Diocese explores creative options to provide best pastoral care for Southwest Michigan Catholic Community

By Vicki Cessna

Motivated by the desire to meet the pastoral needs of the faithful and armed with the reality of an aging clergy, Bishop Paul J. Bradley convened all priests in the diocese last month to continue work on a Diocesan Pastoral Plan for the future. In addition, Bishop Bradley appointed lay leaders and priests from each of the six deaneries to a special Ad Hoc Committee to brainstorm and discuss possible parish collaborations.

Currently in the Diocese of Kalamazoo priests’ retirements outpace priestly ordinations. Statistics gathered by Msgr. Michael Osborn, Vicar General, and Very Rev. Robert Creatan, Vicar for Clergy, were shared with both the priests and the Ad Hoc Committee. A sampling of those sobering statistics include:

- More than half of the priests in the diocese are over the age of 60. God willing, Bishop Bradley will ordain four men within the coming year but that doesn’t outpace the number of expected priestly retirements.
- Closing parishes is not an option, according to Bishop Bradley. Instead, a creative redistribution of priestly talents and responsibilities and long-term solutions are needed to provide the best pastoral care for the more than 110,000 Catholics in Southwest Michigan.
- Over the past several years Bishop Bradley has instituted a number of structures to promote collaboration among the 46 parishes and 13 missions, starting with the introduction of the deaneries in 2010. In February of 2014 parish partnerships were created with the goal of helping parishes share resources. In addition some parishes have added the staff position of “parish coordinator” to assist the pastor with administrative tasks associated with overseeing a parish.

While these measures have helped enhance pastoral care, the reality exists that more has to be done. Last month priests in the diocese gathered with Bishop Bradley at St. John Bosco Parish and spent the afternoon reviewing possible solutions. The next step in the process is to bring recommendations back to the Ad Hoc Committee with the hope to have a finalized Diocesan Pastoral Plan by early next year. The first phase of the implementation would then be slated to begin in June, 2016.

Progress and updates on the Diocesan Plan for the Future will be shared in future editions of The Good News and on the diocesan website. Visit www.diokzoo.org to submit a question or idea and to see the full list of Ad Hoc Committee members.

Students from across the diocese to participate in annual March for Life

Diocese plans local observance

By Sarah DeMott

Local event planning is underway to mark the anniversary of the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision which legalized abortion in the United States. The day is set aside as a Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children. Bishop Paul J. Bradley will celebrate Mass on January 22 at 5 p.m. in St. Augustine Cathedral. After Mass, all are welcome to walk to Bronson Park for an ecumenical prayer service. Hot chocolate and cookies will follow at one of the local churches. United in prayer, parishes across the diocese will also be planning Masses to gather the faithful in prayer.

At a national level, pro-life groups participate in the annual “March for Life” rally in Washington, D.C. This coming January, each of the three Catholic high schools in the diocese, Hackett Catholic Prep, St. Philip Catholic Central High School and Lake Michigan Catholic High School, along with groups from Holy Angels Parish, Sturgis and St. Mary’s Assumption Parish, Bronson, will participate.

The theme for the 2016 March for Life is “Pro-Life and Pro-Woman Go Hand-in-Hand.”

March for Life began as a protest against the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court ruling and is now the largest annual pro-life event in the world. For more information, visit diokzoo.org/respect-life or marchforlife.org.

Check the diocesan website and Facebook page for up-to-date details. For additional information on how you can help protect the sanctity of life contact: Lisa Irwin, Associate Director, lirwin@diokzoo.org; 269-903-0177.
Eagerly anticipating the birth of my first child I was determined in my preparation to leave no stone unturned. The baby’s room was ready, complete with cheerful zoo animals and matching wall border. The supplies were stocked. The list of family phone numbers were compiled to herald baby Cessna’s arrival (pre-internet days).

Nearing my due date I had one task left on my “to do” list: choose a pediatrician. Flexing my best investigative journalist skills I proceeded to “interview” prospective pediatricians over the phone. I don’t recall all the questions though I’m sure I culled them from some “What to Expect When You’re Expecting” type book. There was one conversation though that I recall vividly. It went something like this:

“What books do you recommend I read right now in the last few weeks,” I asked, ready with pen in hand to jot down her recommendations.

“How ’bout a Danielle Steel,” the young doctor replied, amused.

“Excuse me?” I replied, clearly baffled by why a romance novel would help in my preparation for parenthood.

“There’s not a parenting book out there that will make any sense until you have baby in hand,” she explained. “Enjoy this time. Relax. Spend time with your husband. That’s my advice.”

Hired!

Sometimes in our zeal to prepare every miniscule detail in anticipation of a major life event we get lost in the weeds and miss the big picture. I’m reminded of this temptation every Advent season. As the catalogs come pouring in through the mail and my email is cluttered with enticing retail sales, I try to take a step back and remind myself that what I’m really preparing for is not a retail marathon but to receive the greatest gift we were ever given: Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And preparing for His arrival should mean a joyful, daily “to do” list of prayer and service to others.

“Don’t think that love, to be true, has to be extraordinary,” said Blessed Mother Teresa. “What is necessary is to continue to love. How does a lamp burn, if it is not the continuous feeding of little drops of oil? When there is no oil, there is no light and the bridegroom will say: “I do not know you”.

One of my favorite bits of wisdom I try to pass along to soon-to-be parents is this: no amount of preparation will prepare you for how your heart will burst with love for this precious child of God you’ve been entrusted with. I know that was true for me.

During this blessed Advent season may your own lamps be filled with the right drops of oil and may your preparation lead your heart to a closer union with Jesus Christ as you feel His loving arms embrace you.

Pope Francis DECEMBER Intentions
Universal: That all may experience the mercy of God, who never tires of forgiving.

Evangelization: That families, especially those who suffer, may find in the birth of Jesus a sign of certain hope.
Endings and New Beginnings

If November is the month when the Church asks us to pray for the faithful departed and to reflect on “the Last Things” (death, judgment, Hell and Heaven) in terms of our own spiritual futures, these months of December/January are times when the Church challenges us to reflect on endings and new beginnings. The Liturgical Year came to an end right after Thanksgiving and the new Liturgical Year just recently began on November 29th with the First Sunday of Advent. At the same time, December brings 2015 to an end, while January 1st launches the New Year of 2016. The new Church Year also will bring all the new spiritual possibilities that await us as well, and wonderful new opportunities to grow in holiness and to deepen our faith. December rings out the old; January brings in the new. Advent urges us to prepare our hearts to celebrate the Birth of Christ once again; the Christmas Season opens our hearts to live the Good News of Christ’s abiding Presence with us with joy and in hope.

During this month, we also have another wonderful new opportunity to experience God’s grace and mercy in an extraordinary way as, on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception on December 8th, the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy will begin, and will continue until the conclusion of this new Church Year on the Solemnity of Christ the King on November 20, 2016.

These two very important times in the Church’s new liturgical year — Advent/Christmas and the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy — complement each other beautifully. It is through the birth of Jesus Christ — the Word of God made Flesh — that the fullest expression of God’s mercy for all of us is expressed. By sending His Son into the world with the ultimate mission of reconciling and saving the world, God’s unconditional and saving love for the world, and for all people to ever live, has been demonstrated for all time. As Pope Francis put it so distinctly, Jesus’ Birth puts a human Face on God’s mercy, His love and his abiding Presence. The reason why we celebrate Christmas with such joy is because we are eternally grateful to God for giving us such an incredible treasured gift as His Son, Jesus, our Savior, Lord, and Brother.

So, in the midst of all the other ways that we are trying to prepare for Christmas through shopping, wrapping, decorating, baking and merry-making, I would like to suggest that we find ways to prepare our hearts for the “endings and new beginnings” potentially coming our way through the new Church Year, the new calendar year and the new Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. I would suggest that we consider what I call the “four Ps”: 1) Prayer, 2) Pilgrimage, 3) Personal attitudes, and 4) Practice.

Prayer: Pope Francis, in his Bull of Indiction calling for the Extraordinary Jubilee Year entitled “The Face of Mercy,” urges us to slow down and take time reflecting on God’s holy Word, who (as we know) is Jesus, the Word of God made Flesh. While we might take time to read scripture and to say daily prayers, we may find that our scripture reading and our prayers can become rote and dry if we do not periodically slow down and truly reflect on what we are reading and praying. Pope Francis points to one of the beautiful psalms as an example. Psalm 136 is a wonderful summary of salvation history. Interspersed between each stanza of that psalm is this beautiful refrain: “For His mercy endures forever.” This powerful prayer, repeated continually in “litany-style,” Pope Francis writes, helps us “break through the dimensions of space and time, inserting everything into the eternal mystery of love.” During the next year, just as the Holy Father invites us to meditate on this refrain, we should find new ways to spend time with God whether it is by meditating on the psalms, praying the Liturgy of the Hours, or using a daily book of devotions and meditations. Keeping in daily and regular conversation with God will keep your hearts, mind and soul open to receive the wisdom and grace He wants to bring into your life.

Pilgrimage: During the hectic holiday months the media focuses much attention on the back-ups from holiday travel, the long lines at airports, the high cost of transportation and other tedious details of the season. However, travel and transportation are far different than pilgrimages. We are all “pilgrims” traveling through this world to a desired destination, with our ultimate destiny being our eternal reward in Heaven. As Pope Francis writes, “the practice of pilgrimage...represents the journey each of us makes in life.” It is for that reason that the “Holy Door” is such an important symbol during this Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. On December 8th, Pope Francis will open the “Holy Year Door” in Rome. At the same time, each Bishop will open a “Holy Year Door” in each Diocese. By making a pilgrimage to the Holy Door, whether one makes a major pilgrimage to the Holy Door in Rome or a shorter pilgrimage to the Holy Door at our Mother Church, St. Augustine Cathedral, in Kalamazoo * [see related article on Holy Door, page 7], the pilgrimage will bring us graces and blessings to help us in our life journey.

Personal Attitudes: A holiday season isn’t complete without a viewing of “A Christmas Carol” featuring the main character Ebenezer Scrooge — perhaps one of the most popular redemption stories in literature. This classic story helps us to witness the conversion and transformation of an old curmudgeon who goes from living his life in a miserly way to a life of joyful and generous largess. During the entire Year of Mercy, beginning with the season of Advent, we are called to conversion — to a change of heart. Every change starts with adjusting or revising our personal attitudes. Are we merciful as our Father is? Are we kind?

Continued on page 4

LA PERSPECTIVA DEL OBISPO

Finales y nuevos comienzos

Si noviembre es el mes en el cual la Iglesia nos invita a orar por los fieles difuntos y reflexionar sobre “las últimas cosas” (muerte, juicio, infierno y cielo), en términos de nuestros propios futuros espirituales, estos meses de diciembre / enero son tiempos en los cuales la Iglesia nos invita a reflexionar sobre finales y nuevos comienzos. El Año Litúrgico llegó a su fin justo después del día de Acción de Gracias y el nuevo Año Litúrgico recientemente comenzó el 29 de noviembre con el primer domingo de Adviento. Al mismo tiempo, diciembre trae el 2015 a su fin, mientras que el 1er de enero lanza el año nuevo del 2016. El nuevo año eclesial también traerá todas las nuevas posibilidades espirituales que nos esperan, y nuevas oportunidades maravillosas para crecer en sabiduría y profundizar nuestra fe. Diciembre despidie el año viejo con campanas; enero trae el nuevo. El Adviento nos invita a preparar nuestros corazones para celebrar el nacimiento de Cristo, una vez más; el tiempo de Navidad abre nuestros corazones para vivir la Buena Nueva de la presencia permanente de Cristo con nosotros con alegría y con esperanza.

Durante este mes, también tenemos otra nueva oportunidad maravillosa de experimentar la gracia y la misericordia de Dios de una manera extraordinaria ya que, en la solemidad de la Inmaculada Concepción el 8 de diciembre, se iniciará el Año Jubilar extraordinario de la Misericordia y continuará hasta la conclusión de este nuevo año eclesial en la solemidad de Cristo Rey el 20 de noviembre del 2016.

Estos dos momentos muy importantes en el nuevo año litúrgico de la Iglesia — Adviento / Navidad y el Año Jubilar Extraordinario de la Misericordia — se complementan uno al otro muy bien. Es a través del nacimiento de Jesucristo — el Verbo de Dios hecho carne — que la máxima expresión de la misericordia de Dios para todos nosotros es expresada. Al envolver a su Hijo al mundo con la misión última de la reconciliación y la salvación del mundo, el amor incondicional y salvador de Dios para el mundo y para todas las personas que desde siempre han vivido, ha sido demostrado para todos los tiempos. Como el Papa Francisco puso tan claramente, el Nacimiento de Jesús pone un rostro humano a la misericordia de Dios, su amor y su presencia permanente. La razón por la que celebramos la Navidad con tanta alegría y gratitud es porque estamos eternamente agradecidos a Dios por darnos un regalo atesorado tan increíble como su Hijo, Jesús, nuestro Salvador, Señor y Hermano.

Así, en medio de todas las otras formas en las que estamos tratando de prepararnos para la Navidad a través de compras, envolver regalos, decorar, hornear y festear, me gustaría sugerir que encontremos maneras de preparar nuestros corazones para los “finales y nuevos comienzos” potencialmente viéndonos a través del nuevo año eclesial, el nuevo año calendario y el nuevo Año Jubilar Extraordinario de la Misericordia. Yo sugeriría que consideráramos lo que yo llamo “las cuatro P” — 1) oración (prayer), 2) Peregrinación, 3) actitudes personales, y 4) Práctica.

Oración: El Papa Francisco, en su bula de convocación pidiendo el Año Jubilar Extraordinario titulado “El rostro de la Misericordia”, nos insta a frenar y tomarmos tiempo para reflexionar la santa Palabra de Dios, que (como sabemos) es Jesús, la Palabra de Dios hecha carne. Si bien podemos tomarnos tiempo para leer las Escrituras y decir oraciones diarias, podemos encontrar que nuestra lectura de las Escrituras y nuestras oraciones pueden llegar a volverse secas y de memoria si no frenamos periódicamente y realmente reflexionamos sobre el mensaje. El Papa Francisco apunta a uno de los salmos hermosos como un ejemplo. Salmo 136 es un maravilloso resumen de la historia de la salvación. Intercalados entre cada estrofa de ese salmo es este hermoso estribillo: “Para siempre es su misericordia.” Esta poderosa oración, repetida continuamente “al estilo de letanía,” el Papa Francisco escribe, nos ayuda a “romper a través de las dimensiones de espacio y tiempo, insertando todo en el misterio eterno del amor.” Durante este año, así como el Santo Padre nos invita a meditar en este estribillo, debemos encontrar nuevas maneras de pasar tiempo con Dios, bebiendo los salmos, rezando la Liturgia de la Horas o usando un libro diario de devociones y meditaciones. Manteniendo en diario y regularmente una conversación con Dios mantendrá sus corazones, mente y alma abiertas a recibir la sabiduría y la gracia que Él quiere traer a sus vidas.

Peregrinación: Durante los agitados meses festivos los medios de comunicación centran mucha atención en los embotellamientos por los viajes para celebrar las fiestas, las largas colas en los aeropuertos, los altos costos de transporte y otros detalles tediosos de la temporada. Sin embargo, viajes y transporte son muy diferentes a peregrinaciones. Todos somos “peregrinos” que viajamos a través de este mundo a un destino deseado, siendo nuestro destino final nuestra recompensa eterna en el Cielo. Como el Papa Francisco escribe: “la práctica de peregrinación...representa el viaje que cada uno de nosotros hace en la vida.” Es por ello que “la Puerta Santa” es un importante símbolo tan importante este año Jubilar Extraordinario de la Misericordia. El 8 de diciembre, el Papa Francisco abrirá “La Puerta del año Santo” en Roma. Al mismo tiempo, cada obispo abrirá un “La Puerta del año Santo” en cada diócesis. Al hacer una peregrinación a la Puerta Santa, se haga una peregrinación mayor a la Puerta Santa en Roma o una peregrinación menor a la Puerta Santa en nuestra Iglesia Madre, la Catedral de San Agustín, en Kalamazoo * [ver el artículo relacionado en Puerta Santa, página 7], la peregrinación nos traerá gracias y bendiciones que nos ayudaran en nuestro viaje de la vida.

Continued on page 4
When did you first feel the call to become a priest? Was there an event or person who was heavily influential in your decision? 

What is your favorite place on campus at the seminary? 

What lengths do we go to reject sin in our lives? Are we grateful? Are we living our lives as Jesus came to show the world how to live? Are we practicing in our own lives the same works of charity and mercy which Jesus lived? Are we the merely Scrooge, or can we change to be the joyful and generous renewed Scrooge? 

The Theological Work of Mercy • Feed the hungry • Give drink to the thirsty • Clothe the naked • Shelter the homeless • Visit the sick • Visit the imprisoned • Bury the dead 

The Spiritual Work of Mercy • Admonish the sinner • Instruct the ignorant • Counsel the doubtful • Comfort the sorrowful • Bear wrongs patiently • Forgive all injuries • Pray for the living and the dead 

Actitudes personales: Las fiestas no están completas sin ver “A Christmas Carol” (Un cuento de Navidad), con el personaje principal Ebenezer Scrooge — tal vez uno de las historias de redención más populares de la literatura. Esta clásica historia nos ayuda a ser testigos de la conversión y la transformación de un viejo cascarrabias que pasa de vivir su vida de una manera miserable a una vida de alegre y de generosa largaface. Durante todo el Año de la Misericordia, comenzando con la temporada de Adviento, estamos llamados a la conversión — a un cambio de corazón. Todo cambio comienza con el ajuste o revisión de nuestras actitudes personales. ¿Somos misericordiosos como lo es nuestro Padre? ¿Somos amables? ¿Hasta dónde vamos para rechazar el pecado en nuestras vidas? ¿Somos agradecidos? ¿Somos agredidos? ¿Somos generosos como Jesús vivió nuestras vidas como Jesús vivió nuestro Camino? ¿Estamos practicando en nuestras propias vidas las mismas obras de caridad y misericordia que vivió Jesús? ¿Somos el avaro Scrooge, o podemos cambiar para ser el alegre y generoso renovado Scrooge? 

Práctica: Rezar, hacer una peregrinación, ajustar nuestras actitudes personales son importantes “P”, pero estamos también invitados a una cuarta “P” — práctica. Nuestro Santo Padre no nos anima durante este Año Jubilar extraordinario de la Misericordia a vivir nuestra fe con alegría y poner en práctica nuestra fe a través de las obras espirituales y corporales de misericordia [ver lista más abajo]. Es necesario una relación profunda y personal con Jesús, y demonstramos esa relación personal cuidando y llegando en servicio amoroso a nuestros semejantes “peregrinos” en el viaje de nuestra vida. Debemos estar tan empatados del amor y misericordia de Dios que “podemos salir a cada hombre y mujer, llevando la bondad y ternura de Dios.” La Conferencia Católica de los Obispos de los Estados Unidos tiene una serie de recursos maravillosos para ayudarles a practicar las obras espirituales y corporales, incluyendo meditaciones y reflexiones sobre la misericordia. Además, sería bueno revisar la campaña de medios sociales, #mercyinmotion en Twitter, para ayudar a crear conciencia y emoción hacia esos ejemplos maravillosos de personas que demuestran lo que significa ser el “rostro de la misericordia de Dios” en situaciones de la vida real. 

Queridos hermanos y hermanas en Cristo, a medida que avanzamos a través de estos finales y nuevos comienzos durante estos dos meses especiales, nuestro enfoque debería estar en la gran bendición de preparar nuestro corazón para el regalo más grande que Dios nos da — Su Hijo unigénito — Quien vino al mundo como un infante para salvar a toda la humanidad. Mientras nos preparamos para este regalo, y para el próximo Año Jubilar Extraordinario de la Misericordia, abrasemos nuestra vida para ser decididos en nuestra devoción, para permitir que nuestros corazones sean convertidos por el amor de Dios, y permitir que nuestras vidas brillen tanto como la estrella de Navidad, cuando los ángeles anunciaron la buena noticia del nacimiento de Jesús: “¡Glória a Dios en las alturas y en la tierra paz a los hombres de buena voluntad!”

Que Dios los bendiga ahora y siempre. 

Fielmente suyos en Cristo 

THE CORPORATION OF MERCY • Feed the hungry • Give drink to the thirsty • Clothe the naked • Shelter the homeless • Visit the sick • Visit the imprisoned • Bury the dead 

THE SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY • Admonish the sinner • Instruct the ignorant • Counsel the doubtful • Comfort the sorrowful • Bear wrongs patiently • Forgive all injuries • Pray for the living and the dead 

Borgess closes 125th Anniversary with special time capsule opening and prayer event with Bishop Bradley December 8 

The 125th Anniversary of Borgess Health concludes Tuesday, December 8, the historic day Borgess Hospital officially opened as Kalamazoo’s first hospital in 1889. At 4:30 p.m., a time capsule opening ceremony will take place, followed at 5 p.m. by a public prayer service with Bishop Bradley in the Lawence Education Center. 

In a 1989 event celebrating the first 100 years of Borgess, a time capsule was placed in the Lawrence Education Center lobby. It was filled with newsletters, special documents and even a Lake Doster hole-in-one scorecard from Martin Verzi, former president and CEO, Borgess Medical Center. The time capsule will be opened for the first time, inspected and then additional items will be added, space permitting. 

Pray for Vocations 
Visit www.diokzoo.org 
Download Prayer Card for Vocations
Statement on pornography, 
politics take center stage at USCCB

By Catholic News Service

BALTIMORE (CNS) — The U.S. bishops approved a formal statement on pornography and additions to their quadrennial statement on political responsibility at their Nov. 16-19 fall general meeting in Baltimore.

The 2015 version of political responsibility document, “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship,” passed 210-21 with five abstentions, and a separate vote on the statement’s introductory note passed 217-16 with two abstentions; two-thirds of diocesan bishops, or 181 votes, were needed for passage.

Additions to the document were made to reflect the teachings of Pope Francis and the later encyclicals of Pope Benedict XVI.

The pornography statement, “Create in Me a Clean Heart: A Pastoral Response to Pornography,” says that “producing or using pornography is gravely wrong” and is a “mortal sin” if committed with deliberate consent and urges Catholics to turn away from it. Approval of the statement came on a vote of 230-4 with one abstention, with 181 votes needed for passage.

The bishops approved priorities and strategic plans for 2017-20 in a 233-4 vote Nov. 17. The document emphasizes five major areas: evangelization, family and marriage; human life and dignity; religious freedom; and vocations and ongoing formation.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops met in the shadow of the Nov. 13 terror attacks in Paris. Auxiliary Bishop Eusebio Elizondo of Seattle, chairman of the USCCB Committee on Migration, issued a statement Nov. 17 from the floor of the meeting. “I am disturbed,” Bishop Elizondo said, “by calls from both federal and state officials for an end to the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the United States.”

On Nov. 16, the bishops discussed how the U.S. Catholic Church can move forward in response to the Supreme Court’s ruling on same-sex marriage this year. To that end, the bishops are planning to develop a pastoral plan for marriage and family life. The pastoral plan, according to Bishop Malone, will seek the approval of the bishops’ input.


The other Six Days

Mary-Therese and Virginia: 
Faith in the Fifties

Mary-Therese — My name is actually a testament to faith: the faith of my Catholic parents and at least three nurses. I was born three months early and way too tiny (1 lb 15 ozs), more than fifty years ago in a Catholic hospital in Detroit. Back then, babies that small rarely survived. A nurse baptized me in the delivery room as I was not expected to live. Within days my weight dropped to 21 ounces. My lungs weren’t fully developed so I often just stopped breathing (years later a nurse recalled of me, “she died five times on me!”). One of the nurses told my parents she would pray for me to the Blessed Virgin; another to St. Therese of Lisieux; and a third to St. Jude. That’s how I got my name: Mary-Therese Judith.

God is in my prayer times of each day: morning prayer, the daily Mass readings and a reflection to start, and evening prayer to close. My faith goes beyond prayer, though: it’s about God being everywhere. Some people hate grocery shopping but I love it. Seeing all the colorful produce at Meijer, aisles of foods from around the world, fresh meats and seafood — how blessed we are to have such bounty. It’s too crowded? Look at all the different people — skin color, clothing styles, accents, what’s in their carts — every person has a story, every one matters. Traffic jam on the way home? Let someone in ahead of you, and watch: they will usually do the same for someone else. If not — oh, well, it doesn’t undo the kindness.

Virginia — For me, God has always spoken through music. I am a professional musician performing traditional music from the Celtic traditions of England, Ireland, Scotland and the United States. Part of living my faith involves getting music to people who would love to hear it but can’t afford tickets to concerts. Anyone can take their gifts and talents and give them back to their local community. I feel led to that. Playing music live to people can be very healing.

School cafeteria workers create mural of thanks

A giant turkey with “feathers” representing grateful wishes from students adorned the wall of St. Monica’s last month. The creative artwork was the idea of St. Monica cafeteria staff: Darcy Campbell, Jenny Wallace and Stacy Luckas. “The kids have been so excited. They keep coming down to see the feathers that have been added each day,” said Wallace.

“When we started this, we didn’t care if we had 70 feathers with “Mom” written on them. We just wanted to do something meaningful for the children that we serve in the cafeteria each day.”

School cafeteria workers created the mural in gratitude to their customers.

2015 Christmas Liturgy schedule St. Augustine Cathedral

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<th>Christmas Eve</th>
<th>Christmas Day</th>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday December 24, 2015</td>
<td>Friday December 25, 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 a.m. Mass</td>
<td>The Nativity of Our Lord</td>
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<td>Daily Mass in the Keating Chapel in the Crowley Center</td>
<td>9:30 a.m. Mass</td>
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<td>4 p.m. Mass — Traditional Carols, Organ and Cantor</td>
<td>Traditional Carols, Organ and Cantor</td>
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<td>6 p.m. Mass — Traditional Carols, Organ and Cantor</td>
<td>11:30 a.m. Mass</td>
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<td>11:30 a.m. — Traditional Carols, Cathedral Choir with Brass</td>
<td>Solemn Liturgy of Christmas Day Cathedral Choir</td>
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<td>Midnight Mass</td>
<td>Christmas Eve</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday December 21, 2015</td>
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<td>6:30-7:30 p.m. in the Cathedral</td>
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<td>Tuesday December 22, 2015</td>
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While keeping the “Christ” in Christmas don’t forget to keep the “Preparation” in Advent

By Sarah DeMott

The liturgical season of Advent is the season of preparing for the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is a time to slow down, wait and prepare for the celebration that is to come.

Following are just a few tips for keeping the preparation in Advent

Savor the season: Wait to put up/decorate your Christmas tree until Christmas Eve, or only put lights on, adding ornaments on Christmas Eve.

Simplify: Make simple meals, avoid meat on Fridays, skip dessert. Donate the leftover grocery budget to a charity or your parish.

Unplug: Designate time each day to unplug from tv and social media. Spend that time in prayer or pick up an Advent devotional.

Pray: Adopt special prayers during the season such as an Advent novena, Christmas Anticipation prayer (see aside) or rosary as a family.

Get crafty: Make an Advent wreath to light at dinner each night. If you have young children, use a Jesse Tree or Advent Calendar to help them countdown to Christmas. Add pieces to your nativity set one day at a time to foster excitement of what is to come.

Be a pilgrim: Make a pilgrimage to a local Marian Shrine (closer options include Our Lady of Lourdes Shrine at the Assumption Grotto Church in Detroit or St. John Vianney Parish in Wyoming, Mich.) Help those in need: Devote extra time to community service or volunteering. Help out a soup kitchen or homeless shelter as a family.

Stock up on grace: Go to confession at least once during Advent.

Christmas Anticipation Prayer – Recited 15 times each day throughout Advent

Hail and blessed be the hour and moment
In which the Son of God was born
Of the most pure Virgin Mary,
At midnight, in Bethlehem, in the piercing cold.

In that hour vouchsafe
I beseech Thee, O my God,
to hear my prayer and grant my desires,
[mention your request]
Through the merits of Our Savior Jesus Christ,
and of His blessed Mother. Amen.

What is a Jesse Tree?
Isaiah 11:1: “A shoot shall come out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.”

A perhaps lesser known tradition than the Advent wreath and calendar, the Jesse Tree is an Advent tradition symbolizing Jesus’ family tree. Jesse was the father of King David, and is considered the first person in the genealogy of Jesus. The “tree” can be as simple as a tree drawn and cut out of paper, or as elaborate as a mini Christmas tree. Ornaments are made or bought, representing verses relating to Jesus’ ancestors and events leading up to His birth. Each is associated with a different story from Scripture (an apple ornament for the story of Adam and Eve, etc.). There are several simple tutorials available online.

Outgoing Catholic Charities CEO calls three-decades of service a blessing

Fran Denny, President and CEO, will retire December 31, 2015 after 27 years

By Vicki Cessna

The seeds of her life’s work were sown in Fran Denny when she was a wide-eyed five year old girl. It was at that time in her life when her family moved from Camden, NJ to the Philadelphia suburbs. Trips back to family in NJ involved traveling through the depressed neighborhoods of the city of brotherly love. As a little girl Fran watched out the back seat windows and the many men loitering in doorways.

“As my parents would tell me years later, on one trip I asked them ‘who’s going to help these men?’” Looking back she realized that her life’s mission was to do just that—help people.

This month Fran bids farewell to her position as President/CEO of Catholic Charities, an organization that she has been a part of for more than 27 years in the Diocese of Kalamazoo. She leaves joyfully and without fear, trusting that she’ll continue to listen for God’s plan for this next stage of her life.

Ironically when Fran first came to Kalamazoo she originally intended to stay about three to five years. That plan changed when the Executive Director of the organization resigned four months after she arrived.

Looking back on her life’s vocations she remembers starting out on a different path. “Originally I thought I’d be a math teacher,” she muses. “However, I’ve been so blessed to have many, many wonderful people in my life that helped mentor me.”

During college Fran changed her major to social work, earned her degree from West Chester University and by age 30 was working as a family therapist at Catholic Charities. It was during this time that she worked with Sr. Teresa Barchie a Sister of Mercy who Fran describes as a “brilliant woman. She walked along with me as I was guided into the success of Caring Network, an outreach to pregnant woman, now in its 26th year, as one of the highlights. Just recently she was surprised by a former client who had stopped by the agency with her eight-year-old and husband in tow.

The client then proceeded to express her gratitude and detail what a difference her case worker and the agency had made in her life. “We rarely get the opportunity to see the long-term outcomes of our work with clients. But no one does this work in it for the immediate effects. You’re here to help and love that person in the moment create hope and serve all.”

When asked what she’s most happy about as she looks back on her time she says, “I think I was given a mission very early in life. And to be able to live out that mission goes beyond my wildest dreams. I just feel so immensely blessed to have had the life I’ve had so far.”
Vatican Christmas stamps feature manuscript painting of Holy Family

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — This year’s Vatican Christmas stamps feature a 15th-century manuscript illumination of the Holy Family. Flanked by a lowing ox and a donkey, Mary and Joseph pray over baby Jesus as angels sing above and poor shepherds approach. The image, painted by an unknown artist, is from the Codices Urbinate Latini 239 (1477-1478) from the Vatican Library. The special edition stamps went on sale Nov. 19 in two denominations of 80 euro cents and 95 euro cents in sheets of 10.

The Vatican post office and Philatelic and Numismatic Office also offer a collector’s booklet containing four 95 euro-cent stamps and commemorative cover for 3.80 euro. All order requests should be made by email to: order.ufn@scv.va. The Vatican stamp office will then send a proper order form and methods of payment.

Diocese to sponsor healing retreat for those suffering from an experience with abortion

Rachel’s Vineyard retreat program offered February 5-7, 2016

By Vicki Cessna

“Participants come in feeling fearful and unworthy and leave with an enormous weight lifted,” says Maggie Walsh when describing a common occurrence for those participating in a Rachel’s Vineyard retreat. The two-day spiritual retreat is a program of Project Rachel and locally is served by Catholic Charities West Michigan. In February, the Diocese of Kalamazoo, will sponsor the retreat in the Kalamazoo area.

The program, which began in 1986 by Theresa Karminski Burke, Ph. D., was one of the first therapeutic support groups for post-aborted women. In 1994, Rachel’s Vineyard: A Psychological and Spiritual Journey for Post Abortion Healing was first published. It was a unique support group model for counselors, offering a concrete, emotional experience for women who were grieving the loss of their aborted children. In 1995, Theresa adapted and expanded the curriculum into a format for weekend retreats. Today more than 700-800 retreats are offered worldwide. And while word of mouth has helped bolster the healing ministry, Walsh notes that it’s still very challenging to reach those who need the program the most.

“Some are just so fearful to open the wound and others may have left the Church altogether,” she notes. “The most important thing to note with this retreat is that healing does happen. It’s not a magic pill but it propels a person’s healing journey.”

And the retreat is not restricted to those women who have had an abortion but is open to anyone who is suffering from an experience with abortion including men, parents, grandparents or friends. “Sometimes we have parents who've learned about a child's experience with abortion or other times it could be someone who helped in the process,” adds Walsh.

While it’s not common to have single men attend it does happen and Walsh notes that each group has its own dynamic.

“God weaves together what needs to be. Sometimes a person's witness or testimony will be just what another participant needed to hear,” the retreat typically begins on a Friday afternoon and concludes on a Sunday. The program consists of spiritual and psychological exercises, a memorial service and the opportunity for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

At least half of the members of the presenting team have a related experience with abortion. The cost is $140 but Walsh is quick to point out that the program is available on a sliding scale.

For more information on Rachel’s Vineyard or Project Rachel, contact Maggie Walsh, Project Rachel and Social Justice Coordinator, CCHD and CRS Diocesan Coordinator, Catholic Charities West Michigan, (616) 340-1824 or (800) 800-8284 (MI only); mwalsh@ccwestmi.org

Holy Door at St. Augustine Cathedral will be opened December 12th

During the Year of Mercy pilgrims encouraged to go through Holy Door to gain indulgence

O God, by means of Moses, you instituted for your people a jubilee year and year of forgiveness, grant that your Church may live with joy this opportune time during which you open up for us, your faithful, the holy door, that they may enter and lift up to you their prayers and thus receiving forgiveness and indulgence and the full remission of their sins, they may walk speedily into a new life in accordance with the Gospel of your Son and may reach the heavenly glory of your house.” — Blessed Paul VI, Prayer for Opening of the Holy Door Vatican City, 1975

John’s gospel clearly depicts this relationship between Jesus and us. “Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life, and have it more abundantly” (John 10:7-10).

It is fitting that a Holy Door be situated within a church building. The door of the Church is the ianuu ecclesia – “the silent witness to all the moments of our lives” (USCCB, About the Jubilee Door, 1999). Often sacramental rituals begin at the door — here, the priest or deacon welcomes the parents as they bring their child for baptism; here, he greets the bride and groom as they begin the wedding liturgy; here, he greets the catechumens at the Rite of Acceptance; and, finally, the priest greets the casket at the beginning of the funeral liturgy.

In order to gain a plenary indulgence for the Year of Mercy one of the requirements is to make a pilgrimage to a Jubilee shrine or place (such as a cathedral) and walk through the designated “Holy Door” and participate in a liturgical celebration or devotional exercise.

Pictured left is the The Holy Door at the Basilica of St. John Lateran. The Holy Doors of Rome’s four papal basilicas will be opened during the Holy Year of Mercy, which begins Dec. 8. In Catholic tradition, the Holy Door represents the passage to salvation — the path to a new and eternal life, which was opened to humanity by Jesus. It also symbolizes an entryway to God’s mercy — the ultimate and supreme act by which he comes to meet people. Mercy is “the bridge that connects God and humanity, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness,” the pope wrote in “Misericordiae Vultus” (“The Face of Mercy”), insti-

tuting the Holy Year of Mercy. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)
By Bishop Robert Barron

RENÉ GIRARD, CHURCH FATHER

René Girard, one of the most influential Catholic philosophers in the world, died last week at the age of 91. Born in Avignon and a member of the illustrious Académie Française, Girard nevertheless made his academic reputation in the United States, as a professor at Indiana University, Johns Hopkins University and Stanford University.

There are some thinkers that offer intriguing ideas and proposals, and there is a tiny handful of thinkers that manage to shake your world. Girard was in this second camp. In a series of books and articles, written across several decades, he proposed a social theory of extraordinary explanatory power. Drawing inspiration from some of the greatest literary masters of the West — Dostoevsky, Shakespeare, Proust among others — Girard opined that desire is both mimetic and triangular. He meant that we rarely desire objects straightforwardly; rather, we desire them because others desire them: as we imitate (mimesis) another’s desire, we establish a triangulation between self, other, and object. If this sounds too rarefied, think of the manner in which practically all of advertising works: I come to want those gym shoes, not because of their intrinsic value, but because the hottest NBA star wants them. Now what mimetic desire leads to, almost inevitably, is conflict. If you want to see this dynamic in the concrete, watch what happens when toddler A imitates the desire of toddler B for the same toy, or when dictator A mimics the desire of dictator B for the same route of access to the sea.

The tension that arises from mimetic desire is dealt with through what Girard called the scapegoating mechanism. A society, large or small, that finds itself in conflict comes together through a common act of blaming an individual or group purportedly responsible for the conflict. So for instance, a group of people in a coffee klatch will speak in an anodyne way for a lifetime, helping people learn to contribute new methods of cooperation, and in the rituals of those societies, we discover a repeated acting out of the original scapegoating. For a literary presentation of this ritualization of society-creating violence, look no further than Shirley Jackson’s masterpiece “The Lottery.” The main features of this theory were in place when Girard turned for the first time in a serious way to the Christian Scriptures. What he found astonished him and changed his life. He discovered that the Bible knew all about mimetic desire and scapegoating violence but it also contained something altogether new, namely, the de-sacralizing of the process that is revered in all of the myths and religions of the world. The mono-myth of Jesus is a classic instance of the old pattern. It is utterly consistent with the Girardian theory that Caiaphas, the leading religious figure of the time, could say to his colleagues, “Is it not better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to perish?” In any other religious context, this sort of rationalization would be valorized. But in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, this stunning truth is revealed: God is not on the side of the scapegoaters but rather on the side of the scapegoated victim. The true God in fact does not sanction a community created through violence; rather, he sanctions what Jesus called the Kingdom of God, a society grounded in forgiveness, love, and identification with the victim. Once Girard saw this pattern, he found it everywhere in the Gospels and in Christian literature. For a particularly clear example of the unveiling process, take a hard look at the story of the woman caught in adultery.

In the second half of the twentieth century, academics tended to characterize Christianity — if they took it seriously at all — as one more iteration of the mythic story that can be found in practically every culture. From the Epic of Gilgamesh to Star Wars, the “mono-myth,” to use Joseph Campbell’s formula, is told over and again. What Girard saw was that this tired theorizing has it precisely wrong. In point of fact, Christianity is the revelation (the unveiling) of what the myths want to hide. Indeed, it is the deconstruction of the mono-myth, not a reiteration of it — which is exactly why so many within academia want to domesticate and de-fang it.

The recovery of Christianity as revelation, as an unmasking of what all the other religions are saying, is René Girard’s permanent and unsettling contribution.

Program offers tools for navigating the holidays

By Phyllis Florian

For many people the holiday season can be challenging to navigate as family gatherings ignite painful memories. Memories of fights, loneliness, or unspeakable abuse at the hands of a relative, or confusing and painful relationships with parents or other loved ones can resurface. The Diocese of Kalamazoo understands how complicated family life may be. Through the Trauma Recovery Program, people with histories of trauma, abuse or neglect in childhood may find a safe place to explore how past hurts affect current relationships and family functioning. The program invites participants to learn about new tools that help survivors feel safe, respected, and capable of navigating the complex relationships in their lives. While the program acknowledges that past events may have hurt us deeply, the focus of the “survival” work is on present situations and relationships.

In this way, participants learn to contribute new methods of handling the holidays and every day differently. The program offers tools that work for a lifetime, helping people feel empowered when they used to feel helpless, increasing self-esteem and positive relationships. Often, we hear from past participants who describe the program as the beginning of changes that have positively affected many aspects of their lives. Program “graduates” often refer back to materials and find these resources are applicable to everyday situations including the holidays.

For the hope for the future is brighter for participants in the Trauma Recovery Program. If you believe that this program may benefit you, please contact Phyllis Florian at (269) 381-8917, ext. 223. There are still spots available for the next Trauma Recovery Program session, which begins on January 25, 2016.

Letters between Trappist and his editors explore obedience, conscience

By Mitch Finley, Catholic News Service


As published, the complete letters of Fr. Thomas Merton (1915-1968) — the well-known Trappist monk, author, social critic and poet — come to five hefty volumes. To read these, however, means to get only one side of the conversation. Turning to Fr. Merton’s correspondence with Evelyn Waugh (1903-1966), the two men — both of whom left the Anglican Church for Catholicism as adults — wrote these letters between July 1948 and February 1952. Waugh agreed to edit the American edition of “The Seven Storey Mountain” for British readers, and this version appeared in 1949 with the title changed to “Elected Silence.” Father Merton wrote 13 of the letters in this book, Waugh wrote seven. Editor Mary Frances Coady contributes a prefatory editor’s note, an Introduction and eight context-setting chapters, social light on the letters themselves.

In this compact volume we find the young Merton prior to, during and just after the publication of his autobiography. Twelve years older than Merton, and already a hugely successful novelist, the Waugh of these letters appears as something of a mentor to the younger man. Father Merton expresses gratitude to Waugh for skilled editing of his work, and Waugh appears as both a big fan of Father Merton and a more experienced writer who is willing to share constructive criticism.

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DECEMBER/JANUARY 2015
A Joyful Noise – The Role of Music Ministry in Catholic Liturgy

By Sarah DeMott

“He who sings prays twice,” — St. Augustine

“The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art,” states the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Why is music such an integral part of worship?

According to Dave Reilly, Associate Director of Worship and Liturgy for the Diocese of Kalamazoo, music is a unifier, as is the sacrament of the Eucharist. Like friends and family gathering to sing a rousing chorus of “Happy Birthday,” regardless of their talent level, the chants and songs during the liturgy are meant to heighten the senses and bridge the gap between peoples, unifying them in their love and devotion to Christ.

Mass was originally meant to be chanted and sung. Vatican II reintroduced the importance of music in the Mass and as a component of a parish. One can also look to the Bible for countless examples of the importance of singing and music: God handed songs down to the Israelites through Moses. Jesus and his apostles sang a hymn before their journey to the Mount of Olives.

Beth McElhone has been the music director at St. Joseph Parish in Kalamazoo for 31 years. For her, music is the best way she knows to pray. “Knowing that the music we create helps and invites people to pray is a tremendous gift,” she says. “Music allows many people to get to the heart of their faith, sometimes better than the written or spoken word. I am privileged to be part of that.”

Joe Schreck, who has been singing at St. Augustine Cathedral for more than 26 years, agrees. “I have always felt that the power of music helps convey the message in a way that sometimes the spoken word can’t,” Schreck says. “One of the highlights of the liturgical season for me every year is the Tenebrae service on Good Friday. It is a solemn and intimate service of music and readings. For several years I have had the opportunity to sing a set of lamentations, which I find particularly moving.”

Having a solid music ministry at a parish doesn’t require a trained musician or even an organ. As long as there are leaders who can guide a congregation through the celebration of the Mass, their role can be fulfilled. “There’s more to music ministry than having a good voice,” says Reilly. “It is more important to have an attitude of being unified in leading a congregation through the liturgy.”

According to Joe Schreck, of the USCCB, the quality of participation in sung praise has more to do with the desire to sing together because of our love of God than it does with actual musical abilities. The importance of music in the liturgy is tied to the way it connects the congregation and lifts up praise, not in exposing who can sing well and who cannot.

“He loves the sound of His people praying together as one as they lift their voices in song,” says Mike Kiebel, Music Mission Steward at St. Catherine of Sienna Parish in Portage. “As we pray together through music, we also minister to one another, regardless of how good or bad we consider our voice. Music has the power to do wonderful, transforming things when we use it as prayer.”

Those involved in the music ministry give a lot of themselves. Many attend every Mass, along with weddings and funerals. They generously give of their time and talents to serve their parishes and glorify God. For special liturgies and seasons, such as Easter and Christmas, they spend hours outside of Mass practicing and preparing.

“I truly feel honored to have been part of significant liturgies at different times of people’s lives,” says Schreck. “Funeral masses, weddings, anniversaries celebrations and ordinations, if I have in some way been able to enhance those liturgies then I feel like I am honoring the gift I have been given.”

The future of the music ministry, says Reilly, lies with our students. “It is key to nurture musical leadership within a parish proactively,” says Reilly. “Start with your schools and build up leadership and skill. Children’s choirs are an excellent way to involve children, and their parents. It is a great way to provide education and formation for youth in the parish.”

Nature serves as backdrop for men’s "Into the Wild" weekend retreat

By Peter Mallett

I recently attended the second “Into the Wild” men’s weekend held in the Diocese of Kalamazoo at the Rota-Kiwan Scout Reservation. More than 60 men participated, including several father and son pairs along with 20 men serving on the leadership team, including Chaplain Rev. Tom McNally, Parochial Vicar, St. Joseph Parish, St. Joseph and diocesan personnel Deacon Kurt Lucas, Timothy McNamara and Jamin Herold. The retreat was created by the apostolate The King’s Men, located outside Philadelphia. Founder and President Mark Houck, as well as Executive Director Chuck Harvey, participated.

The four-day retreat began with check-in on Thursday evening followed by dinner and Mass. The evening closed with a beautiful procession of the Holy Eucharist, installing the Blessed Sacrament in a small individual cabin to begin two days of onsite “round the clock adoration.” Throughout the weekend, the men silently adored and prayed with our Lord in this makeshift chapel.

Each day participants listened to an inspiration talk and engaged in activities centered on a theme. Friday was “Leader Day” and the talk was given by Deacon David Guido, St. Martin Parish, Vicksburg. During the day we practiced our orienteering skills and were encouraged to engage in spiritual discussion with our teammates. Saturday’s talk was centered on the theme of “provider” and presented by Deacon Louis Zemlick, St. John Bosco Parish, Mattawan. The day was spent fishing and cooking. On our last day, Sunday, Deacon Kurt Lucas, Executive Director, Parish Life and Lay Leadership for the diocese, gave a talk on the theme of “Protector” encouraging us to spiritual battle in protecting and defending our Catholic faith.

Throughout the weekend there were many opportunities for prayerful reflection and participation in the liturgy and sacraments. Bishop Bradley celebrated Mass Friday evening and Fr. McNally concluded our weekend with Mass on Sunday. The beauty of the Eucharistic procession to our church was inspirational against the natural setting. Each morning began with the praying of the rosary and each evening concluded with what was termed a “Training by Torchlight” during which men shared their stories with others encouraging and praying for them around a bonfire near the lake.

The weekend was a great success as I witnessed and experienced great fellowship and spiritual growth through faith sharing through this unique outdoorsman experience.

NOTE: Into the Wild is scheduled to return in the fall 2016. Contact Deacon Kurt Lucas or diocesan@diokzoo.org for more information. Peter Mallett is a parishioner of St. Joseph Parish, Kalamazoo and a student in the Lay Ecclesial Ministry Institute.

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Día Mundial del Emigrante y Refugiado y Semana Nacional de la Migración

El Santo Padre Francisco ha convocado a una Jornada mundial por el emigrante y refugiado para el 17 de enero del 2016 con el lema: “Los emigrantes y refugiados nos interpelan. La respuesta del Evangelio de la misericordia”.

Y los Obispos de Estados Unidos invitan como todos a la Semana Nacional de la Migración del 3 al 9 de enero del 2016 con el tema: “Dar acogida al forastero” (Mateo 25,35).

Los Obispos ofrecen la siguiente oración para rezar en familia y comunidad.

**Padre Amoroso**, oramos para que nos brindes tu divina protección a todos los migrantes.

**Migración del 3 al 9 de enero del 2016 con el tema: “Día Mundial del Emigrante y Refugiado y Semana Nacional de la Migración”**

**Al Tiempo de Dios — Una Reflexión sobre el Encuentro Mundial de las Familias**

Por Socorro Truchan, Director Asociado, Iglesia Doméstica

“Durante la semana que participé en el Encuentro Mundial de Familias en Filadelfia en Septiembre de 2015, me sentí como si estuviera viviendo al tiempo de Dios, rodeada de miles de personas — todas ellas formaban parte de mi gran familia universal — la Iglesia Católica. Uno de mis primeros momentos de gracia fue un encuentro casual con la Dra. Emanuela Molla, hija de Santa Gianna Beretta Molla. Le di un abrazo y platicamos como si fuéramos amigas de toda la vida. Emocionada por haber comenzado hacia unos años cuando me escribió una carta donde también me envió una reliquia de su madre.

Santa Gianna Beretta Molla (octubre 4, 1922 – abril 28, 1962), una pediatra italiana, es uno de los santos laicos de la Iglesia. Cuando sufría de una enfermedad que le amenazaba la vida durante un embarazo, ella rechazó la idea de tener un aborto para salvar su propia vida y prefirió dar su vida para salvar la de su cuarta hija, Emanuela. Este ejemplo ha sido referente para la Iglesia Católica y ha inspirado a muchos durante los últimos años. La Dra. Emanuela Molla, hija de Santa Gianna, es un ejemplo de la virtud de la maternidad y la dedicación a la vida humana. Ella es recordada por su dedicación a la vida humana y por su amor a los más necesitados.

**Sínodo sobre la Familia**

Por la Dra. Fanny Tabares

El Sínodo sobre la Familia terminó el mes pasado con conclusiones que reafirman la doctrina de la Iglesia y resaltan belleza de la familia. El texto de conclusión saldrá más adelante.

Entre muchos puntos quisiéra atraer la atención de uno en particular: la atención a las familias de refugiados y migrantes. Los obispos hacen hincapié en el hecho de que “la historia de la humanidad es una historia de migrantes: esta verdad está inmersa en la vida de los pueblos y las familias. También nuestra fe lo reafirma: todos somos peregrinos”.

En el mes de diciembre, la Misa de las Posadas, celebraciones o mañanitas a nuestra Señora de la Sagrada Familia y el nacimiento de Jesús. En muchas de nuestras parroquias tienen novenas, celebraciones o mañanitas a nuestra Sra. de Guadalupe, el 12 de diciembre, la Misa de Media Noche del 24 de diciembre; sería muy bueno participar en familia en estas celebraciones y enseñarle a nuestros hijos con el ejemplo el amor de Dios con la solidaridad hacia el prójimo.
VATICAN NATIVITY SCENE, tree to be unveiled early for Year of Mercy

By Carol Glatz, Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Christmas tree and Nativity scene in St. Peter’s Square will be set up and unveiled earlier than usual this year to be ready for the opening of the Year of Mercy.

In preparation for the extraordinary event, which begins Dec. 8 with the opening of the Holy Door in St. Peter’s Basilica, Vatican workers broke through the mosaic that had walled off the door.

Cardinal Angelo Comastri, archpriest of the basilica, led a small ceremony that included prayers and a presentation of the Holy Door to Bishop管 N. 17, the eve of the anniversary of the basilica’s dedication in 1626. The presentation included a key, a document of presentation and a representation of the Holy Year of Mercy.

The Nativity scene, donated by the northern Italian province of Trent, features 24 life-sized figures carved from wood. The scene is positioned in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican Nov. 19. The tree is an 82-foot spruce fir from Germany’s Bavarian region. It arrived earlier than usual to be ready for the Dec. 8 opening of the Holy Year of Mercy.

The Christmas tree is positioned in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican Nov. 19. The tree is an 82-foot spruce fir from Germany’s Bavarian region. It arrived earlier than usual to be ready for the Dec. 8 opening of the Holy Year of Mercy.

The Nativity scene was donated by the northern Italian province of Trent. The 24 life-sized figures carved from wood included Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus, the Three Magi and a man bending over to help an elderly man in an act of mercy. The surrounding figures were depicted in the Dolomites in the 1900s.
Art contest returns with new theme

Diocese accepting student art submissions on “The Merciful Family” through February 15
The second Diocese of Kalamazoo National Student Art Contest highlights the Year of Mercy with the theme “The Merciful Family”. The diocese is accepting art, prose, poetry, music and video submissions through February 15 from students nationwide in grades 4 through 12. Submissions should focus on how we are called to be merciful within our families and communities. Winners will receive a monetary scholarship award courtesy of the Michigan Knights of Columbus, and an official Diocese of Kalamazoo award signed by Bishop Paul Bradley. For more information or full criteria, visit diokzoo.org/national-student-contest. Contact Socorro Truchan with any questions at struchan@diokzoo.org.

Mail submissions to: National Student Contest, Diocese of Kalamazoo, 215 N. Westnedge Avenue, Kalamazoo, MI 49007

The Angels are Coming to Holy Angels Parish, Sturgis

This Advent, explore all things angels with The Glory of Angels Faith and Art Exhibition at Holy Angels Parish in Sturgis. Based on the book, The Glory of Angels by Edward Lucie-Smith, illustrations, short stories and quotes from saints and theologians will be on display, highlighting guardian angels and the archangels. Special exhibit features explore the use of music as the voice of angels, angels in the lives of saints, angels and the last judgement, and more. The exhibit is open Monday through Thursday, 1 p.m. – 6 p.m. and Friday through Sunday, 1 p.m. – 8 p.m. through December 20. Tour guides will be available to lead guests through the art exhibit in the church hall. All events are open to the public. Special programming will feature speakers from around the diocese.

Special programming:
December 5: Music of Angels Concert with the children of St. Joseph Parish and crafts, 7 p.m.
December 6: Angeles, Creacion de Dios (Spanish) – 5 p.m.
December 13: Angels and the Catholic Doctrine with Bishop Murray – 5 p.m.
December 18: Angels Musical – 6 p.m.
December 19: Angels and Popular Devotion with Very Rev. Bob Creagan, V.E. – 7 p.m.
December 20: Youth Night, Praise and Worship – 5 p.m.

Hackett Catholic Prep receives Michigan Milestone Award for 50 Years of service

State and local dignitaries gathered in the library of Hackett Catholic Prep on November 10 to close out the school’s 50th anniversary year with a special award ceremony. Chong-Anna Canfora, of the Historical Society of Michigan, presented school principal Brian Kosmerick with a special Michigan Milestone Award, honoring Hackett for its 50 years of service to the greater Kalamazoo community. A tribute from the U.S. Congress was made by U.S. Representative Fred Upton. Michigan Representative Jon Hoadley read a second tribute commissioned by the Michigan House and Senate. Very Rev. Larry Farrell, pastor of St. Monica Catholic School and Parish, and Bishop Paul Bradley, opened and closed the ceremony with a blessing and benediction.

Hackett seniors took on the project of applying for this special historical distinction, and they both researched and wrote a history of the school as part of the application process. The plaque will eventually hang, with other historical photos and memorabilia, in the lobby of Hackett Catholic Prep. The school officially opened its doors in October of 1964 under the name Monsignor John R. Hackett High School. The school changed its name at the start of the 50th anniversary year.