



Celebrate Veterans Day on Nov. 11

# The Catholic TRANSCRIPT

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**PRIEST DISCUSSES HIS WORK** – Father Patrick Desbois, who researches mass graves of Holocaust victims in former Soviet states, speaks in 2008 at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. He spoke twice on Sept. 27 in West Hartford. (CNS photo/Bob Roller)

## French priest delves into the evil of the Holocaust

By Mark Jahne

Transcript Correspondent

WEST HARTFORD – How do you psychologically and emotionally comprehend the genocide of millions of people? The answer is to look upon each death as that of an individual person, someone with a name, a family and a personal story, according to Father Patrick Desbois.

Father Desbois has devoted his life to confronting anti-Semitism and furthering Catholic-Jewish understanding. So it should come as no surprise that he has taken a key interest in the Holocaust of the 1940s.

The French priest is president of the Yahad-in-Unum Association. Since 2001, he has worked with the United States Holocaust Memorial

Museum, using its archives to locate every mass grave and location in Ukraine and Belorussia where Jews were killed by the Nazis during World War II.

Father Desbois has written a book about his endeavors called *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews*. He spoke about his efforts on Sept. 27 at Lincoln Theater on the University of Hartford campus.

He also spoke earlier that day to students at Northwest Catholic High School.

A packed house attended his evening talk. Some held up photos of family members and expressed their gratitude to him for finally bringing them answers about the

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## Local men get 'a divine kick in the pants'

By Jack Sheedy  
News Editor

WALLINGFORD – The bright, sunny Saturday, Oct. 23, was a perfect day for men to tackle important projects: rake leaves, clean rain gutters, install storm windows, deepen their faith.

Deepen their faith? Yes, that's what more than 800 men did by attending the third annual Connecticut Catholic Men's Conference, an all-day event held at the Oakdale Theatre.

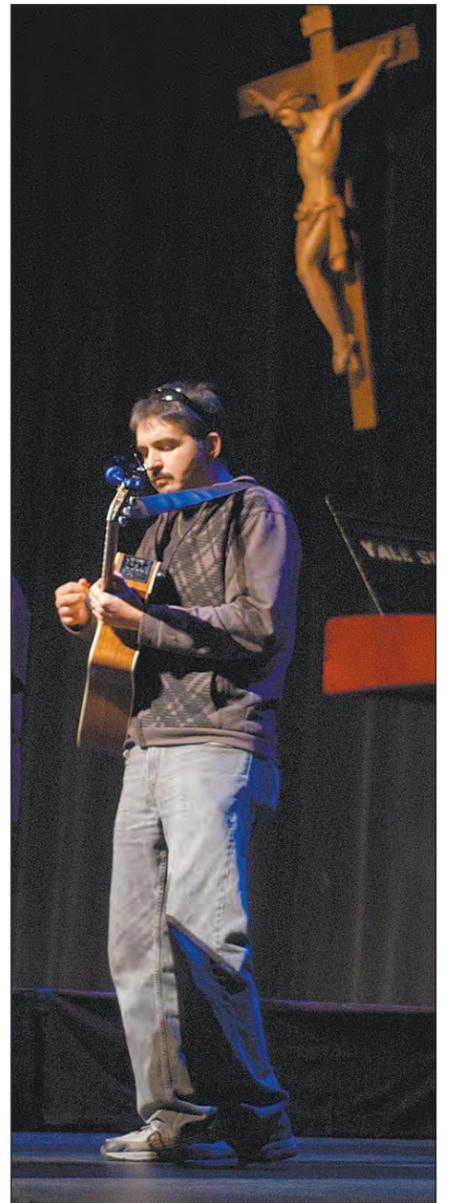
"This is just good Catholic men getting together," said David Craig, national director for Adoration for Vocation and this year's conference organizer. "There's a void, there's a hunger in men to grow in spirituality and grow with other men."

A roster of motivational speakers was a major reason men chose to spend a Saturday away from their families. For Jeannot Michaud, who has attended all three yearly conferences, it's more than that. "It's about your faith," said Mr. Michaud, a member of Bristol Palos Council 35, Knights of Columbus. "It's an eye-opener in a lot of different areas. All the guys should get involved and increase their faith."

Marian Father Donald Calloway, a convert to Catholicism, delivered an address that he described as "a divine two-by-four across the face, a divine kick in the pants." In sometimes earthy language, the 38-year-old Father Calloway told of his dissolute youth, a life of alcohol, drugs, sex and criminality, and of his miraculous conversion. Before turning his life around, he ran away from his military family in Japan, ran drugs and money for the Japanese Mafia, was a wanted criminal in Japan at age 15, and was institutionalized twice.

When he hit rock bottom, he found himself alone in his room. "Brothers, the silence was so loud, it was screaming at me," he said. He wanted to commit suicide but didn't want to feel the pain of dying, so he looked around for something to read, to occupy his mind. He chanced upon a book about a Marian apparition at Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and it changed his life. He wanted to become a Catholic.

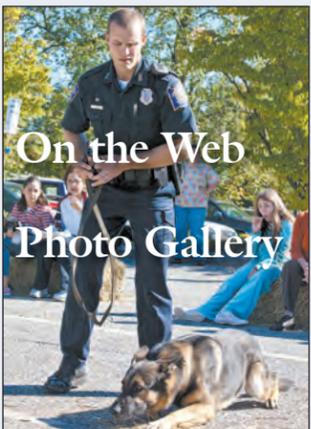
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**TAKING THE LEAD** – Matt Bureau, a member of the Catholic rock group eXaudio, riffs at the Connecticut Catholic Men's Conference Oct. 23 at the Oakdale Theatre in Wallingford. (Photo by Jack Sheedy)

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Photo Gallery

www.catholictranscript.org

The following editorial by Msgr. David Q. Liptak received the first place award in 2009 from the Connecticut Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists and appeared in the Nov. 2009 issue of The Catholic Transcript.

### Thanksgiving

For those who reject historical data, Thanksgiving Day is especially difficult to explain away; it is even more frustrating to ignore. The key historical datum is that Thanksgiving Day in America is fundamentally a religious observance. "Religious" signifies that it pertains to man's relationship to God. This working definition was not coined by Congregationalists or Baptists or Catholics; indeed, it dates from pre-Christian times. The noble Roman orator Cicero, for example, used the word to describe "reverence for God (the gods), the fear of God." (*A Latin-English Dictionary*, John T. White; London, 1866)

America was largely founded in the context of religious experience; specifically, to safeguard the God-given right to religious freedom, and the

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**VIETNAMESE COUPLES MARK ANNIVERSARIES** – Vietnamese Catholic couples from St. Lawrence O'Toole Parish in Hartford gather in front of the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Hartford where they and about 300 other couples marked their wedding anniversaries during a special Mass celebrated by Archbishop Henry J. Mansell on Oct. 17. See more photos in the online Photo Gallery at [www.catholictranscript.org](http://www.catholictranscript.org). (Photo by Mary Chalupsky)

## Anniversary couples say 'I do' again

By Mary Chalupsky

Transcript Reporter

HARTFORD – In an afternoon that was clearly moving and memorable to many, 300 married couples gathered at the Cathedral of St. Joseph on Oct. 17 to renew their marriage vows and to celebrate their vocation and the gift of the sacrament of matrimony.

"It's been wonderful because we have each other," said Jack Kessler, who was celebrating his 66th anniversary with his wife, Peg. "And even more fantastic now with our six grandchildren." The Kesslers

are parishioners at St. Dunstan in Glastonbury.

Equally enthusiastic were Steven and Sharon Levesque, members of St. Joseph Parish in Bristol, who were celebrating their 25th anniversary. "It's a great milestone," said Mrs. Levesque. "Our faith definitely has been integral to our marriage. It's the fiber that keeps you together when the world gets you down."

Similar sentiments came from Margaret and Walter Fisher of St. John Parish in Watertown, who were celebrating their 50th anniversary. "We're very grateful to God

for giving us this time together," she said.

The highlight of the afternoon was the renewal of marriage vows during the Mass celebrated by Archbishop Henry J. Mansell.

"St. Joseph Cathedral is alive with smiles by those who have come here today to mark significant anniversaries from 15 to 71 years," he said.

Speaking about "the power of believing" in the other person as well as the struggles and hard work of marriage, he expressed his grati-

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**RENEWING VOWS** – Christine and Donald Paglia, co-directors of the archdiocesan Family Life Office, renew their vows. (Photo by Mary Chalupsky)

## Couples say 'I do' again

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tude to the couples for their example of being a “great edification for us for the gift of marriage.”

During his homily, he referenced the heroic rescue of the 33 trapped miners in Chile last month, observing how their ordeal taught the world not to take life for granted.

Similarly, he noted that the couples being honored teach us “not to take marriage for granted. Every day, every year is a gift from God.”

Celebrating 70 years of marriage were Andre and Anita Pelletier of St. Mary Parish in East Hartford, French Canadian parents of 11 children, who were also joyful that their celebration was on the same day that Montreal’s Brother Andre Bessette, whom Mr. Pelletier called his “idol,” was canonized in Rome.

“It’s so exciting,” said their daughter, Pierette, who served as one of the readers for the prayer of the faithful. “It’s wonderful to celebrate this day with them.”

There were 56 couples celebrating anniversaries in their 60th year, 113 marking anniversaries in their 50th year, 67 couples celebrating 30th and 40th anniversaries, and 83 marking 20th anniversaries.

“This is a wonderful opportunity,” said Rita Mushinsky, who was with her husband, Edward, celebrating their 60th anniversary. “There’s so much integrity and respect reflecting among those who have come here today.” The couple attends Holy Trinity Church in Wallingford.

Added Claudette Dekoe of St. Matthew Parish in Bristol, who had just returned from a cruise with husband, Peter, to celebrate

their 40th anniversary: “This was amazing and a beautiful ceremony to mark the occasion. I just wish our young people today would persevere in their marriages. It takes work. Nothing is a piece of cake.”

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of his parents, John and Elizabeth Horrigan of St. Mary Parish in Unionville, was Denis Horrigan, who was also marking the 16th anniversary of his marriage to his wife, Kristen, with their two sons.

Denis, whose family belongs to St. Catherine Parish in Simsbury, said of his parents, “Faith is the most important element in their marriage next to their children, and they’ve passed that tradition on to their kids.”

The annual event was hosted by the Archdiocese of Hartford and its Hamden-based archdiocesan Family Life Office, along with the support of the cathedral musicians and ambassadors.

“This is a wonderful day because marriage is so important and because it’s hard work,” said Christine Paglia, co-director of the Family Life Office with her husband, Donald.

Couples attended a reception in the vestibule of the cathedral afterward. They were invited to have their photograph taken with Archbishop Mansell as a remembrance of the occasion along with anniversary certificates.

“We’re very happy,” said Arthur and Pat Rivard of St. Isaac Jogues Parish in East Hartford, who were celebrating their 53rd anniversary. “Every day and every night, we give thanks to God for what he’s given us.”

## French priest delves into the evil of the Holocaust

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fate of their loved ones. They asked about villages and hamlets and what information he may have found. They jockeyed for position at the end of his talk so that they could shake his hand and thank him for taking on this humanitarian task.

“It’s always like this,” said a museum official who accompanies Father Desbois on his speaking engagements.

The 1.5 million Jews murdered in the former Soviet Union between 1941 and 1944 were among more than six million Jews killed by Nazi Germany during its reign of terror. But the circumstances were different in far Eastern Europe than elsewhere.

Jews in Soviet territories were not sent to concentration camps, where they suffered and died in secret. These Jews were killed in “mass shootings in their own towns and villages,” said Paul Shapiro, director of the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the museum.

They were murdered in the presence of families and friends. Soviet authorities kept records of all of this, but those records were not available until the communist government fell, and even then those documents were not initially trusted because of the Soviet Union’s open practice of anti-Semitism.

Father Desbois found them to be both detailed and reliable and has used them to locate mass graves and, more important, survivors who tell him their stories, which are recorded for posterity and as a teaching tool for future generations.

Father Desbois first became

interested in the Holocaust as a child when he learned that his grandfather, a French soldier, had been imprisoned in a forced labor camp in the town of Rava Ruska on the Poland/Ukraine border.

The grandfather “refused to speak about the camp” and that only piqued his interest more.

His research relies upon four sources of information: German archives, Soviet archives, ballistic studies and eyewitness testimony. There are tens of millions of pages of archives available to him and others through the Holocaust Memorial Museum.

To date, Father Desbois has interviewed 1,550 witnesses, some of whom spoke of what they’d seen for the first time in 60 or more years. He said he is compelled to talk to as many as he can find as quickly as he can because they are elderly and in another five years few will remain.

Asked why he chose to do such work, he cited the biblical story of Cain and Abel and God’s dismay at a man’s killing his brother and trying to keep it a secret.

“We cannot build a modern world above hundreds of mass graves” without acknowledging what happened and remembering the people who were killed, he said.

In one village, the Germans shot and killed 1,500 people in a single day and 18,000 overall. Because the soldiers were told to ration their ammunition and limit themselves to one bullet per Jew, those who were wounded but not killed were buried alive. Eyewitnesses told him that in one instance, a mass grave moved for three days as these

people slowly perished.

“We knock on every door” to ask for information and the location of eyewitnesses to these atrocities, he said. “The challenge is to collect evidence.”

Father Desbois travels with a nine-member team, including two armed bodyguards. There are those in the villages who do not welcome his presence because they collaborated in the killings.

Not only were Jews killed in the villages, but their clothing and possessions were taken from them and sold at auction. Children were removed from classrooms and shot.

There are no memorials to these people, no stones on their graves. The graves he finds are mapped and catalogued but left unmarked so that grave robbers don’t dig up the bodies to extract the gold from the victims’ teeth.

“Many mass graves are in private gardens,” he said. Others are in forests or fields just outside of the towns. They are bucolic settings, bearing no visible evidence of what lies beneath the soil.

Father Desbois began his work in this field 10 years ago. He has followed this path in cooperation with French Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, a Jewish convert to Catholicism, and the World Jewish Congress.

If Catholics see Jews as brothers in faith, then he believes “we have to pass from discourse to action.”

For more information about the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the work of Father Desbois go to [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org) or [www.yahadinunum.org](http://www.yahadinunum.org).

## Men get ‘a divine kick in the pants’

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After months of study, he was confirmed in the Catholic faith and pursued the priesthood, studying at the Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio; the Dominican House of Studies in Washington; and the International Marian Research Institute in Dayton, Ohio. He was ordained at the National Shrine of Divine Mercy in Stockbridge, Mass., in 2003. He has written several books, including *No Turning Back: A Witness to Mercy*, which he offered for sale at the conference.

John Kuzia, a parishioner at St. Ann Parish in Avon, said, “The message [of Father Calloway] is terrific. I have three sons who are between 35 and 42, and they would relate exactly to his language and

what he talks about.”

Tom Wilk, a member of St. Joseph Parish in Rockville, said, “There’s nothing like hearing it from someone who’s lived it. You know, you can only read so much.”

Doug Barry, founder and director of the Catholic apostolate Radix, delivered a macho address to the men, telling them to take charge of their families’ spirituality and show the way by example.

“Gentlemen, we’ve got to look at where our treasures are, because that’s where our heart is,” he said. “Don’t take yourself off the battlefield,” he urged them. Be men; stay strong, “so we can do our job well. We as men are the front line of defense for our families.”

Back by popular demand was

Michael Cumbie, who last year told the conference about his conversion to Catholicism in 2001 after being a Southern Baptist minister for 23 years. “When you pray, ‘Come, Holy Spirit,’ get ready, ‘cause your life’s gonna change,” he said, underscoring the theme of this year’s conference, “Come Holy Spirit, Fill the Hearts of Your Faithful.”

In his homily at the vigil Mass that ended the conference, Archbishop Henry J. Mansell told the men to be on guard against government policies that undermine Catholic teaching. “Compassion is missing in much of government,” he said.

Concelebrants included Norwich Bishop Michael R. Cote, who had spoken earlier about the need to find God before we can find ourselves. Like the father who waited for his prodigal son to return, in the famous parable, “God is waiting for us,” Bishop Cote said. “We are sons of a common father.”

Also concelebrating were Stamford Bishop Paul P. Chomnycky, former Hartford Auxiliary Bishop Peter A. Rosazza and Hartford Auxiliary Bishop Christie A. Macaluso.

“It gives you a shot in the arm,” said his friend Tony Conte of St. Raphael Parish in Bridgeport. “It’s about camaraderie.”

Mr. Kuzia of Avon said that all he expects every year is to get one or two nuggets from one or two speakers. “I have found that every speaker I’ve heard is terrific,” he said. “They’re edge-of-your-seat kind of guys. I guess I want to get my faith a little deeper, as most of us do, and rather than say it, do it.”

As Eric Borbely, of Church of the Resurrection in Wallingford, said, “I really liked the speakers, but most of all it’s seeing all the men of Connecticut around here and committed to this, and it really makes you feel like you’re not alone, that in a sense, you know, we’re everywhere. We just have to kind of set that example for our families.”

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