VATICAN CITY – A Nativity scene and Christmas tree, like those displayed in Saint Peter’s Square, are visible reminders of God’s benevolence and closeness to all men and women, Pope Francis said.

The traditional Christmas displays are “the signs of the heavenly Father’s compassion, of his participation and closeness to humanity who experience not being abandoned in dark times, but instead visited and accompanied in their difficulties,” the pope said.

“Every year, the Christmas Nativity scene and tree speak to us through their symbolic language. They make more visible what is captured in the experience of the birth of the Son of God,” Pope Francis said Dec. 7 in a meeting with delegations from Poland and Italy, responsible respectively for the 2017 Vatican Christmas tree and Nativity scene.

The centerpiece of the Vatican’s Christmas holiday decorations is the towering 92-foot spruce tree.

Measuring nearly 33 feet in diameter, the tree was donated by the Archdiocese of Elk, Poland, and transported to the Vatican on a flatbed truck traveling over 1,240 miles across central Europe.

Thanking the members of the Polish delegation, the pope said the tree’s soaring height "motivates us to reach out ‘toward the highest gifts’ and to rise above the clouds to experience ‘how beautiful and joyful it is to be immersed in the light of Christ.’"

“The tree, which comes from Poland this year, is a sign of the faith of that people who, also with this gesture, wanted to express their fidelity to the see of Peter,” the pope said.

The Nativity scene was donated by the Benedictine Abbey of Montevergine, located in southern Italy. Created in a traditional 18th-century Neapolitan style, it covers a surface of over 860 square feet and features 20 terracotta figures, some as tall as 6 feet.

The representation of the night of Jesus’ birth, the pope said, is “inspired by the works of mercy” and is a reminder “that Jesus told us: ‘Do to others what you would have them do to you.’”

“The crib is the evocative place where we contemplate Jesus who, taking upon himself human misery, invites us to do the same through act of mercy,” Pope Francis said.

As it was last year, the Christmas tree was adorned with ornaments made by children receiving treatment at several Italian hospitals.

"These children, with their parents, participated in a ceramics recreational therapy program” organized by the Countess Lene Thune Foundation for young boys and girls suffering from oncological and hematological disorders, the
As I write, we are drawing near to the beautiful feast of Christ's birth and the end of the calendar year, 2017. Many of you will not read this until after Christmas Day. But, Christmas is more than a day, so I want to take this opportunity to wish each of you a very blessed Christmas Season.

As the year draws to a close, I am remembering with gratitude the countless ordinary and extraordinary ways that the Lord has blessed our archdiocese this year.

For example, I had the privilege of ordaining 22 new deacons for ministry throughout the archdiocese this year. They are just a few of the wonderful saints whose feasts form a beautiful constellation of heavenly glory surrounding the radiant Star of Bethlehem. Our secular culture will already have received the mystery of God’s mercy-made-flesh through the unwrapped and the after-Christmas sales, so that we might savor more deeply its meaning for our lives and our world.

The saints whose memorials and feasts we observe during the Christmas season offer a vision of the splendor of holiness to which we all are called: Saint Stephen, the First Martyr (Dec. 26); Saint John the Evangelist (Dec. 27); and The Holy Innocents (Dec. 28) are just a few of the wonderful saints whose feasts form a beautiful constellation of heavenly glory surrounding the radiant Star of Bethlehem!

Our secular culture will already have grown weary of the “holiday season” by the time the presents are unwrapped and the after-Christmas sales have run their courses. For those who recognize the true meaning of Christmas, however, the Christmas Season is just beginning! It unwraps and reveals its gifts throughout the sequence of beautiful feasts still to come.

On Christmas Day, as on every Sunday of the year, I offer Mass for your intentions. Let us pray that our Christmas celebrations will renew in each of us a persistent yearning of the joy of the Gospel and a deep desire to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more intensely and follow him more faithfully.

I pray that 2018 will be a year filled with abundant blessings for each of you, for your loved ones and for our archdiocese. I am grateful for the privilege of serving as your archbishop. May Jesus, the Prince of Peace, bring his gift of peace to our suffering world in the New Year before us. God is with us.

As we conclude this year, I would like to thank you for your prayers and support of Archbishop Coakley’s official calendar. The following events are part of Archbishop Coakley’s official calendar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 24</td>
<td>Mass in Vietnamese, 8 p.m., The Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help</td>
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<td>Dec. 26</td>
<td>Seminarians Christmas gathering, 6 p.m., St. John Nepomuk, Yukon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 2</td>
<td>Mass, 11:30 a.m., St. Francis de Sales Chapel, Catholic Pastoral Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 4</td>
<td>Mass, 11:30 a.m., St. Francis de Sales Chapel, CPC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 4</td>
<td>Personnel Board meetings, 2 p.m., CPC</td>
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Celebrating the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

Feast day Dec. 31

By Ted King
The Sooner Catholic

“When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened and the things that the Lord has made known to us.’ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger” (Luke 2:15-16). While the secular world of merchants and sales ma- dies is in “holiday overdrive,” many Catholic parishes are decorated more like an Ad- vent wreath. With merchants stop promoting the holiday, television stations stop showing mov- ies about Santa Claus, and radio stations stop playing Christmas music, Catholic parishes still are decked with wreaths, ribbons, lights and a display of the Nativity scene of the Holy Family of Joseph, Mary and Joseph, featuring the babe lying in a manger. The feast day of The Holy Fam- ily is Dec. 31.

Joseph, featuring the babe lying in a manger. The feast day of The Holy Fam-

ily day Dec. 31.

On the feast day, Catholics often prepare to celebrate Christmas. This year, the Feast of the Holy Family is celebrated on Dec. 31.

By Dana Attocknie

The Sooner Catholic

“Archbishop Paul S. Coakley reminds us that the season of Advent ‘is the season not of being busy with preparations for the holiday, but of being busy with a presentation of Christ to the world.’”

Dana Attocknie

Most Reverend
Paul S. Coakley
Archbishop of Oklahoma City
Publisher

Diane Clay
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Managing Editor

The Sooner Catholic

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No sooner than two dozen bishops, including Archbishop Coakley, Archbishop Thomas J. Olmsted, Cardinal Roger M. Mahony, retired arch- bishops John Cody, Bishop Thomas P. Olmsted and Bishop Joseph C. Sullivan, presided over the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City in November.

This Christmas Season, the Center of Family Love needs support.

Founded in 1981, by members of the Oklahoma Knights of Co- lumbus, the Center of Family Love is a 24-hour care facility that serves intellectual and physically disabled adults age 18 and older. The center provides specialized residential care with innovative educational approaches along with skilled vocational programs in Glauche, Kingfisher and El Reno. Parishioners throughout the archdiocese are invited to share with residents at the center through volunteering, joining the center’s Olympias at Special Olympics, raising money for an adopted friend or by play games, cooking out and spending quality time with residents.

For information on tax-deductible gifts, contact (405) 263-4658, Ext. 1042, nnsanders@cflinc.org. To volunteer, contact volunteer coordinator, Michelle Pena, at mpena@cflinc.org, (405) 263-4658, Ext. 1049.

The Center of Family Love also needs specific items:

- Youth Bibles
- easy-to-read Bible studies; spiral notebooks;
- Fingerpint Polish/Remover; Bath and Body Works for men and women; personal hygiene supplies; single window curtains with rods; comforter sets for twin and queen;
- Religious wall decor; pictures and mirrors; recliners; end tables; furniture; kitchen appliances.

The Cabrini Wellness Ministry of the Cabrini Home of Saint Joseph’s in El Reno and El Reno Catholic High School has been training leaders in the Cabrini Wellness Ministry program for the past several years.

According to a national survey, more than 200 people have been trained in QPR and more than 1,000 people have been trained in Mental Health First Aid.

“The Question Persuade and Re- serve (QPR) and Youth Mental Health First Aid trainings are significant steps in addressing mental health issues and suicide prevention,” said Pat Keating, director of reli- gious education for the archdi- cote.

The Cabrini Wellness Ministry needs support from the community to help meet the needs of people who are in crisis.

To bring about change, the following are items that are needed:

- Youth Bibles;
- easy-to-read Bible studies; spiral notebooks;
- Fingerprint Polish/Remover; Bath and Body Works for men and women; personal hygiene supplies; single window curtains;
- Electric fans; blow dryers;
- Dish towels, pots and pans; containers with lids; food processors; wire whips;
- Commercial washer and dryers; dressers; twin window curtains;
- Exercise ball; mini hot glue gun; exercise equipment;
- Medical-grade scale; conference room chairs;
- Dining room tables/chairs; duffle bags for Special Olympics; commercial washers and dryers; dressers; twin window curtains; single window curtains with rods;
- Comforter sets for twin and queen;
- Youth Bibles;
- easy-to-read Bible studies; spiral notebooks;
- Fingerprint Polish/Remover; Bath and Body Works for men and women; personal hygiene supplies; single window curtains;
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The history of “The Twelve Days of Christmas”

T

he song, “The Twelve Days of Christmas,” is an English Christmas carol. From 1823, Scottish and English Catholics in England were not permitted to practice their faith openly. Some Catholics took part in such events as Christmas caroling as a form of underground song writing. It has two levels of meaning: the surface meaning plus a hidden meaning known only to members of the Church. Each element in the carol is a code word or allusion, religious reality that the children could understand.

There are 12 fruits of the Holy Spirit. The “True Love” heard in the song is not a smitten boy or girl friend, but Jesus Christ, because truly love was born on Christmas Day.

The partridge in the pear tree also represents Him because bird is willing to sacrifice its life to protect its family from the impact of humanizing the effect of the words of Jesus Christ on its behavior. The partridges were the holy family.

The two turtle doves were the Old and New Testaments and the three French hens stand for faith, love and hope.

The four calling birds were the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The five golden rings represented the first five books of the Old Testament, which describe man’s fall into sin and the great love of God in sending a savior.

The six geese-a-laying stood for the six days of creation. Seven swans-a-swimming represented the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit – prophecy, wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, fear of God and self-control.

The nine ladies dancing were the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit – charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

The ten lords leaping represented the ten commandments.

The eleven pipers piping were the ten faithful Apostles. The 12 drummers drummed symbolized the 12 points of belief in The Apostles’ Creed: The Father and the Son are one. The Holy Spirit is equally God. All three persons are one God.

The parishes of Saint Paul the Apostle in Del City celebrated its first bilingual Mass on Dec. 12. Father Joseph Sundar chose the patron of Our Lady of Guadalupe because inside the parish was an unusual altar for the Patroness of the Americas. The Feast from multiple cultural backgrounds, including Filipino, American and Hispanic, was a good one, but his heart hungered for something more. He hungered for something that money can’t buy, but he wasn’t sure what that could be, until the day he heared the Good News of Jesus Christ. His passion for Christmas was so intense that he did two things. First, he gathered all his immense riches and gave them to the poor. Second, he went on to create a sanctuary. Saint “Z” was known for his passion for his faith and his impressive preaching of the gospel and especially the life-changing gift of eternal life. He was a true hero of his time. However, this holiness of the Church is uniously manifested, and must be manifested, in the fruits of grace that the Spirit produces in the faithful. It is expressed in many ways in individuals, who in their walk of life, tend to ward the perfection of their character. It is a true form of humanizing the effect of the words of Jesus Christ on its behavior. He even went as far as using his own hands to create the character and the effects of grace, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, and the like. This form of humanizing the effect of the words of Jesus Christ on its behavior is a true manifestation of the grace of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit who is the life-giving Spirit of Jesus Christ.

The persecutor ordered that our saint, Saint Zeticus, be dragged through the city and be combed pathly by wols until he died. Our saint and martyr con- tinued to run to the poor and sick even after his death. One legend speaks about a spring healing the waters of a stream to which the body had gone over.

So, what did people do with the word? The word means that each donor’s son, once the donor was deceased, objected to his father’s last wish and wanted the money back. The donor’s son left the Good News with Saint “Z” for his financial blessings that left him with less money than his pocket. His anger turned into persecution.

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SHAWNEE – Saint Gregory’s University celebrated the graduation of the August and December 2017 classes on Dec. 1 in the Don and Jenetta Sumner Fieldhouse on the Saint Gregory’s campus in Shawnee, conferring 226 associate, bachelor’s or master’s degrees to students from both the Shawnee and Tulsa campuses.

The ceremony was held nearly a month after it was announced that the university board of directors voted to suspend operations after the Fall 2017 semester.

“We felt it was fitting to honor our August and December graduates with a full commencement ceremony. While it was bittersweet, it was a joyous occasion to celebrate the accomplishments of our students and faculty,” President Michael Scaperlanda said.

Father Don Wolf, chairman of the Saint Gregory’s board of directors and pastor of Saint Eugene in Oklahoma City was the keynote speaker.

Duncan Tiemeyer, Saint Gregory’s Student Government Association president, gave the farewell address.

“Although this unknown may seem scary, it is important that we look to the future with open arms,” Tiemeyer said.

“Saint John Paul the Great said, ‘Have no fear of moving into the unknown. Simply step out fearlessly knowing that God is with you, therefore no harm can befall you; all is very, very well. Do this in complete faith and confidence.’ Face the unknown in complete faith and confidence! Have no fear! This is what we all must do. It is our duty to take this community with us wherever we go and remember that once a Cavalier, always a Cavalier!”
A Millenial Journey in Faith

Take time to recognize Jesus’ presence

Growing up, on the 12th night of Christmas, my siblings and I would go out into the yard to gather “straw” for the wise men’s camels. Through high school and college, we would fill shoe boxes with grass for the visitors from the East who would come in the night. We would place on Jan. 6, the Feast of the Epiphany, to three small gifts brought to us by the angels. That day, called “Little Christmas” in many countries, celebrates the Incarnation of all people, Gentile and Jew. Who were these wise men? Why did they leave their home and families just to meet a baby? What did they do when they returned to their home country? Were they then changed by their meeting with God-man-made man, even as a baby? Were there others, who studied the heavens for a sign, but did not give up everything to follow the star? As we imagine what it could have been like for these men, I wonder how I, too, can become wise and observant enough to recognize God in our midst. The truth of who they are in Christ becomes clearer.

The wise men themselves demonstrate another key point to recognizing Christ’s presence in the world. All of us observe Christ as we meet, look upon him, feel his touch, and in the measure that we do so, he becomes more real to us. What is the book, “What the Shepherd Saw,” by the Reverend Stephen Biddick? It is a book that I highly recommend. Biddick, who was a Jesuit priest, wrote about the newness of the “Joseph” of today, who is a man, speaking to a man. The truth of who they are in Christ becomes clearer. Why not let go of life’s apparent illusions? He tells about a friend who wrote to say, “I will accept the limitations of age, but I do not and will not define myself by my illness … I’m a child of God and that is my identity.”

Cunningham concludes with, “What a promise to ponder. What a beautiful image to wait with – one day we will become one with God.” J.E.H. Helm is a freelance writer for the Sooner Catholic.
La Navidad es más de un día

Mientras escribo, nos acercamos a la hermosa fiesta del nacimiento de Cristo y al final del decenio. Con el paso de los años, hemos perdido la verdadera esencia de esta hermosa fiesta. La Navidad es más de un día; es más que un día de celebración festiva.

La persona que va más allá de este sentido, se acerca a entender que este día nos invita a reflexionar y a recordar. Es un día que nos invita a recordar la noción de la bendición que el Señor nos ha otorgado al darse por nosotros.

La Navidad es más de un día; es más que un día de celebración festiva. Es un día de reflexión, de recordar la noción de la bendición que el Señor nos ha otorgado al darse por nosotros. Es un día que nos invita a recordar el amor inmenso que el Señor nos ha otorgado al darse por nosotros.
Bishop McGinness University annual dinner, auction
Bishop McGinness Catholic High School in Oklahoma City will host its annual “McGinness Rocks” banquet on Saturday, May 11, at the Oklahoma City Convention Center, 300 North Robinson. The banquet is scheduled for 6 p.m. with dinner at 6:30. The theme this year is “Taking a Step Forward.”

The keynote speaker will be Todd Squier, a long-time friend of the bishop and board member of the Diocese of Tulsa. He is also a member of the Oklahoma State Board of Education.

The event includes a silent and live auction, a raffle and the chance to win a trip to Europe. The proceeds will benefit Bishop McGinness University.

For more information, call (405) 944-7884 or visit www.mcginsness.com.

Faith, Family, Friendship and Fun
The Archdiocese of Oklahoma City is hosting a diocesan-wide rally for youth and adults on Saturday, May 11, at the Oklahoma City Convention Center.

The rally will feature keynote speaker Father Andrew Lenihan, a priest of the Diocese of Tulsa and a member of the Catholic Charities staff.

The event is open to all diocesan residents and includes a breakfast, lunch and dinner. For more information, call (405) 944-7884 or visit www.mcginsness.com.

The Pierce Agency

Since the FREE fraternization program was launched in 1994, the Knights of Columbus has paid out more than $14.9 million in benefits to families in need.

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Royal engagement announcement brings attention to Catholic school

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — When the news broke of Meghan Markle’s engagement to Prince Harry, reporters descended upon the Los Angeles Catholic school Markle attended – Immaculate Heart High School and Middle School.

“They’ve been scaling the walls,” Communications Director Callie Webb said of the reporters calling and visiting the 112-year-old school just a few miles from the landmark Hollywood sign.

For two days, Webb received telephone calls and e-mails from local newspapers and TV stations as well as national media and British tabloids about the school’s famous fiancee – the 1999 graduate who is not Catholic but attended the school from seventh grade until graduation.

ABC’s “20/20” spent a day on the campus – with six of their vans parked on the school’s ball field. The attention, and the news itself, has been exciting for the school’s 674 students, Webb said, pointing out that some of them had never heard of Markle while others knew every detail about her 15-month romance with Prince Harry, her engagement, her TV career, activism and now discontinued lifestyle blog, The Tig.

The school, founded by Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in 1906, tried to put the engagement news in perspective, at least on social media. Its Nov. 27 tweet said: “Over 10,000 women of great heart and right conscience have graduated from Immaculate Heart, and we are proud to count actress and humanitarian @meghanmarkle among them. Today, we send her our very best wishes as she celebrates her engagement to His Royal Highness Prince Harry.”

Webb also noted that Markle, 36, was exposed at an early age to helping others, something that was reinforced at school with community service projects. “Her upbringing meshed with the school’s mission and philosophy.”

Markle was chosen as a Kairos retreat leader during her senior year and took part in the school’s theater productions – long before her role as Rachel Zane in the television drama “Suits.”

“She has gone from one stage to a bigger stage,” Webb added, noting that in “whatever small way” the school contributed to her current achievements, it is proud.

Immaculate Heart makes no mention of the royal engagement on its website. Instead, the school news is about sports wins, charity drives, upcoming events and a 2007 graduate who is featured in 2018 edition of Forbes.

She knows the media focus on the school is likely to wane, but for now, it has been great publicity. She also continually hopes to reinforce the message that Immaculate Heart is thrilled for Markle, but not just for the wedding at England’s Windsor Castle.

“We always tell our students to dream big,” she said, “but not necessarily about marrying a prince!”

Our Lady of Guadalupe

Several parishes in the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City celebrated the annual feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe with prayers, re-enactments, dancing and singing. The feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe is Dec. 12.

Photos Cara Koewing/Sooner Catholic and provided.