The feast in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe goes back to the 16th century. Chronicles of that period tell us the story.

A poor Indian named Cuauhtlatohuac was baptized and given the name Juan Diego. He was a 57-year-old widower and lived in a small village near Mexico City. On Saturday morning, Dec. 9, 1531, he was on his way to a nearby barn to attend Mass in honor of Our Lady.

He was walking by a hill called Tepeyac when he heard beautiful music like the warbling of birds. A radiant cloud appeared and within it was a young Native American maiden dressed like an Aztec princess. The lady spoke to him in his own language and sent him to the bishop of Mexico, a Franciscan named Juan de Zumarraga. The bishop was to build a chapel in the place where the lady appeared.

Eventually the bishop told Juan Diego to have the lady give him a sign. About this same time Juan Diego's uncle became seriously ill. This led poor Diego to try to avoid the lady. The lady found Diego, nevertheless, assured him that his uncle would recover and provided roses for Juan to carry to the bishop in his cape or tilma.

When Juan Diego opened his tilma in the bishop's presence, the roses fell to the ground and the bishop sank to his knees. On Juan Diego's tilma appeared an image of Mary exactly as she had appeared at the hill of Tepeyac. It was Dec. 12, 1531.

Our Lady of Guadalupe Celebrated December 12

Holy Family Home Expands Teen Support

OKLAHOMA CITY — Catholic Charities is making transitional care available at the Holy Family Maternity Home for teens in crisis pregnancies.

“The goal of this new service is to help the family and the teenage girl who is experiencing an unplanned pregnancy as they work to create a ‘new normal’ in their lives,” said Monica Palmer, associate director for Clinical Services. “Families often need time and help to adjust.”

As part of the Transitional Care program, Holy Family Home offers short-term residential services in a safe and supportive environment. Each girl enrolled in the program will have a private room with caring staff on duty 24 hours a day, as well as case management to assist in making an educational and a medical plan. Additionally, Holy Family Maternity Home provides age-appropriate recreational activities including field trips, art and musical events.

“The residents and families will be able to decide on the length of the stay based on their needs,” said Mary Jane Webster, Holy Family Maternity Home director.

continued on Page 7
Are You Confused? What are Oklahoma’s Child Abuse/Neglect Reporting Laws?

Recent media coverage of Penn State’s current crisis has left many people confused about reporting child abuse or neglect. Who has an obligation to report? First, the duty to report varies from state to state. The majority of states, including Oklahoma, make it a mandatory duty to report child abuse or neglect, including suspected child abuse or child neglect. In Oklahoma, every adult falls under this legal obligation to report. There are no exceptions.

Second, it is important to know that the law that imposes this duty also protects the good-faith reporter. There can be no legal retaliation against persons who make good faith reports of child abuse or even suspected child abuse. The intent of the law is clear: Think first of the child and protect the child!

Knowing that we have the firm obligation to report, the next question is: How do I report? Perhaps this little summary will help:

First: Call the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (DHS) hotline: 800-522-3511.

Be prepared — identify yourself, tell them all that you know, and ask for a case number. If a reporter of abuse needs to call back, then having the case number is very helpful. The DHS will handle the matter can vary. If they believe the child might be in imminent danger, they may ask the reporter to call the local police or sheriff. If you make a report and are asked to call the police, then do so immediately. Even though the procedures may seem burdensome, think first of the child and protect the child.

Once a person has reported to DHS and followed their instructions, the reporter of abuse has fulfilled his/her legal obligation. However, if the abuse involves a member of the clergy, a church employee or a church volunteer, the next step is to contact our Archdiocesan Pastoral Hotline, (405) 721-5651 Ext. 139, and/or the Vicar General, Monsignor Edward Weisenburger, (405) 721-5651 Ext. 138.

The Archdiocese stands ready to assist not only victims of child abuse but also those who must report abuse. Jennifer Goodrich, the archdiocesan employee who staffs the Archdiocesan Pastoral Hotline, is a licensed professional. While her primary responsibility is to assist victims who come forward to report abuse by church personnel, she is also available to provide support for the person reporting the abuse to DHS and the Archdiocese. Goodrich has access to other professionals and will arrange additional pastoral care, if requested. Any person who reports abuse or neglect has done the right thing and I encourage that person to let others help, too.

Remember in making an honest and conscientious report, you are thinking of the child and protecting the child.

The reports of abuse that we hear about with such frequency are deeply troubling. The sexual abuse of children is a serious problem in our society. I hope you will remember that the Archdiocese and its parishes have created policies and procedures to protect children. Those policies and procedures are working. On Nov. 17, David Crary wrote an Associated Press story published in The Oklahoman reporting that in the U.S.A., statistical data indicates that the prevalence of child sexual abuse in the U.S.A. has dropped over the past two decades. The article attributes this to several factors such as stepped-up prosecution, better screening of people who deal regularly with children and increased public awareness and support of child-protection programs. While many of the child-protection advocates quoted expressed a guarded optimism, they also note that their caseloads have not declined. All cautioned against complacency.

Our commitment to protecting children is absolute, firm, but it takes all of us to make the child-protection policies that the Church and others have put in place work. I applaud your support of your pastor, parish facilitator, principals and teachers, DREs, catechists, youth ministers and all the other dedicated leaders and volunteers who work diligently to implement our Safe Environment Program. I ask each of you to continue this support and cooperation with their efforts.

Your comments on the Safe Environment Program are always welcome. You can contact our Safe Environment Program Coordinator, Janet Enstrand, with your questions, concerns or comments, at (405) 721-5651 Ext. 150, or email Enstrand at jenstrand@archokc.org.
¿Está usted confundido? ¿Cuáles son las leyes de Oklahoma para reportar abuso/negligencia infantil?

La reciente cobertura de los medios de comunicación de la actual crisis del estado de Pennsylvania ha dejado a mucha gente confundida acerca de cómo reportar el abuso infantil o negligencia. ¿Quién tiene la obligación de informar? En primer lugar, el deber de informar varía de estado a estado. La mayoría de los estados, incluyendo Oklahoma, lo convierten en un deber obligatorio para reportar el abuso infantil o negligencia, incluida la sospecha de abuso o negligencia infantil. En Oklahoma cada adulto entra dentro de esta obligación legal de reportar. No hay excepciones.

En segundo lugar, es importante saber que la ley impone esta obligación también protege al informador de buena fe. No puede haber represalias legales contra las personas que hacen reportes de buena fe de abuso o maltrato infantil aun sospechado siquiera. La intención de la ley es clara: proteger al niño y protegerlo.

Sabiendo que tenemos la obligación firme de reportar, la siguiente pregunta es: ¿Cómo puedo hacer la denuncia? Tal vez este pequeño resumen le ayudará a entender la situación.

En primer lugar, llame a la línea directa para ayuda del Departamento de Servicios Humanos (DHSS):
800-222-3511

Esté preparado - identifíquese, diga todo lo que sabe, y pida un número de caso. Si la persona que hace el reporte de abuso tiene que volver a llamar, este número de caso será muy útil. El cómo el DHSS se encargará de esto un número puede variar. Si ellos creen que el niño podría estar en peligro inminente, entonces pueden que pidan al informante llamar a la policía local o al sheriff. Si usted hace un reporte y se le pide que llame a la policía, hágalo inmediatamente. Aunque hacer un reporte dice veces puede parecer molesto, piense primero en el niño y proteja a ese niño.

Una vez que una persona ha informado al DHSS y seguido sus instrucciones, el informante de abuso ha cumplido con su obligación. El caso se puede variar. Si ellos creen que el niño podría estar en peligro inminente, entonces puede que pidan al informante llamar a la policía local o al sheriff. Si usted hace un reporte y se le pide que llame a la policía, hágalo inmediatamente. Aunque hacer un reporte dice veces puede parecer molesto, piense primero en el niño y proteja a ese niño.

Si alguien que sabe, y pida un número de caso. Si la persona a que permita que otros le ayuden. Recuerde que para hacer un informe honesto y concienzuido, usted está pensando y protegiendo al niño.

Los informes de abuso que hemos oído hablar con tanta frecuencia son profundamente inquietantes. El abuso sexual de niños es un problema serio en nuestra sociedad. Esperamos que este artículo ayude a entender las leyes que protegen a nuestros niños.

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New Orleans, La. — Love is patient. Love is kind. Familiar words to anyone who has attended a Catholic wedding Mass. Susan Conroy witnessed those words in action while working alongside Mother Teresa in the slums of Calcutta, India.

“I knew her throughout the course of 11 years,” Conroy said Oct. 22 during a stop at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Kenner, La., where she recounted extraordinary experiences in Calcutta that changed her priorities from wanting to get a good job, earn money and be a wife and mother to living a life of service.

“I was seeking a meaningful life instead of a comfortable life,” the staunch Catholic said, “to love as Jesus loved, to serve as Jesus served, to give as Jesus gave. That is the secret to life.”

Mother Teresa said people can experience heaven on earth by serving others, and that’s what Conroy set out to do.

“I came back without a desire for the corporate world,” Conroy said. “My heart was full. I wanted to keep helping people.”

A coffee table book

It was Conroy’s mother, Ruth Elizabeth Conroy, who introduced her to Mother Teresa by mailing Mother Teresa’s beautiful musings about joy being prayer, strength and love. Conroy said she displayed the quotes in her dormitory room, something unusual for a student studying economics at the secular Dartmouth College.

Then, Conroy devoured three books about Mother Teresa that her mother had lying on a coffee table at home. Mother Teresa’s words about seeing Jesus in the distress of the poor roused a desire in Conroy to travel to India.

“Mother Teresa believed that when you reach out to those in need you are reaching out to Jesus, you reach out to Jesus,” Conroy said. “I wanted to see Jesus, to serve Jesus. She was called a living saint, and I wanted to see what a saint is. I wanted to learn to love. She loved people that most of us couldn’t even look at.”

Got sponsors for her trip

Being the seventh of 10 children, Conroy had to find a way to pay for the excursion. She learned about the William Jewett Tucker Foundation that funded Dartmouth student service trips and created a fellowship program to Calcutta that survives today. Within nine weeks after applying to the foundation, Conroy — then a 21-year-old rising college senior — was on a plane to Calcutta in the summer of 1986.

Death and disease surrounded Conroy in Calcutta as she witnessed poverty and human disfigurement beyond imagination. Conroy said she ministered to babies in an orphanage and to dying adults alongside Mother Teresa 24 hours a day. With Mother Teresa, she prayed and ate, ministered to babies in an orphanage and to the dying adults alongside Mother Teresa 24 hours a day.

She tried to absorb all the lessons as she witnessed Mother Teresa’s ideal holiness.

“Love surpasses fear”

“I had never seen such frightening sights, but Mother Teresa didn’t care what people looked like,” Conroy said. “She had love greater than fear. How did she love that way? She looked within with the eyes of love the way God looks at us. She was seeing the dignity of the human being. I longed to learn that… Love is the most important thing. We should be striving eagerly for love.”

“Love is patient, love is kind. It gives as Jesus gave. That is the secret to life.”

With Mother Teresa in the slums of Calcutta, India, Conroy read St. Therese’s autobiography, “The Story of a Soul,” and found grace in learning to complete small things with great love yet find satisfaction.

She worked with the Maine Children’s Cancer program, helping dying children. She worked in soup kitchens, homeless shelters and with AIDS patients in the south Bronx. She taught religion to poor children.

Although she professes not to be a writer, Conroy was led to write a book about her time with Mother Teresa and received her blessings on the project. One hundred percent of the proceeds from the book, “Mother Teresa’s Lessons of Love and Secrets of Sanctity,” go to the Missionaries of Charity’s work in Haiti and to EWTN, the Catholic television station that offers spiritual nourishment to Catholics, especially those who are ill and shut-in.

“My writing this book and giving it to the world was meant to be,” Conroy said. “God chooses the weak and makes them strong.”

She has been interviewed on EWTN and completed a 13-part series, “Speaking of Saints” that airs on EWTN.

Cared for her aging mother

Her avocation to help others has become her vocation, which is why she travels the country discussing her faith experiences, especially with Mother Teresa.

“If these talks make people want to be a saint and love God even more, then I must keep talking,” she said. “God is not loved enough.”

Kenner resident Michael Varino worked for a year to get Conroy to speak in Kenner after seeing her on EWTN.

“People need to be nourished,” he said. “She glows from inside. She’s full of love and shows it.”

Printed with permission from the Clarion Herald, newspaper for the Archdiocese of New Orleans.
Stewardship Conference Offers Insight, Support

Recently several Oklahomans from the Archdiocese had the opportunity to attend the International Catholic Stewardship Council's Annual Conference in Florida. These participants and their parishes have been working at different levels of stewardship development. The contrast is worth noting because whether you are just starting a stewardship effort in your parish or looking to recharge a successful program after many years, the ICSC Conference was a great place to be.

Barbara and Matt Blattler are volunteer members of a newly formed stewardship committee at St. James the Greater Parish in Oklahoma City. Barb works at Mercy Health Center's Rehabilitation Unit in Oklahoma City. Barb works at Mercy St. James the Greater Parish in Oklahoma City. Matt is a branch manager at IBC Bank in Moore. Encouraged to become involved in the most recent Stewardship Fair held at St. John’s each fall is a great tool for recruiting volunteers, expanding programs and teaching the concept that a Christian steward is one who receives God’s gifts gratefully, cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner, shares them in justice and love with others and returns time, talent and treasure with increase to the Lord.

Each member of a parish shares in responsibility for the church mission, each is called to practice stewardship of the church as a disciple of Christ. Your parish — your local Christian community — provides one focal point where each of you can express your faith in worship and through acts of charity.

In conducting a stewardship effort, parish leaders will find that parishioners will be more apt to share their gifts because of the blessings they have received than because of the needs of the parish budget or the need for volunteers. If your parish is considering starting or expanding a stewardship effort, please contact the Archdiocese Office of Stewardship and Development at (405) 721-4115 for more information, reference material and support in your effort.

The series is provided by Catholic Charities Parish Outreach and Program Development and the Pastoral Ministry Office.

Holiday Grief Focus of Workshop

A workshop regarding “Holiday Blues: Dealing with Grief and Loss” will be presented by Monica Palmer, Associate Director of Clinical Services with St. Joseph Counseling of Catholic Charities.

The workshop is part of the Parish Faith and Ministry Formation series for adults.

The workshop will be held at 10:30 a.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 7 at the video-conferencing center at the Catholic Pastoral Center. Also taking part in the presentation will be the parishes of Saint Peter in Woodward, Holy Family in Lawton, Saint Francis in Enid, and Saint Mary in Clinton.

The presentation will give those who may be struggling with the holiday season’s ideas and skills that will help to deal with the loss of loved ones and stresses.

“‘The holidays are a natural time to think of family and those who are dear to us,’ said Palmer. ‘Sometimes we need help in dealing with those feelings and finding a way to reflect on those feelings.’

The workshop is free. Registration is requested by calling site of each of the participating parishes. Please contact the Archdiocese Office of Stewardship and Development at (405) 721-4115 for more information, reference material and support in your effort.

For more information, contact Becky VanPeel at (405) 523-3503 or (405) 375-8514 ext. 1110, or Sister Diane Keating at (405) 274-4208.

The series is provided by Catholic Charities Parish Outreach and Program Development and the Pastoral Ministry Office.

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A gift to the Catholic Foundation in return for a Charitable Gift Annuity allows the donor to support the wonderful work of the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Oklahoma and at the same time receive a charitable tax deduction and a fixed regular payment amount for life. For example, Karen, age 70, donates $15,000 to establish a charitable gift annuity with an annual gift annuity rate of 5.3 percent. For her gift, she receives a $5,714 charitable tax deduction in the year of the gift. Each year, she will receive $570 in gift annuity payments, of which $512 is income tax-free throughout her projected life expectancy, which is 15.5 years. After 15.5 years, all $870 is taxed as ordinary income. What a great way to invest in the future of your faith.
Catholic Charities Adoption Services Life-Long

OKLAHOMA CITY — Pat Gallagher grew up knowing two things were true: She was adopted, and also that she was an important part of a loving family.

Pat was only 3 weeks old when she joined the Gallagher family. Growing up, her mother often told the story of the day they adopted Pat from Catholic Charities. She would lovingly recount all the details of the adoption ceremony and blessing by Bishop Reed, Pat’s brief stint as “Rosemary,” and even the unusually hot car ride home during which Pat cried the whole way back to Tulsa. Filled with hardship and joy, it was a story of love and family.

Adopted by Jim and Katherine Gallagher, she was raised in Tulsa with her two sisters, Kathie and Mary Lou. Her upbringing was full of all the experiences of traditional family life. She went to church each Sunday and attended Monte Cassino Catholic School. And although she didn’t have the same physical features as her mother and two sisters, she had the same mannerisms and habits that often come with family.

Growing up in that loving family, Gallagher only occasionally wondered about her birth parents. Then in 2010, after raising two children of her own, she made the decision to try to contact her birth family.

“When I was younger, I promised my mother that I would never search for my birth parents and I held true to that promise throughout her lifetime. I always told my mom she was MY Mom and this was MY family. However, five years after her death, I decided it was time to learn more,” Gallagher said. “That’s when I contacted Catholic Charities to help with the search.”

Gallagher already had some basic information. She knew her birth mother was a one-time resident at Our Lady of Victory Maternity Home. She also knew that her birth mother was a college student from Texas who came to Oklahoma to have her before returning to school. To learn more, she contacted Catholic Charities Adoption Services Life-Long.

Stephanie Storozyszyn in post-adoption services at Catholic Charities, who began the delicate process of seeking out Gallagher’s birth parents.

“It’s not unusual for adult adoptees like Pat to search for their birth family years after the adoption took place. Whether it is out of curiosity or the need for medical information, the reasons are as unique as the people involved,” said Storozyszyn. “No matter the situation, Catholic Charities ensures that throughout the search, all parties’ privacy, sensitivity and care are carefully considered.”

Catholic Charities’ post-adoption services consist of three components: a non-identifying report, contact registry and the search itself. There are fees for the services, which are nonrefundable, regardless of the outcome. In Oklahoma the files are sealed, and due to state law, a court order from an Oklahoma County judge is required for the release of adoption information. Even with a court order, there are often limits as to what can be released. Storozyszyn estimates Catholic Charities has performed almost 50 post-adoption searches in the past three years.

To maintain the searchee’s privacy, Catholic Charities initiates contact with a letter written on plain paper with minimal personal information. This letter is to open the door to contact without overwhelming the recipient or creating undue pressure on either involved party.

“I initiated the process two years ago, but my search truly intensified in late spring of last year. Although I learned from the initial report that my birth parents had passed, I was hopeful I could learn more from their children. Unfortunately, after some efforts from Catholic Charities, the odds were not looking good. There was no response to their letter,” Gallagher recalled. “Then on June 8, just days from both my mother’s and birth mother’s birthdays, I received a call from Stephanie, telling me that my birth mother’s family received the letter and would like to talk with me.”

Gallagher said the letter was a complete surprise to her half-brother, Carlton, who first thought it was a phishing attempt. However, when his wife, Carol, did an online search for the phone number, they realized the letter was legitimate and called to learn more.

Carlton was the first sibling to make contact. “Initially, I think he was surprised and more than a little curious about suddenly having a sibling he knew nothing about. In fact, he said to me, ‘How could I have not known? Mom could never keep a secret,’” Gallagher said.

The astonishment soon subsided and Carlton and Gallagher formed a relationship through a series of phone calls. Within a couple of days, Pat had spoken with two more of her birth mother’s children, Helene and Karl, all of whom shared stories and photos with their newfound sister. Through these conversations, she learned much more about herself and her birth mother.

Following a few months of phone calls and email exchanges, the siblings arranged to meet in Texas.

A Moment in Catholic Charities History: St. Joseph’s Orphanage

Founded in 1912, St. Joseph’s Orphanage was Catholic Charities’ cornerstone program. Just 34 years later, the orphanage was home to 125 children, several of whom were 12 and older.

To encourage more people to help an older child, the following notice appeared in the Southwest Courier:

3 LITTLE BOYS

At Saint Joseph’s Orphanage we have three little boys, all around 12 and 13, who have been in this institution for several years. They think they are little men and would like to go out and help someone. They want to live on a farm. If there are any Catholic farmers whose hearts are big enough to give these little fellows a chance, we will be deeply grateful to hear from them immediately.

continued on Page 15

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continued on Page 15
**Ten RNs Complete Faith Community Nursing Course**

OKLAHOMA CITY — Ten new registered nurses have completed the Foundations of Faith Community Nursing Course. The course offers registered nurses an educational and spiritual program based on the core curriculum developed by the International Parish Nurse Resource Center. Faith Community Nursing is a recognized specialty practice for registered nurses, which combines professional nursing and health ministry. Faith Community Nurses are often called “parish nurses,” “congregational health nurses” or “church nurses,” and emphasize health and healing within a faith community.

The ministry is coordinated through Catholic Charities. This is an independent nursing practice, which does not involve “hands-on” health care. Instead, the nurse performs roles of educator, referral agent, advocate, personal health counselor, developer of support groups, coordinator of volunteers and integrator of faith and health. The nurse performs all duties with a special emphasis on the intentional care of the spirit.

The spiritual aspect is key to parish nursing and nurse serve with a faith community ministerial team by actively promoting wellness, wholeness and preventive health.

The course was offered at Our Lady of the Lake Retreat Center, Guthrie. More than 180 nurses have attended the Oklahoma program. For more information, contact Mary Diane Steltenkamp RN, MAPM, Director of Faith Community Nursing at (405) 523-3006, or msteltenkamp@catholic-charitiesok.org.

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**Catholics Can Adopt a Family for Christmas**

OKLAHOMA CITY — As Christmas nears, many Oklahomans turn their thoughts to shopping and gift-giving. However, for many Oklahoma City’s poorest families, even a single Christmas gift can be out of reach. Fortunately, Catholic Charities’ Adopt-a-Family program is available to provide low-income families with Christmas presents.

Now in its 16th year, the Adopt-a-Family program has made Christmas possible for thousands of Oklahoma families. This year the program faces a growing need as more people are affected by the economic slowdown. To help fulfill this need, Catholic Charities is seeking sponsors for the Adopt-a-Family program.

“The sad reality is that the number of people living in poverty has grown larger than ever in recent years,” said Catholic Charities Executive Director Tim O’Connor.

Almost 400 families have requested assistance from the Adopt-a-Family program this year, making the need for support larger than ever.

With almost 400 families on their Christmas list, Catholic Charities has noticed a significant increase in requests from 2010, when the program helped 287 families.

Due to the record number of commitments for assistance, the organization is not accepting additional Adopt-a-Family requests this year.

Adopt-a-Family sponsors can be individuals, families, church groups, small businesses or even large corporations. Those who participate can choose to sponsor a single family or several (for larger groups).

Upon enrolling, each sponsor receives names and ages of family members as well as gift ideas for each person.

For those who may not have time to shop, cash donations or department store gift cards are greatly appreciated. Donors are requested to drop off gifts at Corpus Christi Catholic Church on Dec. 12 and 13. Gifts will be distributed to families on Dec. 16 and 17.

To learn more about sponsoring a family in need or to learn more about the Adopt-a-Family program, please call 523-3013. For more information about the programs and services of Catholic Charities, please visit www.catholiccharitiesok.org.

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**Teen**

continued from Page 1

“If needed, the girl can stay through the birth of her baby and complete the school semester.”

To further help ease the transition, counseling is available through Holy Family Maternity Home to assist both the young mother and her family in the decision of whether to parent or place the child for adoption.

If she chooses to parent, the resident will be given training in parenting and other life skills. Also, as a part of the case management service, families will be given information regarding other community services available.

Staffed by caring professionals, Holy Family Maternity Home is a full-service home for young women in crisis pregnancies from throughout Oklahoma. All services at the Holy Family Home are provided at no cost to the young mother or family. For more information, please contact the Holy Family Home, 405-741-7419, or visit www.catholic-charities.org.
Center of Family Love Celebrates 30th Anniversary, Expansion

By Traci Chapman
For the Sooner Catholic

OAKARCHIE — Okarche’s Center of Family Love has had a lot to celebrate lately, like a significant birthday and a sizeable expansion.

On Nov. 16, the Center of Family Love celebrated its 30th birthday and the opening of a new wing.

“Tonight we celebrate 30 years of serving others,” said David Blair, CFL’s assistant executive director during a celebration held to mark the twin events. “Tonight we celebrate the past, but I look forward to celebrating the future.”

The celebration was attended by more than 100 people, who came to honor not only 30 years of accomplishments, but also what the center is all about — its residents.

One of those was Hank Ross, president of CFL’s board of directors. Ross’ brother, Jeffrey spent several years at the center. He passed away earlier this year.

“As the years passed, the center became part of our lives,” Ross said. “I began serving on the board, sibs got involved, significant dollars were given and raised.

“The center became that ‘extra sib’ taking care of Jeff, not part of our original family, but part of our family today,” he said.

Keynote speaker, former Gov. George Nigh, spoke about the center’s commitment to those residents, developmentally disabled adults who might not have a place to go without centers like CFL, he said. “Before, these families had nowhere to turn to, no one who could help them,” Nigh said. “With CFL, they have hope and family and love.

Both Nigh and his wife, Donna Nigh, have been committed to CFL since the start, said Executive Director Jim O’Brien. “They’ve been with us every step of the way,” O’Brien said. “And the beautiful thing about this is how many others have been too — the commitment is amazing.”

One of those people was Joe Pierce. Thirty-six years ago, Pierce — the father of Jody, who is developmentally disabled — decided to find a way to help people like his son. His dedication was the seed that blossomed into the Center of Family Love, O’Brien said.

The center has come a long way since that time. Phase I of the center’s capital improvement project is now a reality. With a price tag of $4.5 million, its completion will help those committed to CFL move closer to their goal of giving every resident his or her room.

Phase II is next, Blair said. That estimated $1.75 million project will include remodeling the existing 54-bed building, built in 1981. New furnishings for all of the new rooms, remodeled kitchen, dining and lounge areas, as well as landscaping and an irrigation system for the entire campus will also be included in that phase.

CFL has grown despite challenges. State funding cuts have made life difficult at times, O’Brien said, but the center has been blessed by “smart management” and a reputation some said is unsurpassed in the state of Oklahoma.

“I just wish we could duplicate this many, many times over across the state,” said Donna Nigh. “You look at these residents and you see how wonderful they are — they don’t know meanness, they only know love.”
CFL Board Member Shares Family Story

By Hank Ross
Center of Family Love
Board President

I remember as a teenager the Knights of Columbus men gathering outside our hardware and seed store in Chickasha raising money for their annual “Tootsie Roll Campaign.” In their yellow vests with pouches filled with tootsie rolls, donation or no donation, especially the kids, everyone received candy. The yellow vests told the story of their cause in large letters, “Please help the Mentally Retarded.”

Maybe the nomenclature of helping the mentally retarded is not politically correct in today’s world and has been changed over the years. But to a teenage kid whose brother had Down’s syndrome, I understood the meaning of those words. I understood these were people trying to help those who cannot help themselves. These were people making a difference.

My father on those days the Knights showed up made it clear this was a day of hospitality to those raising money. We would provide drinks, maybe some popcorn to eat because these individuals had an important cause. And we did this not knowing the money they were raising would have an impact on my brother and our family 19 years later.

My brother, Jeff was number eight of 10 children. When he was brought home in 1962, my Dad said, “God gave us this child because there will always be someone to take care of him.” My brother lived with my parents for 35 years, siblings helping when they could. But with aging parents and geographically distant brothers and sisters, we needed a different plan.

In April 1997, Jeff’s life changed. Our lives changed. We prepared to make the transition from his home in Chickasha to Okarche. We had all departed home for a university at some point in time. We just figured it was Jeff’s turn. So we made T-shirts saying “Okarche University” and sent Jeff to the Center of Family Love.

As the years passed, the center became part of our lives. I began serving on the board, we got involved, significant dollars were given and raised. The center became that “extra set” taking care of Jeff, not part of our original family, but part of our family today.

My brother, Jeff passed away at the Loosen Center on this campus just eight months ago. He was on hospice and we considered moving him back to Chickasha, but concluded this was his home.

He was among friends and staff who cared and loved him. His brothers and sisters were by his side when he left this world. Jeff and all these residents have an automatic ticket to heaven.

They know no wrong.

These last few months I have been thinking often of Jeff. I think we fulfilled our parents’ wishes that with our large family, someone would always be here to take care of Jeff. The center was an integral part of fulfilling that obligation.

For the Ross family, the Center of Family Love will always be special to us. We as Jeff’s brothers and sisters realized that he was a gift from God. However, in turn the Center of Family Love has been a gift to us. A gift that originated from those men in yellow vests giving out tootsie rolls.

By Hank Ross

Center of Family Love resident Larry Tollary smiles as he helps wheel in a cake celebrating the Center’s 30th anniversary.

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Christmas Message Clear if We Know Where to Look

By Reverend Don Wolf
For the Sooner Catholic

In the space for the address it said: Tom and Adeline Cristwell, 1104 Driscoll, Tipton, MO. That was easy enough to figure out. It was the code following that I couldn't make any sense out of. Mom had written in pen off to the side, tilting upward, Mr Cly Eds ad 64432. My imagination darted out for a moment at 1 gathered words that these encryptions might mean: "Motor Vehicle Clearance. Yearly adding up to sixty-four thousand four hundred thirty-two." How about "Meadly" vexed by Clarence, Lillian and Yolanda, Above all, deposit six hundred forty four by the fourth, or maybe the third of February?" Or perhaps, "Mystical certainty is elusive, decisive and systematic. Anne Dizena 6-4-43." Of course, it meant none of those things.

Mum had used the same address book for 50 years. She added and annotated each change to the names and addresses as she came to know them. And she was a fancy scribbler so she wrote in every blank space and each possible place in a tiny, tight hand. It was a spiral-bound, black notebook with the pages divided alphabetically by an index letter tab that stood out from the pages. After all of these years the tabs had just about worn away and several of the pages were loose. About 10 years ago she had taken to tying a rubber band around it so that it would stay together in the drawer of her desk in between uses. It was always a work in progress, and had she needed to add one more thing to one more name, she would have. Well, if she could have. Fifty years of moving, marrying, re-marrying, living and dying and all of the other adventures that fit into a family had made this black covered collection a memoir of my mother's family history.

She didn't use it all that often. Her memory was prodigious; probably 50 phone numbers and zip codes could come to her in an instant. It was her custom to sit and write Christmas cards to everyone in the family every year. She would write in the notebook with the pages divided alphabetically by an index letter tab that stood out from the pages. After all of these years the tabs had just about worn away and several of the pages were loose. About 10 years ago she had taken to tying a rubber band around it so that it would stay together in the drawer of her desk in between uses. It was always a work in progress, and had she needed to add one more thing to one more name, she would have. Well, if she could have. Fifty years of moving, marrying, re-marrying, living and dying and all of the other adventures that fit into a family had made this black covered collection a memoir of my mother's family history.

"Mom. What does C-L-Y mean?" I asked from the kitchen table. I was sitting in the dining room where Mom was sitting. I usually pulled her out in her wheelchair about 7 a.m. and turned on The Today Show while I went into the kitchen to make coffee and see about some breakfast. That way she could get in time with Matt and Katie while I had a little time with the paper. Today we had finished the paper and I started to work on the Christmas cards. She was pretty deeply in either Jerry Springer or Oprah; I never remember which Christmas cards. She was pretty deeply into either finished breakfast and I started to work on the Today Show while I went into the kitchen to make breakfast. At the same time I began to understand why. It probably took a good better part of two weeks. Sitting with the book I was able to let go. All I do know is this: It kept her busy for the rest could mean anything. "Don't worry. I think I've got it. It's in Missouri. So what does m-v-d-E-d-s-a-d mean? Aren't you going to let me know?" "Don't be rude," she said. That was one of the remnants she could still get to when she had a mind to. She tagged it with, "I hear you." That was another one of her lines. When Mum first got home from the hospital, I cried almost every day. She had been a force in my life, there wasn't anything she couldn't do if she was interested in it. In her world it wasn't common for women to work out of the home, so her life was spent inside the limits that she had made there. And like the women of her time, she didn't think less of herself for not having gotten a Ph.D. or becoming local district manager. Every part of her life that I saw as a kid, and then later as an adult, breathed her contentment with what she had chosen. Seeing her body crippled with the stroke was just about more than I could bear. So those first months were tough on me as I watched her become a person I didn't know.

"Mom. What does C-L-Y mean?" I asked from the kitchen table. I was sitting in the dining room wher
SGU Seeks Catholic Input

SHAWNEE — St. Gregory’s University will host an accreditation visit by the North Central Association’s Higher Learning Commission (HLC) from March 12-14, 2012. Interested parties are invited to submit third-party comments to the visiting team. SGU has been accredited by the HLC since 1969. Periodically, the Commission performs a comprehensive evaluation to warrant a continuation of a university’s accreditation. This entails an exhaustive self-study performed by St. Gregory’s and a site visit by a team of evaluators who report on their findings and make recommendations.

The purpose of the evaluation is to assure St. Gregory’s constituents that it has the structures, policies, resources and outcomes to fulfill its academic mission; to promote the education of the whole person in the context of a Christian community in which students are encouraged to develop a love of learning and to live lives of balance, generosity and integrity.

As a part of the process, the public may submit comments directly to the Higher Learning Commission to include in its review. Comments may be sent by mail to:
Public Comment on St. Gregory’s University
The Higher Learning Commission
230 South LaSalle Street, Suite 7-500
Chicago, IL 60604-1411

Comments may also be submitted electronically by filling out the “Third-Party Comment” form on the HLC website. They should be submitted by Feb. 12, 2012.

Christmas Message

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least half of the names in the book were people I had never heard of before. I picked the card out from the box, wrote “Anita” on the inside above the printed greeting and then put our names below it. I also folded the piece of paper with our New Year’s letter on it and placed it into the card. That was why I was working on the list this year. I wanted everyone to know how mom was getting along and about the changes in her life. I just finished writing “Dubitski” when Mom said, “Died,” she said in her flat voice. Well, raised eyebrows. “She died?” I asked. “Died.” I looked over at her with my mother’s mind.

Now I wonder if Christmas brings out all of this? These cards will probably go into a stack with all of the others that they get. They’ll go to the mail box, pull out a wad of letters and flip through them and say, “Oh, it’s from her.” I’ll bet they’ll put it on the fireplace mantle and throw the letter into the side table drawer and not get to it until April when they go through it for their receipts. What do you think?”

She seemed pretty focused on Rikki.

But if Christ came into the world to bring God to us all, it’s not so wild to think that our connections to one another should become different. God’s choices ought to alter the world enough to weave our lives into one common humanity. Pull at the end of a cloth and the whole cloth moves. Christ could, no doubt, do the same thing, for all of us.

I was down to the Macks, the twins, the Furrts and the Evans. Mom seemed to have no objections to them. I put our New Year’s letter on the table and looked at me as if I were a particularly slow student. She stared for maybe 20 seconds and said again, “Ed’s address was 4416 Cedar.” Then she looked back to the TV.

I looked back to the page of the address book. It became clear, I think.

Mom had noted that Tom and Adeline had moved and had, by the wild circumstance of real life, the same street address as Mom’s brother and sister-in-law, Ed and Det, 4416 Cedar. Mid-City Eds Ad 64432 made perfect sense, now that I had my glimpse into my mother’s mind.

I wonder Christmas might be the briefest glimpses into another Mind. Just the briefest moment when we have a chance to see what Another intends, for all of us. All of the mess that surrounds the holiday might be just enough that we see, for a moment, how the world could make sense.

It was time to put some coffee on. “How about a cup, Ma?”

Merry Christmas
Eucharistic Adoration Around the Archdiocese

It is good to give thanks to the Lord; to sing praises to your name, Most High; to proclaim your love in the morning, your faithfulness in the night.” (Ps. 92). Adorers try to do this and, in so doing, try to love the Lord back by an effort to be near Him in His Eucharistic presence. They pray to Him for their loved ones, for vocations, their parishes, and share their woes, needs, joys with Him. There is always a response from our Lord, who is never outdone in generosity. Following are the locations and intervals for Eucharistic Adoration across the Archdiocese. If your parish is not listed, needs updating, or if you have a question, contact:

Barbara M. Curcio, St. Eugene Parish
(405) 755-9163 or Barbara-Curcio@OUHSC.edu

Perpetual Adoration, 24 hours a day/year-round
St. Monica Parish - 2001 N. Western, Edmond
St. Joseph Parish - 421 E. Artes Street, Norman
St. Andrew Parish - 800 NW 5th Street, Moore
Sunday 2:30 to 5 p.m.
Wednesday 6:30-10 p.m., Friday 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.
St. Francis Xavier Parish - 110 N. Madison Street, Enid
Sunday 6 to 7 p.m.
St. Joseph Parish - 403 Kate Boevers Avenue, Union City
Monday 7 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.
Christ the King Parish - 8055 Dorset Drive, Oklahoma City
Monday 6 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Immaculate Conception Parish, Highway 9 West, Seminole
Monday Noon to 10 p.m.
Sacred Heart Parish - 208 S. Evans Avenue, El Reno
Wednesday 9 a.m. to 12 noon
Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, 3214 Lake Avenue, Oklahoma City
Wednesday 6:45 to 8:15 p.m.
First Saturday 6:30 to 9:30 a.m.
St. Benedict Parish - 632 N. Kickapoo Avenue, Shawnee
Wednesday 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.
St. Charles Borromeo Parish - 5024 N. Grove Avenue, Oklahoma City
Wednesday 7 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Benediction
First Friday - 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. Saturday
St. Eugene Parish - 2400 W. Hefner Road, Oklahoma City
Wednesday 6 p.m.
St. Mary Parish - 125 E. Street, Ardmore
Wednesday 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.
St. Francis of Assisi Parish - 810 W. 9th Street, Newkirk
Wednesday 5 to 7 p.m.
St. Francis Xavier Parish - 700 E. Oklahoma Avenue, Highway 7, Sulphur
Wednesday 5 to 6 p.m.
Friday 9 to 10 a.m.
St. Rose of Lima Parish - 4254 N. 9th Street, Perry
Thursday 8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Daily M,T,W,F 8:30 to 9:30 a.m.
Epiphany of the Lord Parish - 7336 W. Britton Road, Oklahoma City
Thursday 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.
Sacred Heart Parish - 208 S. Evans Avenue, El Reno
Saturday 6 a.m. to Sunday 9 p.m.
Sacred Heart Parish - 2706 S. Shartel Avenue, Oklahoma City
Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Prince of Peace - 1500 Fenton Road, Altus
Friday 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.
St. Peter Parish - 1220 N. Quinn Street, Guymon
Friday 6 to 7 p.m.
Holy Cross Parish - 14 W. Francis, Madill
Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m
St. John the Baptist Parish - 900 S. Littler, Edmond
Third Friday 5 to 5 p.m.
Saturday First Friday 6 to 7 p.m.
St. Joseph Parish - 1300 E. Beverly, Ada
First Friday Benediction 5:30 p.m.
St. Francis of Assisi Parish - 1991 NW 18th Street, Oklahoma City
First Friday Benediction 5:30 p.m.
St. John Nepomuk Parish - 1000 W. Garth Brooks Blvd., Yukon
First Friday 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.
Holy Angels Parish - 317 N. Blackwelder Avenue, Oklahoma City
First Friday 9 a.m. to Noon
St. Mark the Evangelist - 3939 W. Tecumseh Road, Norman
First Friday 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
St. Mary's Parish - 707 N. Ponca Avenue, Ponca City
First Friday 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Sts. Peter and Paul Parish- 309 S. Main Street, Kingfisher
First Friday 6 to 7 p.m.
St. Teresa of Avila Parish - 1576 N. Tim Holt Drive, Harrah
First Friday 7:30 p.m.
St. Anna Parish - 8492 state Highway 17, Elgin
First Friday 8:40 to 9:30 a.m.
St. Vincent De Paul Parish - 123 S. 9th Street, McLoud
Saturday 6 a.m. to Sunday 9 p.m.
Sacred Heart Parish - 2706 S. Shartel Avenue, Oklahoma City
Third Sunday 7 p.m.
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish - 220 N A Street, Sterling
Ministry of Motherhood Called Needed Vocation

By Marianne Medlin
Catholic News Agency

Toronto, Canada (CNA) — Dorothy Pilarski’s new book, “Motherhood Matters,” collects a growing list of inspirations, prayers and quotes to encourage Catholic mothers.

Released in August, “Motherhood Matters” (Catholic Register Books, $14.99) is a collection of inspirational stories, prayers and quotes to encourage Catholic mothers.

It is similar to the Chicken Soup for the Soul series in that the reader can pick and choose stories based on titles that intrigue them, she explained.

Pilarski said that the motivation for writing the book came from her own reflections in hosting a Catholic mothers group in her home for the past 15 years.

“We meet monthly, starting off with the rosary and then have a speaker and then herbal teas, cookies and chatting,” she said. “Many graces came to me as a result of this mothers group.”

“In between the meetings I would be inspired to write letters to the mothers on my email distribution list. Inspirations would come to me and I wanted to share them with other moms.”

Pilarski also said that she was encouraged to share what she has learned about motherhood by how she was raised by her own mother.

“My mother stressed that children were a gift from God, that the most important job a mother had was to pass down the Catholic faith from one generation to the next — and that a mother was in the privileged position to do exactly both of those.”

For many years I looked forward to having children — the thought of not looking after them never occurred to me since my own mother always stressed that a child’s early years would affect them their entire lives.”

However, Pilarski said that when she had her first child, she was “startled” by what she began to notice around her.

“It seemed like my suburb was stranded during the day. There were all of these beautiful houses, but no children and no mothers,” she said. “It struck me odd that while we had those incredible homes, there was nobody actually at home to create a home.”

Women were driving in and out of their neighborhoods leaving at the crack of dawn, she recalled, “and coming back late in the evenings. I kept on thinking of all of the ironies of working so hard, but not having the time or children to actually relax in a family life.”

Pilarski remembers there being more nannies and day cares watching children than mothers where she lived.

“It really seemed eerie that many women who their entire lives looked forward to getting married and having children were giving up that privilege to a paid provider.”

The author observed that this dynamic can be traced to the basic problem that “motherhood is not valued in today’s world.”

“The very thought that a mother is expected to have a baby and almost immediately go back to work is a clear indication that we are not valuing the mother,” she said.

“As a culture we are saying that it really doesn’t matter who watches our children, so long as it’s being cared for — that’s all that matters. The mother-child bond was not meant to be brokered into a financial transaction. The mother-child bond is sacred and we as a culture have secularized it.”

She noted that many of the decisions families make in modern society “are based on the ‘slimy’ dollar.”

“Often when I ask moms why they are not watching their own children, they say, ‘Do the math.’ But there is more to family life than the bottom line, isn’t there?”

Pilarski said her book challenges “our current North American cultural model of motherhood” and asks the reader “to prayerfully consider motherhood as a vocation, a call from God.”

Pope Benedict XVI: God Rightful Owner of Creation

By David Kerr
Vatican City (CNA/EWTN News) — Advent offers a chance to reflect certain views of the post-modern world which life becomes anonymous and horizontal,” he said, “where God seems absent and man is the only master, as if he was the creator and director of everything, construction, employment, economy, transport, science, technology, everything seems to depend on man alone.”

In such a world, the Pope indicated, God can even appear to have “withdrawn” when catastrophe strikes. It is for this reason, he said, that Jesus reminds believers to “be watchful” and “alert” in today’s Gospel reading.

The Pope said Christ’s words were “a salutary reminder to us that life has not only the earthly dimension, but is looking forward to ‘a beyond’ as a seedling that sprouts from the earth and opens up to the sky.”

Each person must be alert toward eternity, because he is “endowed with freedom and responsibility,” and will “be called to account for how he has lived, how he used his abilities: if he kept them to themselves or put them to use for the benefit of his brothers and sisters.”

While entering a new liturgical year and heading toward Christmas, the Pope said, “Let us heed the message in today’s Gospel by entering practically into a holy season, so that we may be ready to greet Jesus Christ, who is God with us.”

For many years I looked forward to having children — the thought of not looking after them never occurred to me since my own mother always stressed that a child’s early years would affect them their entire lives.”

However, Pilarski said that when she had her first child, she was “startled” by what she began to notice around her.

“It seemed like my suburb was stranded during the day. There were all of these beautiful houses, but no children and no mothers,” she said. “It struck me odd that while we had those incredible homes, there was nobody actually at home to create a home.”

Women were driving in and out of their neighborhoods leaving at the crack of dawn, she recalled, “and coming back late in the evenings. I kept on thinking of all of the ironies of working so hard, but not having the time or children to actually relax in a family life.”

Pilarski remembers there being more nannies and day cares watching children than mothers where she lived.

“It really seemed eerie that many women who their entire lives looked forward to getting married and having children were giving up that privilege to a paid provider.”

The author observed that this dynamic can be traced to the basic problem that “motherhood is not valued in today’s world.”

“The very thought that a mother is expected to have a baby and almost immediately go back to work is a clear indication that we are not valuing the mother,” she said.

“As a culture we are saying that it really doesn’t matter who watches our children, so long as it’s being cared for — that’s all that matters. The mother-child bond was not meant to be brokered into a financial transaction. The mother-child bond is sacred and we as a culture have secularized it.”

She noted that many of the decisions families make in modern society “are based on the ‘slimy’ dollar.”

“Often when I ask moms why they are not watching their own children, they say, ‘Do the math.’ But there is more to family life than the bottom line, isn’t there?”

Pilarski said her book challenges “our current North American cultural model of motherhood” and asks the reader “to prayerfully consider motherhood as a vocation, a call from God.”

Pope Benedict XVI: God Rightful Owner of Creation

By David Kerr
Vatican City (CNA/EWTN News) — Advent offers a chance to remember that all things belong to God, Pope Benedict XVI told pilgrims in his Angelus address on Nov. 27.

“In reality, the true owner of the world is not man but God,” said the Pope to the thousands gathered in St. Peter’s Square on the first Sunday of Advent.

“The Pope reflected on the day’s Scripture reading in which the Prophet Isaiah tells God there is ‘one who rouses himself to cling to you; for you have hidden your face from us and have delivered us up to our guilt.’

“How can we not be impressed by this description?” asked Pope Benedict, who spoke of its relevance to today’s world.

“The prophet’s description ‘seems to reflect certain views of the post-modern world where life becomes anonymous and horizontal,’” he said, “where God seems absent and man is the only master, as if he was the creator and director of everything, construction, employment, economy, transport, science, technology, everything seems to depend on man alone.”

In such a world, the Pope indicated, God can even appear to have “withdrawn” when catastrophe strikes. It is for this reason, he said, that Jesus reminds believers to “be watchful” and “alert” in today’s Gospel reading.

The Pope said Christ’s words were “a salutary reminder to us that life has not only the earthly dimension, but is looking forward to ‘a beyond’ as a seedling that sprouts from the earth and opens up to the sky.”

Each person must be alert toward eternity, because he is “endowed with freedom and responsibility,” and will “be called to account for how he has lived, how he used his abilities: if he kept them to themselves or put them to use for the benefit of his brothers and sisters.”

While entering a new liturgical year and heading toward Christmas, the Pope said, “Let us heed the message in today’s Gospel by entering practically into a holy season, so that we may be ready to greet Jesus Christ, who is God with us.”
How Else To Welcome Christ But On Our Knees?

This time of year, my mind goes back to Door County, Wis. I wishfully remember our summer vacation. The ferry ride to Washington Island. Walleye at the English Inn. The bag of cheese curd next to a bottle of wine in our room’s refrigerator.

I imagine I’m standing on Ephraim’s shore and scanning the hillsides across the bay where shops and art studios dot the landscape. I have trouble envisioning a snow-covered bay. I don’t suppose people are running along the shore or riding bikes like they did last June. Seasons change places like Door County. Wis.

And I wonder about St. Rosalia, the Stella Maris Parish in Sister Bay where we worshipped Our Lord last summer.

Something unusual happened the day we visited that parish. After genuflecting, we slipped into a row of kneelers. There were no kneelers to lower.

My husband and I wondered for a moment if we had made a mistake. Was this really a Catholic parish? I looked at the inside of the church. Yes, there’s Our Lady. It must be Catholic.

It was the Solemnity of Corpus Christi. And we were in a Catholic church, but we wouldn’t be kneeling at the moment of Consecration — the very moment that the Corpus Christi would come to us in the Eucharist.

My heart ached for kneelers. Doesn’t that sound strange coming from a former Protestant who spent 40 years in churches that didn’t have kneelers?

I wondered as I sat there. Why had they left out kneelers when they built this church? I guessed that the decision had been made in an attempt to welcome visitors. This area of Wisconsin had its share of tourists. I suspected that the parishioners had hoped to welcome anyone and everyone.

I visited a few Catholic churches as a child. On those rare occasions, I was a shepherd after St. Paul’s own heart! And I pulled out my checkbook and wrote a check. No, I did not think the kneelers were a strange addition to a sanctuary. Kneelers were part of the list of Catholic oddities that included incense, bells and statues.

So why was my heart heavy on that Solemnity of Corpus Christi? If I could live without kneelers for 40 years, surely I could worship without them during this one Mass.

But there’s one thing that changes everything for me. That one thing is Jesus Christ, Our Eucharistic Lord.

I came to the Catholic Church with a love for Christ, and when I grasped the Truth — that this same Christ was truly present in the Eucharist — everything changed.

I thought of St. Paul’s letters to the Romans, he writes, “As I live, every knee shall bend, and every tongue shall give praise to God.” To the Philippians, St. Paul writes, “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven and on earth.”

That day in Door County, I knew that this same Lord would come to all of us. And there was no kneeler upon which to bend our knees.

At the end of Mass, the priest made an announcement. “There are envelopes in the pews if you wish to make a donation for kneelers. We want to comply fully with our Bishop’s mandate for every parish in the diocese to have kneelers,” he said.

I blinked back tears. This bishop was a shepherd after St. Paul’s own heart! And I pulled out my checkbook and wrote a check.

I understand the desire to make all people feel welcome. And I remember all too well what it was like to see the kneelers and not understand. To watch the incense going up, to hear the bells and not know that Jesus Christ had just arrived.

Just bells for no reason. Incense to be different. Kneelers to pray when I could pray while standing or sitting, whether indoors or outside.

But if you had asked me what I would do if Jesus Christ walked through the door to me in the Flesh and stood before me — even back then I would have smiled and answered without hesitation. I’d hit my knees.

There is one thing in the Mass that changes everything. Jesus Christ comes to us in the Body and Blood of Corpus Christi. All praise, glory, honor and power belong to Our Lord. God bless the bishops for reminding us: We have the Body of Christ.

Editor’s Note: Denise Bossert is the mother of four children. She lives with her husband in New Melle, Mo., where she is a member of Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church. She writes monthly columns for the St. Louis Review that traces her journey from Protestantism to Catholicism. Her columns will run from time-to-time in the Diocesan Catholic, www.catholicbygrace.blogspot.com.
Doctors Argue Against Consent Law

Lima, Peru (CNA) — Medical experts in Peru warned that lowering the age of consent for sex to age 14 would lead to abuse and sexual exploitation of minors.

The government has the duty to “protect the physical, psychiatric, moral and social integrity of children and adolescents,” Maica Garcia, president of the National Association of Catholic Doctors in Peru, told CNA on Nov. 21.

Children at the age of 14 are developing and “generally are not sufficiently capable of calculating the consequences of their actions,” she underscored.

“For this reason the principal of parental authority exists, by which the parents answer for them until they are legally adults,” Garcia stated.

She also warned that “consent” could “easily be obtained by unscrupulous persons who would curry the favor of these girls by meeting many of their material and emotional needs, which would obviously be an abuse of power.”

Garcia noted that “consent” could “easily be obtained by unscrupulous persons who would curry the favor of these girls by meeting many of their material and emotional needs, which would obviously be an abuse of power.”

Garcia stressed that government leaders should “safeguard the comprehensive health of all persons, particularly those who are weakest and still developing, to protect their dignity, self-esteem and chances for a better future.”

Adoption Services

However, the experience would not be complete without Gallagher’s sisters, Katie and Mary Lou. Gallagher said, “My sisters are my family and it was important for them to be there to share this moment. So, as I put it, I wanted to introduce my sisters to my relatives. It was a scary step, but one I was willing to take to learn more.”

Many to her relief, the weekend in Texas went wonderfully. In fact, Gallagher was thrilled to learn her birth siblings were much like the family she grew up with — witty, well-educated and fun-loving. She and her sisters left the gathering with photos, stories and memories of her newly expanded family. Additionally, her birth family gave her an unexpected memento — letters written while her birth mother was at Our Lady of Victory.

“I have to admit, it was a little frightening not knowing what my birth family would be like. Fortunately, it has turned out great — perhaps because everyone went into the experience with an open mind, said Gallagher. “I would advise anyone searching for their birth family to keep realistic expectations and be patient. The process can take awhile. And when dealing with birth families, sometimes it clicks, but some people may need longer to get used to the idea.”

A year later, Gallagher is still enjoying her family collage, which she hopes will someday include Earl’s twin, Carville, whom she has yet to meet, as well as her birth father’s family, which Streczyk also helped her locate. She has reached out to her siblings on her father’s side, and though she has connected with one half-sister through email, the other is not ready to establish a relationship.

To learn more about Catholic Charities Post-Adoption Services, visit www.CatholicCharitiesOK.org.

Calendar

DECEMBER

4 The Secular Franciscan Order of St. Claire Fraternity meets at 1:15 p.m. the first Sunday of the month at St. Thomas More Church in Norman in the library. All are welcome. If you would like to learn how Francis lived, plan to attend one of our meetings. For more information, call Alice at (405) 473-7860.

4 Byzantine Liturgy will be offered at 5 p.m. at St. Marks Church, 2393 W. Tecumseh Road, Norman. Molken-Intercessions to Christ Emmanuel will be celebrated after Liturgy. For more information, call Father Phil Seeton at (405) 536-6351.

4 Mount St. Mary Curriculum Fair at 1 p.m. MSM Curriculum Fair is a two-hour event where families will attend many sessions in which Mount St. Mary teachers and staff will explain our programs.

4 Immaculate Conception - Holy Day of Obligation

8 Adoption Services

15 Tap into Faith, 7:30 p.m. St. John’s Corner Joe Frohli will talk about “How To Cope With Family During the Holidays” at Louise’s in Edmond. For more information, contact Mary at mary-ha@cox.net, or call/text at 405-4140.

17 Monthly Novenas to The Infant Jesus, 17th-25th of each month. National Shrine of the Infant Jesus of Prague is located at Saint Wenceslaus Catholic Church, 304 Jim Thorpe Blvd. (405) 567-3080 or www.shrineofinfantjesus.com.

17 The Lay Missionaries of Charity, the Secular (Lay) Order of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta meet in the Council Room at St. John the Baptist Catholic Parish, Edmond, on the first and third Saturday of each month beginning with Mass at 7:30 a.m. in the Chapel. For more information, contact Toni Harrison at (405) 341-2199 or lmc-oklahoma@beglobal.net.

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11 Charismatic Healing Mass, 5:30 p.m. at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, 3901 S.W. 29th St., Oklahoma City. For more information, call the Church office at (405) 685-4806.

13 Catholic War Veterans (of any war/conflict) meet the second Tuesday of each month in the community room of St. Ann Retirement Center at 7 p.m. For more information, contact Father M. P. Price Oswald at (405) 567-3404.

14 Catholic War Veterans USA, Oklahoma Memorial Post 168 meets every second Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m. in the Sunnylane Family Reception Center located at 3900 S.E. 28th St. in Del City. For more information, contact Ken at (405) 739-0045 or by email at Okd168post168@cox.net.

8 The Catholic Woman’s Activities Club is a club made up of women from our parish, who enjoy programs on Gardening, Music, Civics and the Arts. We meet on the second Thursday of each month at noon from September through May in the Patio Room of Epiphany of Our Lord Church (7338 W. Britton Blvd.) All Catholic women are invited. For more information, call June, 525-6904, or Pearl, 524-3641.

9 Bingo Night at St. Joseph’s Church in Norman. Light supper served at 6:30 p.m. Games begin at 7 p.m. with a first session; second session at 8:30 p.m. $5 per session, no limit on blackout cards, group photo of all the winners.

10 The Beneficence Oblates of Red Plains Spirituality Center will meet from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. on the second Saturday of the month. They join the Community for Vespers, followed by a potluck dinner. For more information, contact Sister Eunice at 373-4565 or osboke@iname.com.

10 Oklahoma City Post 168 meets at 7 p.m. the first and third Thursday of each month at the Family Reception Center located at 3900 S.E. 29th St. in Del City. For more information, contact Price Oswalt at (405) 567-3404.

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Irish Set School Record With Canned Food Drive

OKLAHOMA CITY — Bishop McGuinness Catholic High School students recently participated in the annual Canned Food Drive. The food drive is sponsored by the Oklahoma City Regional Food Bank and provides food to Oklahoma families that are in need of help and assistance. Bishop McGuinness has been involved in the Canned Food Drive since 1988.

Faculty sponsors this year were Andrew Worthington, Julia Anderson-Holt and Sally Cole. Student chairmen were senior Joe Edmonds and junior Addie Plank. They set a goal this year to collect 80,000 pounds of canned goods, almost 3,500 pounds more than last year’s record-breaking total of 76,686.

The theme this year was “Can Jam,” a play on “Space Jam,” encouraging students to “Get Up and Can.” The top 10 student collectors overall will receive gift cards to some favorite eateries.

One of Joe and Addie’s responsibilities was coordinating the collection and weighing of the cans. They watched the total rise daily, but were not sure of final figures. After loading over 50 totes and filling two semi-trucks, the Irish did indeed break their own record by collecting 80,005 pounds of canned goods.

“I knew with the help of the student body, we were capable of reaching our goal,” said Joe. “We needed them to take the initiative and ‘Get Up and Can.’”

Irish students collect more canned goods for the Regional Food Bank than any other school in the state including colleges and universities.

“We are very fortunate to have the kind of students who will step up and assume leadership roles for something they believe in,” said Principal David Morton. “The initiative and dedication of Joe and Addie raises the bar and sets an example for next year’s students.”

The principal said it took a true team effort for the Irish to break the record.

“We could not achieve this end result without the support of the students, parents and community. Thank you to everyone who helped with this effort,” said Morton.

Bishop McGuinness Principal David Morton poses with Canned Food Drive chairmen Joe Edmonds and Addie Plank in front of a pyramid of collected canned goods.

Bishop McGuinness students begin loading canned goods into totes for the Regional Food Bank.