Not merely to exist.

(Lynnell Chamberlain is a member of St. John Paul II Parish in Sellersburg. Photo: The life-size icon of St. Ephrem of Syria, a doctor of the Church, is seen in this undated photo. The icon features stanzae from the liturgy and prayers in Syriac text and notes. He fought the heresies of Gnosticism and Arismatism by his writings, including poems and hymns. His feast day is June 9.)

The Criterion. Friday, June 9, 2023

Daily Readings

Monday, June 12
2 Corinthians 1:1-7
Psalm 139:1-2,8-9
Matthew 5:1-12

Tuesday, June 13
St. Anthony of Padua, priest and
doctor of the Church
2 Corinthians 5:18-22
Psalm 119:129-133, 135
Matthew 5:13-16

Wednesday, June 14
2 Corinthians 3:4-11
Psalm 99:5-9
Matthew 5:17-19

Thursday, June 15
2 Corinthians 3:15-14, 1-5
Psalm 85:9ab, 10, 11-14
Matthew 5:20-26

Question Corner/Jenna Marie Cooper

Sacrament of penance can be celebrated outside a confessional

Q
Our parish priest has decided to engrave the confessional and now stands at the foot of the altar and makes us go to confession to right out in the open, where anyone can see or walk by. I feel very exposed and don’t like it. Is this licit? (New York)

A
Confessions heard “out in the open” are not invalid and can be licit in some circumstances.

One historic case that comes readily to mind is St. Damien of Molokai who, after he contracted leprosy from the people he served, would shunt his confessions to a priest on a boat just off shore, to avoid spreading his highly contagious disease. To give a less extraordinary modern-day example, sometimes children’s confessions will be heard out of earshot but in full view of their parents as a way of complying with various “safe environment” policies.

However, the Church generally enshrines the sacrament of confession to be celebrated in a more private setting. In the current Code of Canon Law, canon 964, 1 tells us that: “The proper place for hearing sacramental confessions is a church or oratory.”

Canon 964, 3 goes on to specify: “Confessions are not to be heard outside a confessional without a just cause.”

In canon law, there is much lower bar to classify something as a “just cause” than there is for a “grave cause.”

In colloquial terms, a “just cause” is a reasonable motivation, whereas as a “grave cause” refers to extremely dire circumstances.

It could be that your parish priest sees a just cause for having confessions out in the open, so it might be good to have direct but respectful conversation with him about this practice.

Question Corner/Jenna Marie Cooper

We wear white for baptism, and First Communions and we get married in white. Are we supposed to always wear white for all of the sacraments? Does it really matter what we wear? (Florida)

A
No, white clothing is not strictly required for any sacrament, although in many cases wearing white can be a beautiful and fitting custom.

The only time white clothing is necessary in the context of a sacrament is during the rite of baptism itself, when the newly-baptized is presented with a symbolic white garment with the words: “You have become a new creation and clothed yourself in Christ. Receive this baptismal garment and bring it to him about this practice.”

Whatever the case may be for the reason why your pastor has set his policy regarding the sacrament of penance, you are not required to make your own confession out in the open. You can always ask your priest to hear your confession in a more private place. And you are always free to seek the sacrament of reconciliation at another parish that makes more regular use of a confessional or perhaps at a local shrine or other Catholic place of prayer where confessions are heard.

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Please submit in writing to our office by 10 a.m. Thursday before the week of publication; be sure to state date of death. Obituaries of archdiocesan priests serving our archdiocese are listed elsewhere in 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.


learning—in religion classes, at school Masses and through athletics. But the couple was learning, too. “As a mom, you have those questions after school—how was school today, what did you learn?” says June. “They’d talk about what they learned about the faith. “We’ve gone to a lot of school events, and that in and of itself is evangelism, I think. We came to understand the Catholic faith as they were baptized, confirmed and received their first Eucharist. But there were other incidents June experienced throughout her life that pointed her— and by extension, her family—to the faith. The first called June at the age of 13, when she had a major event that happened with EWTN [Eternal Word Television Network] and Mother Angelica. My mom saw my broadcast and suggested sending her oldest son, Aaron, to a Catholic school. “So, Aaron was enrolled in St. Matthew [the Apostle Cathedral in Indianapolis], and that was the beginning of our journey,” says June. She recalls a moment driving Aaron home from St. Matthew and asking about his day. “We had a visitor today,” he told her. “It was a priest, and he told us something really important. He said our faith ‘would never end.’ But after hitting that 50 milestone, she had to go to a board to even do the surgery,” Ramon says. “Nothing ever stopped,” Ramon recalls. "She had cancer, came back home and started working on her doctorate.” June now teaches for the online Indiana Connections Career Academy while completing her dissertation. “That’s not to say dealing with the tumor was easy. There have been side effects,” Ramon admits. “She’s got several hearing problems, and in some ways she’s still recovering. “It’s just been a slow process. The whole family went through that process. We were all affected by that [ordeal]. But God was great—he got us through it. And we had really good support at St. Lawrence.” With school being online at the time due to the COVID-19 pandemic, June says the school’s teachers reached out with care and concern for Justin, who is now 13. And 17-year-old Sidney—who was then a freshman at Father Thomas Scenica Memorial High School in Indianapolis—speaks of the messages of support and prayers he received on social media from his school classmates and friends. June says she felt the effects of the many prayers. “I was in so much pain after the surgery,” she recalls. “But something changed. I felt the presence of the Lord, like I do now when I [receive] Communion. I felt Christ with me during that journey. “And so after I came out of that experience, I just wanted to make sure that I fulfilled that lifelong dream of becoming Catholic.” “The best water I ever felt” While cheering on Justin at St. Lawrence football, basketball and soccer games, June befriended Megan Smith. She shared with Smith her desire to become Catholic, and Smith told June about the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) program at St. Lawrence. “A lot of the questions that I had throughout my lifetime coming from a Protestant faith were answered through the RCIA process,” says June. “I just felt at home.” The RCIA process also impressed Ramon. “You go there and you just meet you where you are,” he says. “And it’s not just [someone] telling you things and that’s it. It’s about teaching you things about God and the Church, and there is Scripture and readings and other things you can learn from.” That learning culminated in the Easter Vigil Mass, when the Tolivers received the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist. “It was definitively an awakening,” says Ramon about receiving the sacraments. “In my heart, I was founded new.” Before turning 50, he says, he thought “this ride” called life “would never end.” But after hitting that 50 mark, he realized the ride “would one day come to a stop.” “After the Easter Vigil and being baptized and knowing now I have a place I can go when my ride ends, it makes life totally different.” Baptism left an impression on Sidney and Justin as well. “That was probably the best water I ever felt,” says June, the soon-to-be eighth-grader. He chose St. Peter as his confirmation saint because “he wasn’t perfect, but he really loved Jesus. I just want to love Jesus like he did.” Sidney chose St. Joseph, as did Ramon, who calls the saint “very patient. He really dealt a lot, you know, and being a dad is tough.” St. Therese of Lisieux’s “little way” called June— “her ministry of being able to make a big impact by being small, by being little, and how we rely heavily on Christ to do all our work.” “It was just amazing” June sees her and her family becoming Catholic as proof that “God can move in small ways to make great things happen.” For her, the first move was her co-worker friend, Klene, suggesting sending her oldest son to Catholic school. “I felt Ron there with me at the [Easter Vigil] Mass,” she says of her friend, who is now deceased. “I knew he would be watching.” There were the small, accumulated experiences through St. Lawrence School—school functions, volunteer opportunities at school Masses. Those little experiences led to great relationships with coaches, parents and teachers. In fact, it was Justin’s social studies teacher who served as his sponsor. And St. Lawrence principal Andy Maxson, who had been Sidney’s social studies teacher at the school, became his former student’s sponsor. As for June, she chose Smith, her fellow St. Lawrence sports-mom and friend, as her sponsor. Ramon also found his sponsor through St. Lawrence athletics. “Greg [Stephens] has been coaching there for years. That’s how I met him, by coaching, and we just bonded from there,” says Ramon. He’s Barnes fourth- and sixth-grade boys basketball for the school. “It was like the school family and the church family became part of our family,” says June. “It was really beautiful. “This is a really, really special church. Very special. We love the community that in everyone could have the experience we had becoming Catholic—it was just amazing.”

Scheidt Toliver receives the sacrament of confirmation from Father Vincent Gillimore, administrator of St. Lawrence Parish in Indianapolis, during the parish’s Easter Vigil Mass on April 8. In the front row are Sidney’s parents Ramon, left, and June Toliver. In the back row is June’s sponsor Megan Smith, left, Sidney’s sponsor Maxson, who had been Bishop Chatard High School principal Andy Maxson, and, partially obscured, St. Lawrence School social studies teacher Mary Grace Raciti, sponsor of Justin Toliver, partially obscured by Father Gillimore. (Photo by Phil Freeman)
BALASORE, India (OSV News) — Government authorities on June 4 were working to get rail services back in operation in the district of Balasore after the deadliest train crash in India in decades killed 275 people and injured at least 1,000 on June 2.

Investigators said the crash involving three trains may have been caused by signaling failure.

At the Vatican, Pope Francis during his Sunday Angelus remembered the victims of the crash. “May our heavenly Father receive the souls of the deceased into his kingdom,” he said, echoing a papal telegram sent to the apostolic nuncio of India. The pope on June 4 also assured the injured he is close to them and their families.

CNN and other news outlets reported on June 4 that the death toll was lowered to at least 275, after officials found that some victims had been counted twice during the chaos that followed the crash. The number of injured was reported variously as about 900, more than 900 and at least 1,000. Two days after the crash, news outlets were consistently reporting at least 1,000 injured. By June 4, rescue efforts had ended and the derailed cars had been removed from the tracks.

The crash occurred in Odisha state in eastern India about 137 miles southwest of Kolkata, the home of St. Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity. Kolkata is in the neighboring state of West Bengal.

The Associated Press reported that chaotic scenes erupted at night after the derailment around 7 p.m. local time on June 2. According to the BBC, citing Indian officials, several carriages from the Shalimar-Chennai Coromandel Express derailed in Balasore district, hitting a stationary goods train. Several of its coaches ended up on the opposite track. Then the third train—Howrah Superfast Express traveling from Yevsantpur to Howrah—hit the overturned carriages.

Father Lijo George, social work director of the Balasore Diocese in Odisha state, was coordinating the Catholic Church’s voluntary work at the accident site, with priests, religious sisters and lay Church volunteers helping the wounded. The priest told UCA News on June 3 that for some time after the accident he saw that “many trapped in the mangled compartments of the crashed trains [had] yet to be brought out.”

“By 10 p.m. [on June 2] we were able to rescue the survivors. After that, it was about picking up dead bodies,” Sudhanshu Sarangi, director of Odisha state’s fire and emergency department, told AP. “This is very, very tragic. I have never seen anything like this in my career.”

In a June 3 telegram, Pope Francis said he was “deeply saddened to learn of the immense loss of life caused by the train crash,” and assured “all affected by this tragedy of his spiritual closeness.”

The pope entrusted the souls of the deceased “to the loving mercy of the Almighty,” and sent his “heartfelt condolences to those who mourn their loved ones.”

A man named Suryaveer told the BBC that “many trapped in the mangled compartments of the crashed trains” were still alive, but his mother died in the crash. Father George told UCA News that “the bodies of the deceased were taken to a school “and another building close to Balasore district hospital where hundreds injured are undergoing treatment.”

“Our priests and nuns along with Church volunteers are helping the wounded passengers in the hospital to contact their family members and relatives,” the priest said.

The Church volunteers also were arranging food, clothing, masks, gloves and other assistance to the rescue teams and medical teams working in the hospital with limited space, he said.

“Doctors and other paramedical teams from nearby areas have already reached the hospital and are providing treatment to the injured passengers and surgeries are also going on for those in need,” the priest said.

“The people are kept in hospital corridors and other places in the hospital campus following shortage of beds, but everyone is taken care of,” Father George added. Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a message said he was “distressed by the train accident in Odisha. In this hour of grief, my thoughts are with the bereaved families. May the injured recover soon.”

CNN and other news outlets quoted Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw as saying the accident had occurred “due to a change in electronic interlocking” and that an investigation would show “who was responsible for that mistake.”

The Catholic bishops’ conference of India in a statement offered “prayers and sympathies on the sad demise of so many people” and wished for quick recovery of the injured.

The bishops also called on the government “to find out the cause of such a huge mishap and to take steps to see that in future such massive tragedies are avoided.”

India is the world’s most populous country with 1.42 billion people. It has the largest train network under one management in the world. Despite government efforts to improve rail safety, several hundred accidents occur every year on India’s railways.

Pope prays for Indian train crash victims during Angelus

A drone view shows derailed coaches after three passenger trains collided in Balasore district in the eastern state of Odisha, India, on June 3. At least 275 people died, and at least 1,000 others were injured. (OSV News photo/Rubens)

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