A
fter serving at the chapel at Tinker Air Force Base for more than 39 years, Father Patrick McCool, O.S.B., retired June 3. The assignment, which started as “helping on weekends,” turned into a full ministry to help soldiers and their families.

In 1979, Father McCool accepted the assignment at Tinker to provide Mass at the base chapel. It soon grew into a full ministry to the Tinker community as military chaplains were called to be with the troops away from the chapel, Father McCool said.

Tinker AFB, located in Midwest City, is home to the 72nd Air Base Wing and the Oklahoma City Air Logistics Complex. More than 27,000 military and civilian personnel are assigned to the base, and approximately 45,000 dependents and retirees make use of services provided at Tinker. The chapel provides a wide range of services to persons of all faith backgrounds.

Although Father McCool served many years at the base, he was not part of the military chaplaincy corps. Rather, Saint Gregory’s Abbey holds a contractual agreement with the U.S. Air Force to provide a Catholic priest to assist at the chapel, and Father McCool served as the monk assigned to fulfill this commitment.

“Whenever the Catholic chaplain was there, we worked...”

Stan Melby was happy and content in his previous job and never envisioned leaving for a new position. He soon realized God had a different plan.

The former principal in Lawton Public Schools said he was called to be the new principal of Saint Mary Catholic School.

“I am so fortunate that God’s plan has allowed me to move to this great environment without having to relocate away from my family in Lawton,” Melby said.

Principal Melby and Angela Sanders, the new parish and school director of development and communication, have combined to market the school to the surrounding community with some great results.

The school has seen an increase in enrollment from 95 students to 123 students this year.

Besides the marketing efforts, they said the “word of mouth” reputation of the school has helped.

Saint Mary’s robotics team has a statewide reputation as being one of the best and its members are looking forward to hosting a competition in 2019 with teams from across the state. In addition, the school boasts a tremendous STREAM program and an excellent archery team.

Fr. Patrick McCool retires from Tinker

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continued on page 16
The following events are part of Archbishop Coakley's official calendar.

**Archbishop Paul S. Coakley**

Oct. 25, 2018 6:30 p.m. **Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help**

**Mass celebrated by Archbishop Paul S. Coakley with reception following**

**Archdiocese of Oklahoma City**

**Archdiocese of Dubuque**

**Archbishop Barnett, J.D. will give a presentation and host a Q&A session during the reception**

**Ms. Garnett is a professor at the University of Notre Dame**

**RSVP by October 15 to **

**arcokc.org/REDSMass**

**The Knights of Columbus and the Holy Innocents Foundation joined St. Gregory’s Abbey to recognize the National Day of Remembrance for Abused Children.**

**Mass was celebrated by Archbishop Paul S. Coakley with reception following.**

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**USCCB statement on sex abuse scandals; actions to be taken**

**WASHINGTON – The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Administrative Committee issued the following statement today in response to the recent sex abuse scandals. In the statement, the bishops said they pledge to "heal and protect with every bit of the strength God provides us."**

**To anyone who has been abused, never hesitate to contact local law enforcement. If you don’t feel comfortable for any reason with the Church providing help, your diocesan can connect you with appropriate community services. With compassion and without judgment, the bishops of the United States pledge to heal and protect with every bit of the strength God provides us.**

**In action with the Holy Father, with whom we once again renew our love, obedience and loyalty, we make our own the prayer of Pope Francis in his August 20 letter to the people of God. "May the Holy Spirit grant us the grace of conversion and the interior and exterior assiduity to work before these crimes of abuse our compassion and our resolve courageously to combat them."**
**We are here for you**

Providing hope, empowerment for Oklahoma women, babies

By Eliahu Tedrow

The Sooner Catholic

Women who find themselves in a crisis pregnancy have resources within the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City that can help with what can be a difficult and confusing time.

These resources exist not only to provide care for the unborn child, but also to empower women with the resources, skills, support and confidence needed to improve their lives. Studies from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicate crisis pregnancies can lead to a delayed start of prenatal care, increased risk of pre-mature birth and increased risk of violence against the mother if she has had aborted abortions, according to the CDC, are a result of an unintended, or crisis pregnancy.

Women facing crisis pregnancies within the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City are not alone.

Archdiocese

Catholic Charities, Project Gabriel and Birth Choices, Inc. of Oklahoma, work in tandem to provide help and hope for the duration of a woman’s pregnancy and beyond.

During a crisis pregnancy many women may find themselves asking questions like where will they live? Do they want to place their baby for adoption? How will they support themselves and the baby financially? Can they continue their education during and after pregnancy?

Anne Ryan, director of social work for Catholic Charities for the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, is on the frontlines with mothers in crisis pregnancy situations.

“This is not a business for us,” Ryan said. “This is a ministry.”

Defined as crisis pregnancy is important to understand the true needs of women and their families. For many, did the pregnancy cause the crisis or was there an existing crisis and the woman happens to be pregnant? These are two different scenarios that require different approaches.

Ryan said women who find themselves pregnant with several different social issues may question whether they have the resources they need or if they are even capable of parent at that time in life.

“A woman may come in and want to talk about an adoption plan. When the volunteer asks them what’s going on, they say, ‘I can’t parent because they don’t have a home.’”

Ryan said the average woman seeking help is 18–19 years old, almost always unmarried and often with either a difficult or abusive relationship or drugs and alcohol involved. However, crisis pregnancy can affect any woman, regardless of age or socio-economic status.

To reach women within communities, Project Gabriel was created. Project Gabriel is a pro-life, pro-family ministry supported by Catholic Charities. It is a confidential, compassionate ministry that helps women struggling with unplanned pregnancies.

Project Gabriel offers trained mentors who engage with and assist women in need of resources, supplies, and emotional and spiritual support.

“We would love to see women in more parishes within the archdiocese,” Ryan said.

In addition, Birth Choice of Oklahoma Inc. is a service agency existing solely to assist pregnant women. They provide women practical assistance to help them realize their worth and that of their unborn child.

Birth Choice provides ultrasound testing as well as an array of services for mothers and the child. Birth Choice also offers Rose Home, one of Oklahoma’s only shelters for pregnant women and their children.

“Women continue to need our services regardless of the status of the abortion issues,” said Barbara Chisholm, executive director of Birth Choice.

“The stories remain the same, only the names change. Over the past 45 years, we have seen and heard unbelievable stories of faith, strength, perseverance and courage and love. We have witnessed miracles with the women and the volunteers. We have become a family of love and support for our mothers and their children. We are always at the heroic action they take for life.”

For more information on where women can turn in a time of need, Project Gabriel has a 24-hour crisis line: 405-669-1430. Women can call anytime, day or night.

Sooner Catholic

**Project Gabriel**

**Find pregnancy resources and caring help at:**

[www.projectgabrielok.org](http://www.projectgabrielok.org)  
[www.birthchoicenwok.org](http://www.birthchoicenwok.org)

Oklahoma’s Kateri Tekakwitha Spiritual Center builds faith, tradition

By Dana Attacock

The Sooner Catholic

H e was humanity's first countercultural, and to seek holiness, to go against the grain and make a lasting difference.

This is what Father Deacon and Susan Callison of the American Indian Catholic Outreach (AICO) are doing with their powwow ministry.

“The goal of our powwow ministry is to be the voice, presence and identity of Indigenous Catholics in North America,” said Father Deacon Callison.

The Tekakwitha Conference is the voice, presence and identity of Indigenous Catholics of North America under the protection and inspiration of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha.

Members strive to “affirm pride in their cultures and spiritual traditions, advocate for peace and justice in indigenous communities; nurture the relationship between indigenous people and the Catholic Church and empower Catholic indigenous people to be leaders within their communities and church.”

Father Deacon, of the Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana, has a background in youth ministry, both in parish and diocesan settings. His journey has been a long and arduous one as he searches for services that best reach the people he loves. He has been active in indigenous programs for nine years and is currently the new executive director of the Tekakwitha Conference.

“Being introduced to the Tekakwitha Conference was such a blessing,” Barkey said. “For the first time, I began to see how my identity as a person of indigenous heritage could be integrated without compromise with the faith I live and believe.”

The Tekakwitha Conference is an organization that empowers the Catholic faith, pamphlets about different experiences, and takes out with the Catholic outreach has been active, according to the conference.

Deacon and Susan Callison attended the 2018 Tekakwitha Conference in Tacoma, Wash. Photo provided.

Work of St. Kateri continues with new executive director

By Dana Attacock

The Sooner Catholic

The work of the Tekakwitha Conference is to “affirm pride in their cultures and spiritual traditions, advocate for peace and justice in indigenous communities, nurture the relationship between indigenous people and the Catholic Church and empower Catholic indigenous people to be leaders within their communities and church.”

Father Deacon and Susan Callison are part of the Tekakwitha Conference in Tacoma, Wash., this summer and came back to Oklahoma rejuvenated.

“When Susan and I return from a conference, we can’t wait to bring our powwow ministry again,” Callison said. “The beauty of it is our rejuvenation is contagious.”

Their powwow ministry takes them to powwows throughout the archdiocese where they set up a table to provide books about the Catholic faith, pamphlets about different experiences, and takes out with the Catholic Outreach in your prayers.”

For more information about AICO and Saint Kateri Tekakwitha Spiritual Center of Oklahoma, contact Deacon Roy Callison at (405) 322-3525 or Rodd@AICO.org, or go online to archcatholic.org/american-indian-catholic-outreach.

Dana Attacock is managing editor for the Sooner Catholic.
Faith, fun and the Eucharist for children

Edmond author pens children’s faith guide

By Steve Gust
The Sooner Catholic

Jennifer Sharp’s faith journey has been nothing short of remarkable, involving the creation of three illustrated books meant to teach young children the symbols and significance of their Catholic faith. After coming into the Catholic Church at Saint John in Edmond at Easter 2017, she felt a call to produce Mass and prayer guides for children.

“I just was compelled to write,” she said. “Sometimes we assume our children learn about faith through osmosis and coming with us to Mass. I knew I had to do something to foster a deeper understanding, especially of the Mass and Eucharist.”


A companion book, “My First Interactive Catholic Book for Catholic Kids,” is for children ages 3 to 7. It also takes children through the various stages of a Mass, including “Profession of Faith,” and “The Lord’s Prayer.”

“I love the idea of sitting restless or crying,” she said. “I felt in love with Jesus and the Eucharist. The first time in adoration I was kneel ing there, I said ‘Lord, I’m coming to you.’”

She and Raymond are authentic disciples of Christ, she said. “I am one of the most creative people I have ever seen.”

In addition to her children’s faith books, the couple helps create RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) and baptism seminars.

“Instead of sitting restless or crying,” she said. “We went about making new friends at Saint John.”

She said her hope is the books will bring children closer to their faith. Some of the information in the pages will also help to re-educate their parents.

“The kids need to know about the faith.”

Steve Gust is a freelance writer for the Sooner Catholic.

Handing on the mission to lay women

Father Ted Pawlak
National Catholic Biocenters Biocenter

Opioids, pain management and addiction: Balancing ethical duties

Father Tad Pawlak, a Jesuit priest, at the Bioethics Center at Catholic University.

Almost two million Americans are now addicted to opioids. The New York Times recently quoted drug abuse notes that more than 100 people die each day in the United States from drug overdoses. This unprecedented level of abuse—which involves both heroin, but also prescription pain relievers such as oxycodone, morphine, codeine, and fentanyl—has become a national crisis. Reportedly, about 40 percent of veterans and 20 percent of non-veterans are pain-relief-resistant options more effective for chronic pain. Figure out how to use these powerful pain medications appropriately and take responsibility for their use.

At a minimum, a three-pronged approach is required. One prong involves educating professional pain care providers about the hazards of analgesics and the risks associated with their use. The second prong involves making effective addiction treatment and substance abuse treatment more widely available to those who need it. The third prong of care for patients with pain involves finding pain management alternatives to mind. At the same time, taking foods that can backfire, with devastating consequences.”

At a San Diego-based pilot program to reduce the over-prescription of opioids included the novel step of notifying physicians when one of their patients had died from an overdose. The San Diego medical examiner would send health care professionals a letter in this format:

Tim Muldoon
Catholic Extension

Sure, the San Diego medical examiner would send health care professionals a letter in this format:

Father John Walch (known as Jack to friends and family) was one of the bright lights in the history of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City. Born in Oklahoma City on Jan. 14, 1918, he graduated from John Carroll High School (The Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help) and then received his education at the University of Notre Dame where he was only one solution. He remained at Notre Dame and continued to create. His bronze plaque of Blessed Stanley Rother can be seen in the cathedrals of Oklahoma City and Tulsa, and another one atop the chapel continues to sound their clarion call. Many believe that his sculptures are his crowning achievement however was the art in Saint Francis de Sales Chapel (at what is now the Catholic Pastoral Center) as well as the beautiful terrazzo designs throughout Bishop Michael McGovern’s office. He was an able and respected church leader who looked after the needs of the community as President of the Catholic Student Union, and the Saint John Damascene Studio of Liturgical Art for the sole purpose of creating art for institutions in the Church.

More than 100 churches, chapels, convents and other worship spaces contain John Walch creations in a four-state area, not to mention the Philbrook and the Oklahoma City Museum of Art.

His crowning achievement however was the art in Saint Francis de Sales Chapel (at what is now the Catholic Pastoral Center) as well as the beautiful terrazzo designs throughout Bishop Michael McGovern’s office. He was an able and respected church leader who looked after the needs of the community as President of the Catholic Student Union, and the Saint John Damascene Studio of Liturgical Art for the sole purpose of creating art for institutions in the Church.

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Archdiocese of Oklahoma City capital campaign surpasses first goal

Funds will build Rother shrine, strengthen parishes and ministries

Archbishop Coakley announces the $80 million challenge goal at the Wave 3 launch at Holy Family in Lawton. Photos Archdiocese of Oklahoma City Archives.

OKLAHOMA CITY – Archbishop Paul S. Coakley announced on Sept. 18 that the “One Church, Many Disciples” capital campaign has surpassed its $65 million original minimum goal. The campaign is raising funds in the archdiocese’s 107 Catholic churches in central and western Oklahoma to build a shrine for Blessed Stanley Rother, strengthen parishes and schools, foster ministries and create endowments for the future.

“I have been grateful and humbled by the generosity of families across the archdiocese who have supported this historic campaign,” Archbishop Coakley said. “We have been blessed to have the powerful witness of Blessed Stanley to help guide us as we build upon his legacy for future generations.”

Blessed Stanley, a priest from Okarche, Okla., was murdered in 1981 while serving as a missionary in Guatemala. He was declared a martyr by Pope Francis on Dec. 1, 2016, and was beatified on Sept. 23, 2017. He is the first U.S. martyr and the first U.S.-born priest to be beatified.

A shrine for Blessed Stanley will be built on SE 89 between Interstate 35 and Shields Boulevard in south Oklahoma City. The shrine will include a 2,000-seat church, a chapel, ministry and classroom buildings, a museum and a pilgrim center. When completed, the shrine will be the largest Catholic church in Oklahoma. It will be visible and accessible from I-35 and is intended to serve as a welcoming symbol of the Catholic Church in Oklahoma.

It is anticipated the shrine will bring thousands of visitors every year to Oklahoma from across the country and beyond. In addition to serving as the final resting place of Blessed Stanley, the shrine will serve as the center of ministry for the Hispanic Catholic community in Oklahoma City and will host large celebrations and liturgies for the archdiocese.

In addition to the shrine for Blessed Stanley, funds from the “One Church, Many Disciples” campaign will be used to strengthen local church communities, renovate The Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, support evangelization efforts, create endowments for faith formation and provide retirement for senior priests.

The campaign has received 63 leadership gifts ranging from $100,000 to $7.5 million. One-third of the church communities have completed the campaign; 34 are actively conducting the campaign; and the final 32 will begin the campaign in January. To date, 40 churches in the archdiocese have surpassed their individual parish goals.

Due to the extraordinary success of the campaign, Archbishop Coakley recently announced a challenge goal of $80 million. The additional funds will go to the same ministries outlined in the original campaign “case for support.”

For more information about the “One Church, Many Disciples” campaign, go online to onechurchmanydisciples.org.

To find more information about the shrine for Blessed Stanley Rother and the “One Church, Many Disciples” campaign, or to make a gift online, go to onechurchmanydisciples.org.
Administrative assistant - OKC

The Archdiocese of Oklahoma City is seeking a creative and collaborative administrative assistant for the youth, young adult, and campus ministry team. The ideal candidate must communicate and interact in a tactful and professional manner with clergy, Catholic Pastoral Center staff, parish and school personnel, and the public.

The position requires attention to detail, accuracy, and sensitivity to confidential information. Knowledge of Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint required. Organizational efficiency, initiative, expedition, flexibility, and adaptability are required.

 Oslo is seeking someone who will be responsible for planning and giving societies. Includes donor preference and portfolio management, development of materials, mailing lists, and maintaining spreadsheets for donor interaction. The position also requires a strong commitment to teaching English in Oklahoma. Includes various activities related to public relations, communications, and development.

Job seekers should submit a resume to Karen B. Johnson, St. John Nepomucene Cathe- dral, 412 W. Tennessee St., Oklahoma City, OK 73105. Please indicate in your letter that you are applying for a position as an administrative assistant.

After school program - Lawton

St. Mary Catholic School in Lawton is seeking an after-school program coordinator. This position is responsible for the supervision and management of the after-school program. Responsibilities include scheduling, planning, and monitoring the program, ensuring the safety and well-being of the children, and communicating with parents and staff.

Please submit a cover letter and resume to jn 2000 @lawton.k12.ok.us. The position will remain open until filled.

Get to know them: Characters of the Reformation

By J.E. Helm

Kateri Tekakwitha Spiritual Center of Oklahoma for the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, said, "One of the best parts of attending the annual conference, which he attended annually with his sister, was visiting with the American Indian Catholics from all over the United States and Canada. An American Indian Catholic who has never experienced a gathering of more than 100 American Indian Catholics, it’s awesome! It’s especially nice to see the numerous bishops, priests, deacons, sisters and brothers, many of whom are native American Indians, gathered together to praise God in a Mass that incorporates American Indian spirituality."

"We blend American Indian spiritualities with our Catholic faith," said Van Roy. "We believe that the blending of these two spiritualities can be truly a spiritually uplifting experience."
La vida humana, el tema de esta columna, es la expresión más profunda de la dignidad de cada uno de nosotros. La vida es un don de Dios, un bien de todos, que los humanos deben respetar y proteger. "No es sólo un mandamiento que nos prohíbe matar. Es un mandamiento que nos cuida, que nos protege, que nos ama. No es un mandamiento de los ciudadanos, pero que, al mismo tiempo, es un mandamiento de Dios. Es una ley eterna de amor, de paz y de justicia." 

El arzobispo Coakley también invita a los lectores a reflexionar sobre el valor de la vida humana, y a considerar cómo podemos contribuir a su preservación y protección. "El retiro del Viñedo de la Caridad es una magnífica oportunidad para un tiempo de oración y recarga espiritual, y para entrar en una nueva dirección de vida y participación."

La vida es buena y alegre noticia

Lo que hemos comento

Se debe agradecer a la arquidiócesis de Oklahoma, que ha tomado medidas para abordar el problema de la abusividad en el clero. Los arzobispos Coakley y Pedregal han expresado su preocupación por la magnitud del mal, y han comprometido a sus respectivas diócesis a promover la transparencia y la justicia. Han incitado a los clérigos a realizar un arrepentimiento genuino, y a que los sacerdotes y diáconos expresen su comportamiento reprensible, pecaminoso y crímino- so. Han pedido a los fieles que den testimonio de la verdad y la justicia, y que se mantengan firmes en sus convicciones.

El arzobispo Coakley ha destacado que la Carta para la transparencia y la justicia ha sido creada en el proceso de llevar a cabo una revisión de las prácticas del clero dentro de nuestra querida Iglesia Católica. Esta Carta es un paso importante en la lucha contra la abusividad en el clero, y se espera que sea un reflejo de nuestra determinación a proteger la vida humana y a promover la justicia y la paz en nuestra comunidad.

Para los fieles, este período de reflexión y arrepentimiento debe ser un momento de crecimiento y transformación. Es un momento para recorrer el camino de la fe con diligencia, y para unirnos en el amor y la compasión. "Estamos llamados a colaborar con el Señor en un nuevo mandato de evangelización, que incluye el servicio al prójimo y la promoción de la justicia. Esta es nuestra misión, nuestra tarea pastoral, y la razón por la que estamos aquí, en este momento.

El arzobispo Coakley ha expresado su profundo deseo de que los fieles se comprometan con este nuevo mandato de evangelización, y que sean un ejemplo de amor y justicia para aquellos que les rodean. "Nuestra misión es transformar vidas y promover la paz en el mundo. Esta es nuestra tarea, y nos invita a comprender mejor la verdad, la justicia y el amor de Dios."
Rother Heritage Gallery

The Heritage Gallery at the Cath-
olic Pastoral Center, 7501 North-
west Expressway, presents “The She-
pherd Cannot Run: A Retrospec-
tive on the Life of St. Stanley Rother.” The free exhibit is open 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Monday-Fri-
day. Special tours arranged by call-
ing (405) 721-5651, Ext. 141.

40 Days for Life kick-off rally

From 9 a.m. to noon, Oct. 6, other Christians for 40 days of prayer against abor-
tion. Everyone is invited to peacefully pray during a 40-day vigil in public right-of-
ways. Contact Fr. Laurence Heng-
sey, (405) 635-2665 or melit@ock.
cc.org. For more information, to be a volunteer, or to be a sponsor for a parish group, contact Eri-
a Martinez at (405) 615-7642, melit@ock.
cc.org.

Friends of the Poor Walk

The 116th annual Sr. Vincen
t de Paul Friends of the Poor Walk and silent auction will be at 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 7 at All Saints Catholic School, 4001 NE 24 Ave., Nor-
man. Doors open 1:30 p.m. for online
registration. All proceeds will be
used online to help people living in poverty. For more information to walk at www.
fpwalk.org.

Parkin carnival

St. Patrick, OKC, annual par-
sion carnival will be at 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 7 at 309 NW 64 Ave., Nor-
man. Doors open 1:30 p.m. for on-
line registration. Spectators can be purchased throughout the day. Prize drawings at 6:30 p.m. Need not be present to win.

Worldwide Marriage Encounter weekend

A Worldwide Marriage Encounter weekend gives couples the tools to deepen com-
unication and help relationships grow. The next weekend Encounter is Nov. 2-3 at the Catholic Pastoral Center. Visit www.meoklahoma.org.

St. Benedict annual

benefice day

Sr. Benedict, 624 N. Kickapoo
Ave. in Shawnee, invites everyone to attend their annual weekend of prayer and re-
newal Sept. 28-30. See page 20 for more information.

Knights of Columbus retreat

The Knights of Columbus re-
treat is open to all on Oct. 6 at the Catholic Pastoral Cen-
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ter, 7501 Northwest Expressway, OKC. For more information, see page 20.
“Filled with the life of Christ”

continued from page 1

together on taking care of the Catholics, and when the
Catholic chaplain was deployed, I took care of
all the liturgy and individual counseling,” he ex-
plained. “Since there is a shortage of Catholic chap-
lains in the military, we often were without a Catho-
lic chaplain, and when I retired, there wasn’t one.

Now, the chapel is using
other monks from Saint
Gregory’s.”

Father McCool said he
had the support of the
abbey during his min-
distry, along with
several people at
Tinker, both Catho-
lic and Protestant,
through the staff
and some of the
retired.

Reflecting on his
many years of ser-
vice, Father McCool
said, “It is good
to run into people
years later who re-
member occasions
of ministry. I felt I
was helping a lot of
people.”

On June 3, Abbot Lawrence Stasyszen celebrated
a special Mass to recognize Father McCool’s service.
During his homily, Abbot Lawrence said, “On this
occasion, I wish to thank you for your dedicated
ministry as a priest in this very special community
at Tinker AFB. The men and women in our armed
forces, along with their families, have been comfort-
ated and strengthened and filled with the life of Christ
through you. May you never find great satisfaction
in knowing that you have made a positive difference
here through your steadfast presence and ministry.”

Most Rev. Timothy
Broglio, Archbishop for
Military Services, sent
a special message to be
read during Mass.

In it, he said, “Thank
you for unselfish and
dedicated ministry. No
one will ever document
all the graces received
and shared through your
ministry, but the lives
you touched always will
reflect the presence of
divine grace. The conclu-
sion of a pastoral assign-
ment is truly an occasion
to look back with gratitude
and to remember how the
Lord has worked through
you. It is never easy to
serve in the military envi-
ronment, but you have persevered.”

Father McCool now spends his time living at Saint
Gregory’s Abbey, following their daily schedule and
serving as the abbey’s librarian. Visitors are wel-
come.

Jolene Schonchin is a freelance writer for the Sooner
Catholic.

continued from page 7

to lay people has meant that the
leadership once offered by the
nuns must eventually be assumed
by people whose formative ex-
periences are different from those
of the nuns. They must dedicate
themselves to deepening their
understanding and commitment to the
mission, through prayer, study
and professional development.

That process, while different
from that of the nuns, neverthe-
less brings its own gifts.

Lay people can bring
different experiences of
family or professional
life, education, commu-
nity and commitment
to the Church and the
Gospel, carrying forward
the mission of the organi-
zation with new energy. St.
Gabriel’s is in
Mound Bayou, a town
which was founded
by former slaves and
is the oldest all-black
community in the
country. The center
was founded by the
Sisters of Mercy
in 1985 and was later
staffed by the
Franciscan Sisters of Chris-
tian Charity based in
Manitowoc, Wisc. This
year, the first African
American executive
director was named:
Shakebra Young, a native
of nearby Cleveland, Miss. She
brings years of training in busi-
ness and human services, having
previously worked at Sacred Heart
Southern Missions in Walls, Miss. She
also has a concern for moth-
ers and children, having written
about her own experience as a
single mother.

Young is joined by a
number of other women,
several of whom
have worked at Saint Gabriel’s for
a number of years. They operate
several ministries: a thrift store,
a sewing cooperative, an early
childhood intervention program,
outreach to seniors, a GED pro-
gram, and a computer lab for
after-school use. They reach some
11,000 people per year.

What is most striking
about Saint Gabriel’s is
that the staff there is root-
ed within the community
they serve in ways unlike
the sisters who preceded
them. They are sisters in
a different sense, not reli-
gious sisters, but sisters
and neighbors whose home
and family have roots in
this region.

When the bishops
gathered at Vatican II sought to paint a
picture of the ways they saw the
Church needed to adapt to the
modern world, they described
mission work as seeking to plant
the seed of God’s word in new ar-
eas where ultimately those seeds
would take root and grow in their
own soil.

Saint Gabriel Mercy Center
is such a place. It bears the lega-
cy of the women religious who
founded and tended it, but now it
must grow on its own under the
auspices of talented local women
who seek to serve their neighbors.

Stan Melby, principal at St. Mary
Catholic School in Lawton. Photo pro-
vided.

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New this year, four staff mem-
ers were certified in CPR training
as well as training on new Auto-
matated External Defibrillator (AED)
machines for both the school and
parish.

“Having CPR-certified employees
is an extra measure we are tak-
ing to always be prepared,” Melby
said. “If something were to hap-
pen, we want to be able to say we
had the training and equipment
to do our best for that person.
The goal is to eventually have all of our
teachers certified.”

For more information about
Saint Mary go online to www.
smmarys-ok.org. To learn more
about Catholic schools in the
Archdiocese of Oklahoma City,
go online to archokc.org/catho-
lic-schools-office.

Charles Albert is a freelance writ-
ner for the Sooner Catholic.