Pastor dies
Fr. Romanus Akamike, pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Coleman, died unexpectedly December 12, 2015. He was 61 and celebrated his 25th year in the priesthood in Nov. 2014. Obituary, Pg. 2

Consecrated Life
As the Year of Consecrated Life winds down, Sister Malachy Griffin, vicar of women religious in the Diocese of San Angelo, says committing to the consecrated life is focusing your commitment on Christ, Pg. 6

Fr. Romanus, Coleman’s ‘dancing, singing priest,’ dies at 61

By Jimmy Patterson
Editor / West Texas Angelus

SAN ANGELO — When Romanus Arinze Akamike was a small boy in the Biafran region of Nigeria, he suffered an accident that would render his right index finger nearly useless. Ultimately, he would lose the first digit of the finger.

Years later, when he was a young man, it was his time to fulfill the commitment to serve his country’s military. That call to serve ran simultaneous to Nigeria’s Biafran Civil War from 1967-1970, a particularly dangerous time for those called up.

One problem for the Biafran military: With no bone in his right index finger, firing a weapon was impossible. When Akamike proved that disability, he was passed over for service in the armed forces.

At Fr. Romanus’ funeral Mass, December 23, 2015, at Sacred Heart Cathedral in San Angelo, his close friend and spiritual son Fr. Francis Onyekozuru told mourners that it was after Fr. Romanus was freed from his military recruitment that he chose to become a priest and to devote his life to Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church.

Fr. Romanus Akamike, pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Coleman, died December 12, 2015, of natural causes. He had just returned from a visit to his homeland a day earlier.

Ecumenical retreat center progresses; groundbreaking set for summer of 2016

By Jimmy Patterson
Editor / West Texas Angelus

MIDLAND — Organizers and volunteers are optimistic about achieving a groundbreaking date of June 2016 on an ecumenical retreat center in Midland.

The Way Retreat Center will sit atop a rise of land on 20 acres adjacent to the intersection of East Loop 250 and Todd Road in northeast Midland.

The retreat center will be the first of its kind in the area and organizers say their objective is to attract not only people of all faiths but businesses and corporations, as well.

“We want The Way to be a place where people in Midland-Odessa know they can turn for a retreat experience that will be spiritually enriching for all Christians,” said board president Brian Fralin. “We also want our local business community to know corporate boards or staffs of businesses, non-profits and churches are also welcome to stay with us for an afternoon, a day or a weekend where their professional lives can also be nourished by the unique environment that we offer at The Way.”

One plus of the retreat center, organizer Mike LaMonica said, is its proximity to Midland-Odessa. The Way will eliminate the 30-60 minute drive to Stanton, the nearest retreat center. Such convenience makes it possible for businesses, churches and other organizations to utilize the center while knowing both work and family are nearby.

“This has been a longtime dream of many people,” LaMonica said. “And this is God at work in our community and through our church.
**BISHOP SIS’ SCHEDULE**

**JANUARY 2016**

10 — SAN ANGELO, Christ the King Retreat Center, Mass with Deacon Candidates, 11 a.m.
12 — SAN ANGELO, Christ the King Retreat Center, Mass for seminary retreat, 4:30 p.m.
15 — SAN ANGELO, V Encuentro Team meeting at 6:30 p.m.
16 — BIG LAKE, St. Margaret of Cortona, Mass at 7:00 p.m.
17 — RANKIN, St. Thomas, Mass at 8:00 a.m.
17 — IRAAN, St. Francis of Assisi, Mass at 9:30 a.m.
17 — BIG LAKE, St. Margaret of Cortona, Mass at 11:30 a.m.
19 — SAN ANGELO, Pastoral Center, Liturgical Commission meeting at 1 p.m.
19 — SAN ANGELO, Holy Angels, RCIA at 6:30 p.m.
20 — SAN ANGELO, Pastoral Center, Priestly Life Workshop
26 — SAN ANGELO, Pastoral Center, Presbyteral Council Meeting at 11:00 a.m.
26 — SAN ANGELO, Newman Center, Theology on Tap at 7:00 p.m.
27 — SAN ANGELO, Newman Center, Mass at 12:00 noon
27 — SAN ANGELO, Pastoral Center, Vocation Team Meeting at 2:00 p.m.
27 — SAN ANGELO, Feast of Santa Angela Event, evening
28 — MIDLAND, St. Stephen, Knights of Columbus Appreciation Dinner at 6 p.m.

**SEPTEMBER 2016**

14 — SAN ANGELO, Sacred Heart Cathedral Rite of Election at 3:00 p.m.
16-17 — SAN ANGELO, Christ the King Retreat Center, Diocesan Spring Priests Conference
18 — SAN ANGELO, Staff Lenten Day of Recollection at 9:00 a.m.
20 — SAN ANGELO, Diocesan Catholic Schools Commission at 9:00 a.m.
21 — MIDLAND, St. Stephen, Rite of Election at 2:30 p.m.
22 — HOUSTON, Holy Name Retreat Center, Region X Vocation Directors Meeting
22 — HOUSTON, St. Mary’s Seminary, Mass at 5:00 p.m.
29 — March 2 — SAN ANGELO, Christ the King Retreat Center, Tex-Mex Border Bishops’ Spring Meeting

**CHRIST THE KING RETREAT CENTER**

**JANUARY 2016**

10-15 Holy Trinity Seminary Silent Retreat
17 First Holy Communion Retreat-St. Ambrose Wall
18 Heart of Mercy Prayer Group
22-24 Engaged Encounter
24 Natural Family Planning
25 Decaon Quarterly
25 Heart of Mercy Prayer Group
29-30 First Methodist Midland
31 CKRC Confirmation Retreat

**FEBRUARY 2016**

1 Heart of Mercy Prayer Group
8 Heart of Mercy Prayer Group
10 Ash Wednesday
12-14 Deacon Formation
15 Heart of Mercy Prayer Group
16-17 DOSA Priests Spring Convocation
19-21 Engaged Encounter
21 Natural Family Planning
22 Heart of Mercy Prayer Group
Group
24 DOSA Staff Mass & Lunch
25-28 Small Town ACTS
28 CKRC Confirmation Retreat
29-Mar-3 Tex-Mex Border Bishops

**NECROLOGY**

**FEBRUARY 2016**

5-Deacon David King (2006)
10-Rev. Leo E. Lavoie (1978)
20-Deacon Mark Reeh (2005)
21-Rev. Tom Kelley (2005)
22-Rev. Francisco Lopez (1994)

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**From The Bishop’s Desk**

**Plentiful opportunities for indulgences**

By Most Rev. Michael J. Sis
Bishop of San Angelo

We are in a Jubilee Holy Year, and any time a Jubilee comes around, it is a great opportunity to renew our understanding of the Catholic teaching on indulgences. Indulgences are often misunderstood. They are not some sort of discount into Heaven, and they are not a mechanical ritual that automatically confers forgiveness. They inspire us to live more fruitful and holy lives, and thereby lead us to a more intimate union with God.

The greatest indulgence of all is Jesus Christ, who was crucified for our sins. We accept his forgiveness when we make a sacramental Confession, and then we need to follow the road of purification by making changes in our action. An indulgence should be seen as part of a lifelong process of continuous conversion and ongoing rehabilitation of our human heart.

Through the Sacrament of Baptism, we receive forgiveness for our sins, and all punishment is remitted, or canceled. Through the Sacrament of Penance (Confession), sins are forgiven, and the eternal penalty that is due to sin is taken away, but there remain consequences for sins that those who have committed them must bear. These negative consequences of sin are traditionally called the temporal punishment for sin.

Our sin leaves marks on the soul which do not automatically disappear with Confession. We need to be progressively cleansed of these “residues” of sin and that is what an indulgence is about. It is a healing medicine for the spiritual wounds that result from our sin.

Every sin inevitably causes suffering for the one who has committed it. Every sin creates disorder within our human soul. Sin also disrupts our relationships with God and others. Even after we have received forgiveness, we still must undergo a process of purification and restore those disrupted relationships. This process of purification can take place either in this life or in Purgatory. Whatever part of the process remains unfinished upon the death of our body must be completed in Purgatory, before entering the full presence of God in Heaven.

By God’s grace, an indulgence brings about a necessary purification without the suffering that would normally accompany it. By the gift of the grace of Jesus Christ and the prayers of the saints, the painful aspect of punishment is mitigated or canceled by fostering its medicinal aspect through other channels of grace. (St. John Paul II, General Audience, Sept. 29, 1999)

An indulgence is the remission of the temporal punishment that is due for sin whose guilt has already been forgiven. Through an indulgence, God grants that, through the prayer of the Church, the temporal punishment for sin is either reduced or eliminated. An indulgence is either partial or plenary, according to whether it removes either part or all (Please See BISHOP/19)

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**Oportunidades abundantes para las indulgencias**

Obispo Michael J. Sis

Estamos en un Año Santo de Juicio. Cada vez que ocurra un Juicio, es una gran oportunidad para renovar nuestro entendimiento de la doctrina católica sobre las indulgencias. Las indulgencias son una mensa mal entendidas. No son algún tipo de descuento para llegar al Cielo, y tampoco son un ritual mecánico que confiere automáticamente perdón. Las indulgencias nos inspiran a vivir vidas más fructíferas y santas, y así mismo nos llevan a un unión más íntima con Dios.

La mayor indulgencia de todo es Jesucristo, que fue crucificado por nuestros pecados. Aceptamos su perdón cuando hacemos una confesión sacramental, y luego tenemos que seguir el camino de la purificación por medio de hacer cambios en nuestra acción. La indulgencia debe ser vista como parte de un proceso por vida de conversión continua y rehabilitación en curso de nuestro corazón humano.

A través del Sacramento del Bautismo, recibimos el perdón por nuestros pecados, y todo tipo de castigo es remitido, o cancelado. A través del Sacramento de la Penitencia (Confesión), los pecados son perdonados, y la pena eterna que es debido por el pecado es quitado, pero permanecen consecuencias, las cuales han de ser soportadas por quienes los han cometido. Estas consecuencias negativas del pecado son tradicionalmente llamadas pena temporal por los pecados.

Nuestro pecado deja marcas en el alma de quienes no desaparecen automáticamente con la Confesión. Tenemos que ser limpiados progresivamente de estos "residuos" del pecado. Eso es lo que se trata con una indulgencia. Es una medicina curativa para las heridas espirituales que residen en nuestro cuerpo. Inevitablemente, todo pecado provoca sufrimiento a quien lo ha cometido. Todo pecado crea desorden en nuestra alma humana. El pecado también perturba nuestras relaciones con Dios y los demás. Incluso, después de haber recibido el perdón, todavía tenemos que pasar por un proceso de purificación y restaurar esas relaciones quebradas. Este proceso de purificación puede llevarse a cabo ya sea en esta vida o en el Purgatorio.

Cualquier parte del proceso que permanece pendiente al tiempo de la muerte de nuestro cuerpo debe ser completada en el Purgatorio, antes de entrar en la presencia plena de Dios en el Cielo.

Por la gracia de Dios, una indulgencia produce la purificación necesaria sin el sufrimiento que normalmente lo acompañaría. Por el don de la gracia de Jesucristo y las oraciones de los santos, el aspecto doloroso de la pena se mitiga o se cancela por medio de
Author's Note
From Fr. Knick and Sandie Knickerbocker:
Fr. Knick and Sandie regret that we inadvertently submitted a preliminary draft of the December article rather than the final edited copy. Please excuse the omissions and errors.

Bread of Life Retreat
Holy Angels will once again be hosting the Bread of Life Retreat January 29-31, 2016. The retreat is Eucharistic centered and will be led by the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal. The retreat is for youth in grades 7-12 and all youth attending must be with a parish youth group. Packets have been mailed to every parish/mission. If you have not received the information or have questions, please call Lori Hines at 325-942-8192 or email her at lori@holyangelssanangelo.org. Deadline to register is January 22. Deadline to order t-shirts is January 11.

Spiritual Warfare:
A Woman's Retreat
All women are invited to “Spiritual Warfare: A Woman's Retreat” led by Dr. Margaret Schlientz and Sally Robb. It is hosted by the St. Stephen’s Women’s Organization and will be held at St. Stephen’s Catholic Church on Saturday, February 6, 2016 from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The cost of the retreat is $20 by pre-registration only and includes lunch. No tickets will be sold at the door. For more information, call Mary at (432)978-9311 or Gladys at (432)520-7394. Reservations may be made at St. Stephen’s Parish Office.

Rachel’s Vineyard
Retreat forthcoming
If you feel like you are being crushed by the weight of abortion pain, consider a Rachel’s Vineyard retreat, a safe place to share your story and find healing. The next retreat scheduled in the area will be in Lubbock, April 15-17, 2016. For more information, call Kathy Krile, 806-577-5912.

Concert for Life
Good Shepherd Anglican Church will host a Concert for Life, Saturday, January 23, 2016, with proceeds going to benefit the San Angelo Pregnancy Help Center. The concert will showcase local musicians of all ages, as well as feature a chili snack bar and silent auction.

Spring pilgrimage to
Holy Land, Italy

Texas bishops issue statement on refugees
Catholic leaders in state call for service to those in need — from all

Texas Catholic Conference
The Texas Catholic Bishops encourage all parties—including governmental leaders, political officials, and advocates—to avoid impulsive judgments in setting public policies regarding the placement of Syrian refugees. The horrors of modern terrorism are frightening, but they demand from us a strong renewal of our faith and our commitment to Christian teachings and the common good.

We firmly believe that it is possible to maintain security at home while also welcoming refugees. The Bible abounds with calls for us to demonstrate hospitality to those in need. In Romans 12:13, we are told that Christians should “extend hospitality to strangers.” Christ himself expressed praise and appreciation to those who expressed compassion, for “…I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matthew 25:31-46).

Our Catholic refugee agencies will continue to resettle refugees in the United States in accordance with our existing agreements and federal law. All cases will be handled in the same manner in which they have been handled in the past, and in agreement with established guidelines, which include sharing information with state and local stakeholders.

At the same time, we remain open to working with government agencies to ensure strenuous measures that assure public safety and security to legitimate refugees needing assistance, but in a way that balances our concerns and commitments to mercy and compassion.
Catholic high school board tackling necessary pre-construction steps

By Jimmy Patterson
Editor / West Texas Angelus

MIDLAND — With a target ground-breaking date of the spring of 2017, board members overseeing the development of a Catholic High School in the Permian Basin continue to remain optimistic at the incremental steps being taken — steps that are necessary, even vital, to the process.

Board president Wendy Holland said volunteers are currently working on a five-year plan while awaiting the arrival of a donation deed from Fasken Oil & Ranch, which donated the land needed for the high school. The as-yet unnamed school will be located at the intersection of Texas Highway 349 (Tom & Nadine Craddick Highway) and Holiday Hill Road, in far northwest Midland.

“We’re also working on funding our start-up expenses,” Holland said. “We need money to operate and so are developing a core group of people who share our ideals and have a love for Catholic education and a desire to see the Body of Christ at work.”

Holland said that with a Catholic high school in Midland — physically situated where it can also serve students in Andrews and Odessa — it will help the Church to offer the complete package, from preschool and elementary Catholic educations to Catholic ministries available at local colleges and universities.

Midlander Roy Ramirez, a parishioner at Our Lady of Guadalupe, says the work of bringing a Catholic school to the area is not easy, but needed.

“It will be well worth the sacrifice,” he said. “The benefits will not just be for my kids but for the entire area. It is time consuming, arduous and not an easy task, but I am committed to see this through.”

Other board members are Bishop Michael J. Sis, Fr. Michael Rodriguez, Sister Elizabeth Swartz, Albert Casias, Jim Cox, Mary Jaramillo, Jaime Ramos, Elias Reyes, and Gorge Salinas.

For more information or to make a financial contribution, visit the web site at permianbasincatholic.org.

Catholic schools need 'strong priestly presence,' says foundation head

By Beth Griffin
Catholic News Service

HUNTINGTON, N.Y. — A Catholic school needs "a strong priestly presence" or it "is going to move in a problematic direction," said Father Peter M.J. Stravinskas, executive director of the Catholic Education Foundation.

"The school effort rises and falls with the priest. If he's engaged, it thrives," he explained. "If he's indifferent, the best efforts get undermined."

The priest led a seminar at the Immaculate Conception Seminary in Huntington, N.Y., August 18-19 for priests from 13 dioceses. The program combined history and church teaching about Catholic education with practical advice on how priests can be valuable witnesses to the faith by their presence in the schools.

Priests should build time into their schedules to be with students on the playground, in the cafeteria, at sporting events and in the classroom. "You don't have to be a theologian to teach high school religion. If you can teach hormone-raging juniors and seniors, you can do anything," Father Stravinskas said. "But you have to be authentic, or they can smell it a mile away."

He added, "My greatest joy is being able to drop into a first- or second-grade class."

The priest is an important resource for the faculty and administration for pastoral input, theological advice, counseling, outreach to parents and grandparents, and welcoming new families. "We never enrolled children in our school, we enrolled families, to make the point that parents are the first educators of their children," he said.

The bishop sets the tone for Catholic education in a diocese and can influence vocations by his placement of priests, Father Stravinskas said. Most seminarians are graduates of Catholic high schools, he said, adding that
Focused commitment to Christ cornerstone of the consecrated life

Editor's Note: The Year of Consecrated Life draws to a close in February 2016.

By Sister Marie Malachy Griffin, OP

Dear God, please, no!! I beg you: listen, hear me. Thank you for thinking of me, but do give another Catholic girl this gift of a religious vocation.

I found myself praying this many times during high school and my early college years.

"Roses, roses, roses" will be your secret code. Realize that all incoming and outgoing mail is read. Use this code in a letter home if you decide that being a Sister is not for you. Your Mother and I will arrive at the Motherhouse to claim you, our beloved daughter, and bring you home," my Father told me as he and my family took me to Sinsinawa, Wisconsin, to begin the process of becoming a woman religious. How did I get from "Dear God, please, no ... to roses?"

During a retreat as a college sophomore, the director said he believed a minimum of 10 percent of the retreat attendees were being called by God but were not answering. Oops! I could name one! Then and there I said, "Okay. I'll go."

On September 8, 1959, after completing two years of college, I joined 94 other women who began the Novitiate as Sinsinawa Dominicans. A year later, 70 of us received the habit. In 1961, at the first Profession of the vows we were asked by the Superior, "What do you ask?" Our response was, "The mercy of God and yours." We were asking to have the sentiments of the heart of Jesus so as to seriously follow Him. All life is gift, all is mercy. God's mercy to us is immeasurable. And we were called to be merciful to all.

What is consecrated life? It is a way of being a Christian, recognized by the Church, whereby women (or men who choose membership in religious congregations) commit themselves to follow Jesus Christ in a very focused or exacting way. For the love of God they promise to observe the binding counsels (vows) of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

After 800 years, Dominican spirituality remains true to the vision of Saint Dominic de Guzman (1170-1221). The four pillars or core principles and goals are: prayer, study, preaching, and community.

Prayer opens us to the Spirit of God within and helps us to seek and follow God's will for us. Dominicans contemplate and give to others the fruit of their contemplation. Prayer was both familiar and new. The form prayers took changed with maturity, life events, learning, studying, and retreat experiences. During a sabbatical from my teaching ministry, I was given the unusual opportunity to be a long-term guest at Our Lady of Mississippi Abbey, where we gathered for the Year of Consecrated Life.

Religious, orders in the Diocese of San Angelo

Sisters and Where They Serve
Sr. Frances Alonzo, OSF (retired)
Sr. Leonila Torres Bermudez, ICAS (Our Lady of Guadalupe, Ft. Stockton)
Sr. Rita Campos, OSF (St. Mary's School, Odessa)
Sr. Mary Grace Erl, O.CARM (Our Lady of Grace Carmelite Monastery, Christoval)
Sr. Kate Fitzgerald, CDP (St. Ann's School, Midland)
Sr. Adelina Garcia, OSF (Associate Director, Office of Evangelization and Catechesis, San Angelo)
Sr. Elsa Garcia, CDP (St. Ann's Midland)
Sr. Marie Malachy Griffin, OP (Director, Office of Religious, San Angelo)
Sr. Jyothi Gumpula, CSA (Sacred Heart Parish, Abilene)
Sr. Delia Herrera, MCDP (CCA Eden Detention Center)
Sr. Tita Iglesias, OND (Holy Spirit Parish, Sweetwater)
Sr. Imelda Kensingon, O.CARM (Our Lady of Grace Monastery, Christoval)
Sr. Kathy Kudlac, OSF (Director, Newman Center, Angelo State Univ.)
Sr. Hilda Marotta, OSF (Director, Office of Evangelization and Catechesis, San Angelo)
Sr. Gertrudis Munoz Mendieta, ICAS (Our Lady of Guadalupe, Ft. Stockton)
Sr. Deborah Mumaw, OSF (St. Mary's School, Odessa)
Sr. Mary Michael Nerlinger, O.CARM (Our Lady of Grace Monastery)
Sr. Alicia Reinaldo, OND (St. Mary's School, Odessa)
Sr. Guadalupe Ibenez Santos, ICAS (St. Joseph's Parish, Abilene)
Sr. Mary Joseph Solis, O.CARM (Our Lady of Grace Monastery)
Sr. Mary Theodore Therese Sridhanyata, O.CARM (Our Lady of Grace Monastery)
Sr. Elizabeth Swartz, SSND (Superintendent of San Angelo Diocese Catholic Schools, El Paso)
Sr. Virginia Isabel Tadeo, OND (Holy Redeemer Parish, Odessa)
Sr. Elizabeth Villegas, OND (St. Joseph's Parish, Odessa)

Hermitages and Monasteries
Hermitage of Cherith, Rev. John Kuehner of the Holy Spirit
Mt. Carmel Hermitage, Herrim of the Holy Spirit

Sisters’ numbers shrinking yet becoming more diverse

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- A new report on U.S. women religious said that religious life is becoming not only more multiethnic but more international as well.

The report, "Understanding U.S. Catholic Sisters Today," said that of all women who entered religious life in the past 10 years, only 57 percent were white, while 17 percent were Hispanic, 16 percent were Asian, and 8 percent were black -- including both African-American women and those born in Africa.

Because of the growing numbers of foreign-born women religious, the report noted, Trinity Washington University recently received a grant to study and map the presence of international women religious in the United States and their evolving ministries in response to church and societal needs.

The report, released Dec. 9, was commissioned by FADICA, Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities, which represents about 50 philanthropic organizations.

It highlights the major findings of the latest sociological studies of U.S. women religious. The report was written by Kathleen Sprows Cummings, director of the Cushwa Center for the Study of American
Procedural changes for annulment cases announced

By Fr. Tom Barley, JCL
Judicial Vicar
Diocese of San Angelo

On August 15, 2015, Pope Francis issued two apostolic letters that have a significant effect on the annulment process. The first was Mitis et misericors Iesus by which the canons of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Catholic Churches regarding the nullity of marriage are reformed. The second, which pertains to the Roman Catholic Church, was Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus by which the canons of the Code of Canon Law pertaining to cases regarding the nullity of marriage were reformed. These two reforms took place on December 8, 2015 on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. While the process is not easier, as in the mere filling out of forms, the time it takes to complete the annulment process may be much briefer, depending on how long it takes to get witness-effective testimonies. The automatic appeal to the appellate court in San Antonio is no longer in effect. This will shorten the process by six months to a year after the tribunal’s decision of the case in San Angelo. Now in the ordinary process after the case has been decided at the level of the Tribunal in San Angelo and no appeal has taken place within the allowed 15 days after notification, then the case is completed.

In addition to the ordinary process, which has been how cases have been decided in the past, there is a new abbreviated process. The following factors must be present: a case is deemed by the Judicial Vicar to be an obvious case of invalidity due to certain circumstances in the marriage at the time of consent; both parties and the Defender of the Bond are in agreement that the marriage was invalid at the time of consent; and if all of the proofs can be gathered and the investigation process of the Tribunal can be completed within a thirty day period from the time the case was received by the Tribunal. When these three factors are in place, the case can be presented to the Bishop as the judge of the case. After hearing from all parties in the case and having reviewed the proofs, the Bishop can make the decision concerning the nullity of the case. If the Bishop decides the case in favor of nullity of the marriage, there is no appeal of his decision. The entire process must be completed within 45 days of the reception of the
Audit shows San Angelo Diocese in full compliance

SAN ANGELO — During the month of September 2015, the Catholic Diocese of San Angelo completed an audit of its Safe Environment Programs with auditors from Stonebridge Business Partners of Rochester, New York, an independent firm commissioned by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), to insure compliance with the USCCB Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.

In a letter dated November 25, 2015, Stonebridge Business Partners advised that “the Diocese of San Angelo is in compliance with the data collection requirements for the 2014/2015 Charter audit period.”

The Charter, originally adopted by the USCCB in November 2002, sets forth specific requirements which enable dioceses across the country to establish safe environment programs to protect children and youth from sexual abuse as well as other forms of abuse. During this audit, Diocesan Safe Environment Policies; Safe Environment Programs for church personnel, parents, and children; as well as procedures for assisting victims of sexual abuse were examined.

“As Bishop, I am happy to report that Stonebridge has informed us that, based on the analysis of the audit, the Diocese of San Angelo will continue its status of being in compliance with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People,” said Most Rev. Michael J. Sis, bishop of the diocese. “Since implementation of the Charter, and the first compliance audit in 2003, the diocese has been found to be in full compliance with all articles of the Charter in each audit period. I am pleased with the results of this audit and grateful for the hard work of hundreds of people throughout our diocese in 29 counties — pastors, deacons, women religious, and lay leaders — who provide a safe and sacred environment for all of our children and youth in the many programs and ministries we provide for them. Once again, this audit has given us a great opportunity to step back and see what we have accomplished, and explore areas where we can make adjustments or improvements.”

Since 2002 the Diocese of San Angelo has conducted background checks and Safe Environment Training for over 10,000 individuals who work with children and youth throughout the Diocese. In addition, over 14,000 parents and other interested parties have attended seminars that the diocese has presented on Preventing Child Sexual Abuse.

“The diocese will continue to move forward, continuing efforts, not only to provide a safe environment for our children and youth in our church programs, but also to raise the awareness of child sexual abuse and steps that everyone can take to help protect our children,” Bishop Sis said. “In accord with the Charter, I, along with the other Bishops of the U.S., invite all churches and agencies of society to join hands in efforts to prevent sexual abuse, especially of children.”

-- The Angelus

Our Lady of Guadalupe

Students in Rachel Vega’s religious education class at St. Mary in San Angelo show off their papal miters, which the class made September 27, 2015, during Pope Francis’ visit to the United States. In celebration of the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the class later made and wore Juan Diego’s tilmas.

Pope for a Day

Bishop Michael J. Sis, second from right, with Fort Stockton Our Lady of Guadalupe parishioners at the completion of a skit about Our Lady of Guadalupe. From left to right, Renee Ibarra, Bishop Sis, Katie Salmon, Uber Granado, Sophia Franco, Isaac Franco and Jared Lujan. The skit focused on the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe to San Juan Diego, instructing him to tell the bishop to build a church there.
The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Images from the Mass celebrating the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Dec. 12, 2015, at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Fort Stockton. (Courtesy photos)
Many thanks to the parishes of the Diocese of San Angelo. Pastors, associate pastors, women religious, deacons, staff members, church secretaries and parishioners from throughout the diocese consistently provided the West Texas Angelus with photos and stories of their parish in action in 2015. We are grateful and honored to help share your stories and events.

On this page, a selection of memorable images from 2015, including four priestly ordinations (at right in photo above, Fr. Bala Anthony Govindu, currently serving at St. Stephen’s in Midland, was ordained January 3, 2015 at Sacred Heart Church in Abilene; at right, three priests were ordained May 30, 2015.

Below, Bishop Michael J. Sis greets a young parishioner after a confirmation Mass at St. Ann’s in Midland; Below center, Bishop Sis stops for a quick bite following a long day during the papal visit to Philadelphia in September.

The young adult group from St. Mary’s in San Angelo joined Bishop Sis for a photo on the steps of the Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul in Philadelphia, and, lower right, Bishop Sis speaks to young people at Grandparents’ Day at St. Mary in Odessa.

Previously published photos by Jimmy Patterson, Karen Patterson and Alan P. Torre.
Year in Review

Francis in ‘15: Ecology, refugees and mercy ... lots of mercy

By Cindy Wooten
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — At the Vatican and on five continents in 2015, Pope Francis continued to encourage and demonstrate a style of evangelization that emphasizes walking with people, listening to them and showing them God’s mercy.

From the heart of the universal church to the heart of Africa, the pope showed how Christians with a joyful, living faith take calculated risks, engage in discernment and even debate, and resist the natural temptation to stay safe and cozy at home, letting everything move along like it always has.

On the 1,000th day of his pontificate, which began March 13, 2013, Pope Francis opened the Holy Door in St. Peter’s Basilica and inaugurated the Year of Mercy to help Catholics "rediscover the infinite mercy of the Father, who welcomes everyone and goes out personally to encounter each of them," he said at Mass Dec. 8.

With his gestures, homilies and speeches, the first 33 months of his pontificate led toward that door in a way very much like the early years of St. John Paul II’s energetic papacy prepared him to lead the church into the new millennium, calling Catholics to throw open the doors of their hearts to Christ.

Pope Francis’ call, building on St. John Paul’s, is for those who have experienced Christ’s love to throw open the doors of their churches and their hearts to others, welcoming them in with gestures of tenderness.

He showed a willingness to take risks to spread the message when he decided to anticipate the Holy Year far from the Vatican. Ten days before the jubilee began at St. Peter’s, he opened the Holy Door at the cathedral in violence-torn Bangui, Central African Republic, Nov. 29. Despite security concerns, the Vatican newspaper reported, he told the pilot flying him to Africa that if a landing in Bangui was not possible, "give me a parachute."

Mercy, the family and the environment topped the list of topics repeatedly and insistently discussed by Pope Francis and Catholic leaders across the globe in 2015.

None of the topics was treated just on the level of theory. Discussing concrete situations, though, set off a seemingly endless series of debates, including: Are there situations where justice and truth prevent some expressions of mercy and forgiveness? How far can the church go in acknowledging and welcoming families who do not fully live up to the church’s ideal? Is climate change as real and as dangerous as most scientists say?

Pope Francis kept saying he welcomed the discussion and debate, that it was important and a sign that the church is alive. However, there also were times, particularly at the Synod of Bishops on the family in October, when he indicated that some of the rhetoric had crossed the line. He cautioned synod members against reading their differences of opinion in a "hermeneutic of conspiracy" and against using church teaching as "stones to hurl at others."

The pope and synod affirmed repeatedly that God’s ideal for the family is based on the marriage of one man and one woman, united for life and open to having children. Without acting as if every form of modern family life was equally valid, but also without "demonizing others," the pope said at the end of the gathering, the synod wanted "to embrace fully and courageously the goodness and mercy of God, who surpasses our human calculations and wants nothing other than that ‘all would be saved.’"

Pope Francis, who was to celebrate his 79th birthday Dec. 17, said from the beginning of his pontificate that he would not be a globetrotter and did not particularly like to travel. In 2015, like previous years, his summer break was a "staycation" inside the Vatican and not the change of scenery in Castel Gandolfo his predecessors enjoyed.

Other than enjoying a restful August, though, he added more than 50,000 miles to his frequent-flyer account. He visited Sri Lanka and the Philippines in January; Bosnia-Herzegovina in June; Ecuador, Bolivia and Paraguay in July; Cuba and the United States in September; and Kenya, Uganda and the Central African Republic in late November.

Each trip featured visits to prisons, hospitals and soup kitchens or other places where Christian charity and mercy take their most concrete forms. He spoke in the halls of power, including at the United Nations and at the U.S. Congress, where he was the first pope to address a joint meeting of the Senate and House of Representatives. Whether soaked repeatedly by rain like he was in the Philippines or baked by the sun like in Cuba, he called on governments to put the needs and rights of their people first, and he called on Catholics to bend down with love and care to help society’s most needy and defenseless members.

In the document department, the highlight of the year was the release in June of his much-anticipated encyclical on the environment, "Laudato Si’.

Although forcefully insisting on a need to mitigate climate change and clean up polluted land, air and water, Pope Francis’ encyclical took a broader view of ecology and called people to treat all of creation -- including poor people -- with respect and concern because a lack of respect for creation is a lack of respect for God who created all that exists.

"The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth," the pope wrote in the document.

At the United Nations in New York, at U.N. offices in Nairobi and in speeches at the Vatican, Pope Francis urged world leaders meeting at the Paris Climate Conference in December to put the needs of the earth and its inhabitants - both present and future -- before desires for political or financial gain. The world is facing a clear choice, he said: "either to improve or to destroy the environment."

Pope Francis also drew attention to internal church matters, though he always said the priority was on a lean, limber and listening church busy ministering to the world rather than preoccupied with shoring up its own structures. With his international Council of Cardinals, work continued toward reorganizing the Roman Curia and revamping spending and budgeting procedures to ensure responsibility and transparency.

But the process hit a major bump in the road with the leak of confidential documents on Vatican finances; the Vatican court ordered the arrest and trial of five people in the case, including the two Italian journalists who wrote books based on the leaked documents.

And if mercy must be at the heart of the church’s mes-
Today you have the privilege of seeing something that most people never see—the opening of a Holy Door for a Jubilee Year.

All of us use doors every day. I invite you to think of the image of a door, where God is on one side, and you are on the other. Some people live their whole life with a completely mistaken understanding of that door. They imagine themselves knocking on the door to God, hoping God will answer. They fear that God has locked the door on them.

But the lock on that door is only on one side. It’s on your side. The only one who can lock that door between you and God is you. From God’s side, it’s not locked. You have the freedom to lock it, temporarily or permanently, and God will respect your freedom.

God continually knocks at the door of our hearts. Sometimes he knocks very loudly, and sometimes very subtly and quietly. He wants us to open up to his love.

Much work has gone into the preparation of our beautiful Jubilee Holy Doors, and we are all very appreciative of those who worked so hard on them. But for all of us, the first Jubilee door we are called to prepare is the door to our heart. First, we need to open ourselves to the mercy of God. Then, we must share mercy with others.

We also need to open the door to the Church. This includes making the Church a welcoming place. Every one of our churches should be an oasis of mercy. Instead of putting obstacles in people’s way, we must all seek to find opportunities to break down the obstacles that keep people away from God.

Jesus Christ told us that he is the door to the Kingdom of Heaven. He is the door to the Father. In the Gospel of John, chapter 10, he said, “I am the gate for the sheep … Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture … I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”

In this Holy Year of Mercy, let’s all take advantage of this tremendous spiritual opportunity to open ourselves to the mercy of God, to let go of all our personal attachment to sins that block us from letting God in, and to pass along the gift of mercy to other people. They should be able to see the mercy of God in the way we treat them.

As we begin our observance of this Jubilee Year, it is good to let the words of the readings in today’s Mass echo in our hearts. In today’s first reading, from the prophet Zephaniah, he declares in chapter 3, “Do not be discouraged. The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty savior. He will rejoice over you with gladness, and renew you in his love.”

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Mercy: Opening the heart to the hope of eternal love

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Doors of Mercy in the Diocese of San Angelo

- **San Angelo**: Sacred Heart Cathedral, 19 S. Oakes St.
- **Midland**: Our Lady of Guadalupe Shrine, 1401 E. Garden Lane
- **Abilene**: Sacred Heart Church, 837 Jeanette
- **Odessa**: St. Mary Church 612 E. 18th.
By Fr. Kenneth Doyle
Catholic News Service

Q. To mark dates, why are people now using C.E. (the Common Era) and B.C.E. in place of A.D. and B.C., which have been in use for hundreds of years? I was told by a Catholic teacher in our area that this change is intended to foster better relations with non-Christians. This is too "politically correct" for me to accept without further explanation. Please help. (Somerville, New Jersey)

A. The teacher you spoke to is right. The reason some have adopted the use of C.E. rather than A.D. ("In the year of Our Lord" or "Anno Domini") is to ease the minds of non-Christians who might object to this implicit acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord.

Depending on one's perspective, the new terminology has been viewed as an attack on Christianity or simply as an assertion of religious neutrality.

In 2000, the Southern Baptist Convention called it the result of "secularization, anti-supernaturalism ... and political correctness" and encouraged its members to "retain the traditional method of dating and avoid the revisionism."

On the other hand, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan (who was himself a Protestant) has said: "The Christian calendar no longer belongs exclusively to Christians. People of all faiths have taken to using it simply as a matter of convenience. There is so much interaction between people of all faiths and cultures -- different civilizations, if you like -- that some shared way of reckoning time is a necessity. And so the Christian Era has become the Common Era."

In 2011, an op-ed piece in the Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano blasted the British Broadcasting Corporation for abandoning the traditional A.D. in favor of C.E. "To deny the historically revolutionary function of the coming of Christ on the earth, accepted even by those who do not recognize him as Son of God," wrote the author, "is enormous nonsense."

Some critics of the change point out that many commonly accepted designations have a basis in religious beliefs. (They note, for example, that "January" comes from Janus, who was the Roman god of gates and doorways.)

To me, there is a certain silliness to the entire discussion. Even those who opt for the new designation as an ideological protest still adopt the traditional date of the birth of Christ as the basis for numbering the years. (If you really wanted a secular calendar, why not use the founding of Rome as the focal point of human history -- which is what the Roman Empire did for centuries.)

Q. The older I get, the more this is on my mind. I grew up in the Methodist Church but became a Catholic when I married my husband more than 60 years ago. We raised our children in the Catholic Church, and my husband passed away in 2006. Now, at the age of 84, I feel a strong desire to attend the Methodist Church of my childhood. I don't know that I really want to rejoin that church after all these years; I think it's more just wanting to go to their services a few times. (I have friends who belong to our local Methodist parish, and they would be happy to have me accompany them.)

What do you think of this? Am I just longing for the past, or is it a sign that I am not completely satisfied with the Catholic Church? I don't know that I will act on this wish (my kids would be shocked if I did) but the thought is very often on my mind. (Iowa)

A. To be a Catholic is to be committed to certain core principles of faith. Among them are the centrality of the Eucharist and the conviction that Jesus has entrusted to Peter and his successors the task of guiding the church, with the guarantee of doctrinal purity.

Since you have pledged allegiance to those principles of faith for 60 years, I would find it surprising if you were ready to forsake them now. In my mind it's more likely — as happens when each of us age — that you are experiencing a nostalgic longing for some of the experiences and surroundings of the past.

I don't see any harm in your accompanying your friends to an occasional Methodist service and perhaps be reminded of the religious enthusiasm you felt in your youth. But I would think it wise — perhaps even before you do that — to talk with a sympathetic priest who might help you to sort out your feelings.

Questions may be sent to Father Kenneth Doyle at askfatherdoyle@gmail.com and 40 Hopewell St. Albany, N.Y. 12208.

By Moises Sandoval
Catholic News Service

Christmas is a season of longing, when thoughts turn to home and family, often the images of a time past. Some of us, when we were in college, away at work, or in the U.S. armed forces, longed to come home to the loving embrace of parents and siblings.

But Christmas also has traditions, like the posadas, of visiting families who may be as close as next door but far removed from our concern and attention.

For many years, in our former home in Croton, New York, our friends Gaynell and Jim had a priest friend celebrate a Mass on Christmas Eve in their home to which they invited perhaps 15 or 20 families, ours included. It was the only time during the year that we got together. But that gathering gave us a sense of belonging that stayed with us throughout the year.

Just as the feast is the realization of the ages-old longing for a savior to redeem the world, in our dreams at least, as the carol about going home for Christmas ends, it perhaps touches in some way our longing for an eternal destiny.

Of course, Christmas is also a time when we think of family in larger terms. We think of the homeless, of those who live alone, of people in nursing homes, immigrants here without documents who cannot go home for Christmas, and this year of the hundreds of thousands of refugees from war-torn Syria trekking across Europe.

This is when our tradition of gift-giving to loved ones expands to those near and far who are most in need. The Beatitudes point the way, among the sick, the imprisoned, the hungry, the victims of injustice.

(Please See MOISES/23)

El regalo de tiempo para los que se sienten solos

Moises Sandoval

La Navidad es temporada de anhelo, cuando reflexionamos sobre la familia y el hogar. Algunos de nosotros, cuando éramos jóvenes y estábamos en la universidad, en las fuerzas armadas o trabajando lejos de nuestros familiares, anticipábamos el abrazo de bienvenida de nuestros padres y hermanos.

La Navidad también trae recuerdos de tradiciones, como la de las posadas, cuando visitábamos a vecinos a quienes a veces escaso saludábamos durante el año en la prisas de nuestros quehaceres.

Por muchos años en nuestra antigua aldea de Croton, Nueva York, nuestros amigos Gaynell y Jim organizaban una Misa en la víspera de Navidad celebrada por un amigo sacerdote. Invitaban a unas 15 o 20 familias, incluso la nuestra. Era la única vez al año que nos reuníamos, pero esa reunión nos daba un fuerte sentido de que pertenecíamos.

La anticipación navideña refleja el anhelo más profundo en nuestro corazón -- de algún día llegar a nuestro destino eterno.

Sin embargo, la Navidad también nos urge a preocuparnos por familia en un sentido global. Tomamos conciencia de los desamparados, los que viven solos, los internados en hogares de ancianos, los inmigrantes sin documento.
Family Life

Faith in a work of fiction fit for the Year of Mercy

By Carolyn Woo
Catholic News Service

That Jesuit Father Jim Martin is one of the most popular and prolific Catholic writers around is no secret. He has for many years been editor-at-large of the Jesuit weekly magazine America, whose West 56th Street offices are located directly across town from Catholic New York's offices in the New York Catholic Center.

During a recent phone conversation, I told him he is probably the hardest-working writer in the Catholic press, a remark he kiddingly offered to use as a future book blurb. With nonfiction books such as "The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything," "Between Heaven and Mirth" and "Jesus: A Pilgrimage" already to his credit, you wouldn't have to go far to finish making the case.

A good place to start would be his latest published work, a novel called "The Abbey" that I read over Thanksgiving weekend. The first fictional work in the Jesuit's repertoire stacks up very well, indeed. Though definitely not autobiographical, it combines some familiar themes and landmarks from Father Martin's real life in a well-written, engaging story that has its beginnings in a dream.

"The Abbey" of the book's title is the fictional SS. Philip and James Trappist Monastery outside Philadelphia, which happens to be where Father Martin grew up. He has also spent a good deal of time over the years at St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts, which he conceded was a basis for its fictional counterpart.

The street where Anne, the main character, lives is modeled after the one where Father Martin, now 54, was raised. Her tenant, Mark, who works at the abbey, lives a couple of houses down the block.

The story centers on Anne, who grieves the loss of her teenage son, Jeremiah, killed three years earlier when he was hit by a car while riding his bike with friends.

You'll have to read the 212-page book for the details, but when I suggested to Father Martin that his treatment of religious life as experienced by Trappist monks made this a perfect book for the Year of Consecrated Life, he

Innovation for the New Year

By Fr. John Catoir
Catholic News Service

Another year is at our doorstep. When you begin to think about the new adventures you'll embark on during this New Year, try to make Jesus Christ the centerpiece. To accomplish this, I'd like to share some thoughts with you.

Cardinal John Henry Newman comes to mind. Cardinal Newman was born in England, and became an Episcopal priest in 1825. In 1841, Newman began having doubts about the Anglican Church, and eventually resigned his post. In 1845, he was received into the Roman Catholic Church and was ordained by the Catholic Church in 1847. This was a courageous move, one that brought him a great deal of grief, but he attributed his strength through it all to Jesus, whom he proclaimed as his lord and master.

One of Cardinal Newman's main contributions was in the field of psychological self-analysis, rather than in theology. He saw doctrine as a living thing and compared it to the idea of human development. It's very important to understand him in the context of his devotion to the historical Jesus. Cardinal Newman believed that the incarnation, or what we understand as God becoming man, was the central truth of Christianity, and that Jesus constitutes the source of all spiritual power.

"Jesus: A Pilgrimage" already to his credit, you wouldn't have to go far to finish making the case.

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The street where Anne, the main character, lives is modeled after the one where Father Martin, now 54, was raised. Her tenant, Mark, who works at the abbey, lives a couple of houses down the block.

The opening scene, where a baseball crashes through Mark's window, was straight out of Father Martin's dream. The priest awoke with a start, saying to himself, "Hey, that's a pretty good story," and started to write it all down. At first, he thought he might have an e-book in the making. Then his publishers at HarperOne said they'd be delighted to publish a hardcover version, which they did in October.

The story centers on Anne, who grieves the loss of her teenage son, Jeremiah, killed three years earlier when he was hit by a car while riding his bike with friends.

You'll have to read the 212-page book for the details, but when I suggested to Father Martin that his treatment of religious life as experienced by Trappist monks made this a perfect book for the Year of Consecrated Life, he

(Please See WOO/23)
Making Sense of Bioethics

Argument that we euthanize cats, dogs but not those who suffer is not valid

By Fr. Tad Pacholczyk

Sometimes people will point out: "We euthanize our pets when they suffer, and they are clearly creatures of God, so why can’t we euthanize a sick and suffering person who wants it? It seems like we treat our dogs and cats better than we treat our suffering family members.”

The way we treat animals, however, should not be the measure of how we treat fellow human beings. We keep animals as pets, but we don’t do the same with humans. We use animals to make clothing and food, but we don’t do the same with humans. For all our similarities to the rest of the animal kingdom, we are aware of a fundamental difference in kind between ourselves and our furry friends. We are not meant to die just as animals do, or be euthanized as they are. The death of a human is a more complex event that has other important realities associated with it.

In euthanizing a cat or dog, an assessment about the nature of the creature is rolled up into our decision to proceed. Our pets seem to process the world around them mostly in terms of pleasure and pain, oscillating between these two poles as they instinctively gravitate towards pleasurable experiences, and engage in “mechanisms of avoidance” when they come up against pain or discomfort. Animals lack that uniquely human power to reason about, resign themselves to, and allow good to be drawn out of pain. Animals can’t do much else in the face of their suffering apart from trying to skirt around it, escape the situation, or passively endure it. Because of our strong sense of empathy, humans find it more emotionally acceptable to "put the animal to sleep," rather than watch it suffer a long and agonizing death. But it would be false empathy, and a false compassion, to promote the killing or suicide of suffering family members. As human beings, we have real moral duties, and better options, in the face of our own pain and tribulations. On an instinctual level, we tend to recoil and do our best to avoid suffering, just like animals. But we are able to respond in a way that animals cannot, and even willingly accept our suffering, which is unavoidably part of the fabric of our human existence. None of us can completely avoid suffering, even if it may be purely internal, like the agony that comes from loneliness, isolation, depression, or rejection. Every person must, in one way or another, encounter suffering along the trajectory of life, and human maturity is partially measured by how we deal with that suffering.

Those who live with serious disabilities, through their determined and beauty-filled lives and example, remind us every day of the good that can be drawn from suffering. The way they deal with their struggles manifests the depths of what it is to be authentically human. It is precisely disability, with its disfigurement, impairment, vulnerability and dependence, that challenges us to grasp the outlines of our human journey in a less superficial way, and to value human life and protect human dignity in sickness as well as in health. Victoria Kennedy spoke to this same point when describing Senator Kennedy’s final months: “When my husband was first diagnosed with cancer, he was told that he had only two to four months to live. … But that prognosis was wrong. Teddy lived 15 more productive months…. Because that first dire prediction of life expectancy was wrong, I have 15 months of cherished memories. … When the end finally did come—natural death with dignity—my husband was home, attended by his doctor, surrounded by family and our priest.”

As human beings, we reach beyond the limits that suffering imposes by a conscious decision to accept and grow through it, like the athlete or the Navy seal who pushes through the limits of his exhaustion during training. We enter into an awareness of something greater behind the veil of our suffering when we come to accept it as an integral component of our human condition. We also give positive example, strength and encouragement to the younger generation as they witness our response to, and acceptance of, our own suffering. Our trials and tribulations also teach us about our reliance on God and the illusions of self-reliance.

On the other hand, if our fear of suffering drives us to constant circumlocution and relentless avoidance, even to the point of short-circuiting life itself through euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide, we can miss those mysterious but privileged moments that invite us to become more resplendently human, with all the messiness, awkwardness and agonies that are invariably part of that process.

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Rev. Tadeusz Pacholczyk, Ph.D. earned his doctorate in neuroscience from Yale and did post-doctoral work at Harvard. He is a priest of the diocese of Fall River, MA, and serves as the Director of Education at The National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia. See www.ncbcenter.org

Finding connections with others online

By Eric Rommel
Catholic News Service

Sometimes we swing between constant feelings of insecurity about our place in the world. We tell ourselves, "No one knows what it’s like to feel the way I do right now." Then we hear that everyone feels that way sometimes.

These two statements look like they belong in different worlds, but we know both to be completely true. We see the pain others feel and comfort them and tell them they are not alone. But when we encounter similar situations in our lives, we feel as if we're alone in that pain.

Emily Trunko, a 15-year-old from Ohio, is using the Internet to end that isolation. Earlier this year, she created "Dear My Blank" on Tumblr to give people a place to anonymously post letters that they never intend to send.

Some messages are simple: "Dear J, Your laugh is like the sun shining on my face." Other messages are full of hope: "When we make eye contact and you smile that amazing, lovable smile it stops my heart. I hope one day I will stop your heart as well." A few are heartbreak: "I wish you lived closer, but at the same time I'm glad you don't. If we were together, I'd just ruin it anyway."

It takes courage to talk about feelings. We’re at our most vulnerable when we reveal the person we are inside. Risking that pain is sometimes necessary to discover greatness and joy beyond your imagination.

As you read the messages on the "Dear My Blank" Tumblr, you begin feeling a closeness and kinship with people you’ve never met. Their feelings are universal, and so is the desire to keep those feelings hidden. By giving in to those urges, we do ourselves harm and cause pain in the process.

What would be wrong with telling someone you love their laugh, or their smile melts your heart? How much could you be lost (or gained) by being together with someone you like and seeing that misery isn't the only outcome? Keeping feelings inside and telling others they’re not alone are two sides of the same coin. When you tell others they’re not alone, you're speaking to yourself as well.

Trunko has dealt with teens online who are struggling with depression, eating disorders, loneliness, and a variety of other problems. She understands that it’s impossible to feel alone when you’re supporting someone else facing the same challenges.

She has tapped into a depth of human emotion previously left hidden. When we see just how similar we are, it’s hard to feel isolated. You start seeing words typed by someone else that you could have easily written.

One message from "Dear My Blank," demonstrates that universal connection perfectly. "Even though we're in different worlds, I hope our orbits cross, at least for a little while."
Catholic Voices

Demonizing others a poison unlike few others

By Fr. Ron Rolheiser

Virginia Woolf once said that life is what we see in each other’s eyes. Today, sadly, we rarely see each other’s eyes and we rarely see life either because we impersonalize and demonize each other through labels.

It is a terrible scourge, a moral failure, this labelling. A label renders another faceless, an amorphous category and usually, a hated one as well.

Through labels we set up faceless demons through which we can give full vent to paranoia.

A generation ago, we did this with communism and its corollary labels: Godless Russia, leftist, Marxist, Soviet and so on. In the face of those labels we could discharge every kind of paranoia and suspicion and we could scapegoat to our hearts’ content.

Thus, for example, we could justify building nuclear bombs and could hate in the name of God. (“We need to be protected from this godless monster!”)

Why? Because we were not hating actual persons, with faces, feelings, dreams, pains, families and children. We were hating a faceless monster, without eyes.

One wonders, as Jim Wallis is fond of asking, whether we would have had the same feelings back then had we been shown, regularly, pictures of Soviet families—mothers nursing children, grandparents playing with their grandchildren, husbands and wives agonizing over unpaid bills, lonely young children with innocent trusting eyes staring out at us.

Had we seen the Soviets in those terms, with faces, and not as godless insentient monsters, we might have had less appetite to build all those nuclear weapons. How do you plan for nuclear war when you are actually looking at human faces? But, having never seen their faces, we could rationalize every kind of paranoia.

All wars, ultimately, come about because we no longer look at persons, but rather at ideology and then create the appropriate labels by which to demonize people. Many soldiers, for instance, have commented that they find it almost impossible to kill someone if they are close enough to see that person’s face.

Killing is more easily done from a distance—with mortar shells, bombings and long-range weapons that strike a faceless “enemy” who is not actually seen. It is easier to live with ourselves when the people we have killed are faceless, “collateral damage.”

But this isn’t just true for war and that is my real point here, it is just as true within our church and civil circles: Here we disrespect, justify paranoia, and rationalize lack of elementary charity because we are, in the end, not dealing with real persons, but with faceless liberals, conservatives, feminists, male chauvinists, reactionaries, old fogies, New Agers, good-for-nothings on welfare, valueless yuppies, out-of-date patriarchal bullies, fanatical pro-lifers, family-value destroying radicals and up-tight fundamentalists, not even to mention a whole other category—geeks, nerds, slobs, neorotics and people with an attitude.

We need not give these persons the love and understanding the Gospel asks for because, thanks to the labels we have already given them, they are not persons at all but demons to be exorcised.

We live in a time of paranoia and hysteria, both of the right and of the left, within society at large. Simply put, there is a lot of hatred, disrespect, slander of others and distortion of the truth around.

Moreover, on all sides, it is rationalized on the highest moral grounds. How is this done? Through labels we demonize each other, strip the faces off of each other and, figuratively and literally, kill each other.

When is enough enough? When will we see the destructiveness and evil of this? When will we realize what this is really doing to us? When will we look at ourselves—and this congenital propensity to label, impersonalize and demonize—with some courage and honesty?

Despite loud protests to the contrary, despite our politically correct indignations, and despite our growing belief that we are morally coming of age, especially in our championing of the poor and the misunderstood, we haven’t, I believe, moved a moral inch beyond previous generations that we look upon for labelling and demonizing certain ethnic and political groups.

The labels have changed and grown more sophisticated, but the charity and respect haven’t increased an iota.

It is time to say, enough!

Ronald Rolheiser, a Roman Catholic priest and member of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, is president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. He is a community-builder, lecturer and writer. His books are popular throughout the English-speaking world and his weekly column is carried by more than seventy newspapers worldwide.

The challenge of Our Lady of Guadalupe

By Most Rev. Robert Barron

How wonderful that Our Lady of Guadalupe appears as a pregnant woman clothed in the sun! In the book of Revelation, Mary is described in just this manner (Rev 12:1). But we should not approach this symbolism in a superficial or merely sentimental way. The woman clothed in the sun and with the moon at her feet is portrayed in Revelation precisely as a warrior. Confronting her is a terrible dragon intent upon devouring her child as soon as it is born. Through God’s grace, the child is in fact delivered from danger, but the dragon is furious, sending a torrent of water from its mouth to sweep the mother and child away.

In the wake of the child’s birth, moreover, a war breaks out in heaven between the dragon and Michael and his angels.

The Lady of Tepeyac is a warrior as well. To Juan Diego she said, “I am the ever Virgin Mary, Mother of the True God.” In so saying, she was actively de-throning and de-legitimizing any false claimant to that title. Standing in front of the sun and upon the moon, with the stars of heaven arrayed on her cloak, the Lady was showing her superiority to the cosmic elements worshipped by the Aztecs. The gods in question were blood-thirsty divinities, sanctioning imperialistic war and demanding human sacrifice. Mary announced herself as the mother of a God who demanded no violence, and who instead took upon himself, as an act of love, all of the violence of the world. She was thereby effectively calling out the false gods in the name of the true God.

To be clear, in condemning the gods worshipped by the Aztecs I am by no means exonerating the Spaniards, who committed numerous atrocities and visited tremendous suffering upon the native peoples of the New World. Read the impassioned writings of the Dominican Friar Bartolomé de las Casas for the terrible details. Far too rare were Spaniards who were actually faithful to the God whom Christianity authentically proclaimed.

What followed the apparition at Tepeyac is, of course, one of the most astounding chapters in the history of Christian evangelism. Though Franciscan missionaries had been laboring in Mexico for twenty years, they had made little progress. But within ten years of the appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe, practically the entire Mexican people, nine million strong, converted to Christianity. La Morena had proved a more effective evangelist than Peter, Paul, St. Patrick, and St. Francis Xavier combined! And with that great national conversion, human sacrifice came to an end. She had done battle with fallen spirits and had won a culture-changing victory for the God of love.

The challenge for us who honor her today is to join the same fight. We do not sufficiently engage this great feast if we simply wonder at a marvelous event from long ago. We must announce to our culture today the truth of the God of Israel, the God of Jesus Christ, the God of non-violence and forgiving love. And we ought, like La Morena, to be bearers of Jesus to a world that needs him more than ever.

Bishop Robert Barron is an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and the founder of Word on Fire Catholic Ministries.
The Installation of Fr. Prem Thumma

Bishop Michael J. Sis, left, installs Fr. Prem Thumma as pastor of St. Margaret of Cortona Parish in Big Lake, December 20, 2015. At right, Bishop Sis and Fr. Prem with Deacon Alex Perez. (Courtesy photos)

OBISPO

(Pará 3)

fomentar su aspecto medicinal a través de otros canales de la gracia. (San Juan Pablo II, Audiencia General, 29 de septiembre, 1999)

La indulgencia es la remisión de la pena temporal que se debe por el pecado cuya culpabilidad ya ha sido perdonada. A través de una indulgencia, Dios concede que, a través de la oración de la Iglesia, la pena temporal por los pecados se reduce o se elimina. La indulgencia es parcial o plenaria, según si se elimina una parte o la totalidad de la pena temporal debida por los pecados.

De acuerdo con la enseñanza de la Iglesia, las cuatro condiciones normales para recibir la indulgencia plenaria son los siguientes: (1) verdaderamente arrepentirnos de nuestros pecados con la exclusión de todo afecto a cualquier pecado; (2) Confesión sacramental; (3) la recepción de la Eucaristía; y (4) la oración por las intenciones del Papa. Un miembro de la Iglesia que ha cumplido esas condiciones puede adquirir una indulgencia plenaria mediante la realización de cualquiera de las diversas acciones particulares que la Iglesia ha designado para la indulgencia plenaria.

La indulgencia se puede obtener para uno mismo o para aquellos que ha fallecido, pero no se puede aplicar a otras personas que viven en la tierra. Para poder obtener una indulgencia, uno debe estar en estado de gracia por lo menos al final de las obras prescritas.

Una indulgencia plenaria puede adquirirse varias veces durante el año, pero no más de una vez en el transcurso de un año. Una sola Confesión sacramental es suficiente para ganar varias indulgencias plenarias. Con una sola Comunión Eucarística y una oración por las intenciones del Papa sólo se gana una indulgencia plenaria.

Es apropiado, pero no necesario, que la recepción de la Comunión y la oración por las intenciones del Papa se lleven a cabo en el mismo día de la acción indulgenciada. Es suficiente que la Confesión sacramental, la recepción de la Comunión, y la oración por las intenciones del Papa se lleven a cabo dentro de varios días antes o después de la acción indulgenciada.

Si una persona realiza una acción que se ha dado en la Confesión como una penitencia sacramental, y que también es una acción indulgenciada, se puede, al mismo tiempo, tanto satisfacer la penitencia como también ganar la indulgencia.

En Misericordiae Vultus, 22, el Papa Francisco explica las indulgencias maravillosamente. Él dice: “el perdón de Dios no conoce límites... Dios está siempre disponible al perdón y nunca se cansa de ofrecerlo... No obstante el perdón, llevamos en nuestra vida las contradicciones que son consecuencia de nuestros pecados. En el sacramento de la Reconciliación Dios perdonan los pecados, que realmente quedan cancelados; y sin embargo, la huella negativa que los pecados dejan en nuestros comportamientos y en nuestros pensamientos permanece... la misericordia de Dios... se transforma en indulgencia del Padre que a través de la Esposa de Cristo, su Iglesia, alcanza al pecador perdonado y lo libera de todo residuo, consecuencia del pecado.”

¿Cómo se relacionan las indulgencias a un Año Jubilar? Hay un montón de indulgencias plenarias y parciales las cuales se pueden ganar en cualquier año, sea un Jubileo o no. Sin embargo, en cada Año Jubilar, el Papa declara acciones particulares las cuales pueden transmitir una indulgencia plenaria, cuando se llevan a cabo junto con las cuatro condiciones normales antes mencionadas.

En una carta que escribió el 1 de septiembre de 2015, el Papa Francisco dijo que la indulgencia jubilar puede ser recibida en este Año Jubilar de la Misericordia en una variedad de maneras. La forma más común es hacer una peregrinación a una de las Puertas Santas como una señal de un fuerte deseo de conversión interior.

En la Diócesis de San Ángelo, yo he designado cuatro Puertas Santas del Jubileo. Son en la Catedral del Sagrado Corazón en San Ángelo, el Santuario de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe en Midland, la Parroquia de Santa María en Odessa, y la Capilla de Adoración Eucarística en la Parroquia del Sagrado Corazón en Abilene. La designación de estas cuatro Puertas Santas y la habilidad de recibir la indulgencia plenaria en sus locales terminarán el 20 de noviembre de 2016, a la conclusión del Año Jubilar de la Misericordia.

El Papa Francisco dijo que es importante que nuestras visitas a la Puerta Santa se vinculen al Sacramento de la Reconciliación y de la celebración de la Santa Eucaristía con una reflexión sobre la misericordia. También es necesario orar por las intenciones del Papa rezando la Profesión de Fe.

Otra forma en que la indulgencia puede ser obtenida en el Año de la Misericordia es en el caso de los ancianos y los que no pueden salir de sus casas. Ellos podrán obtener la indulgencia jubilar al vivir su enfermedad y el sufrimiento con fe y esperanza gozosa, o por medio de recibir la Comunión, o por medio de asistir a Misa en cualquier lugar, incluso a través de la televisión u otros medios de comunicación.

El Santo Padre también dice que el encarcelado puede recibir la indulgencia jubilar ya sea visitando la capilla de su prisión o dirigiendo sus pensamientos y oraciones a Dios Padre cuando cruza el umbral de su celda, el cual es simbólico de pasar por una Puerta Santa.

En la misma carta del 1 de septiembre, el Papa Francisco continuó diciendo que cada vez que un miembro de la Iglesia lleva a cabo personalmente una o más de las obras corporales y espirituales de misericordia en este Año Jubilar de la Misericordia, él o ella seguramente obtendrá la indulgencia jubilar.

En recibir las indulgencias, no debemos tener la idea de que las hayamos merecido. Las acciones que tomamos son una expresión de nuestra disponibilidad para recibir el don inmerecido de la gracia de Dios. El poder de la gracia de Dios es infinitamente más grande que todos nuestros esfuerzos. El propósito de la enseñanza sobre la indulgencia jubilar es el de permitir que nuestra celebración del Año Santo sea un momento poderoso de encuentro personal con la infinita misericordia de Dios.
FR. ROMANUS

(From 2)

accident in January 2010. The accident occurred when the gas pedal on his vehicle became stuck, causing him to accelerate, leave the road and roll several times. Initially treated and released, Fr. Romanus was later rushed to a hospital in San Angelo where doctors performed surgery to relieve pressure on his brain.

Fr. Romanus’ love of life and his faith were contagious.

Fr. Onyekozuru said, “Fr. Romanus and my dad were buddies, they grew up together and sang in the same church choir. He was a member of my family before I was even born. He has been instrumental in guiding me in many ways. His sincere, contagious laughter could wake up a gloomy heart. I could not have asked for a better spiritual father, mentor, big brother and friend in my vocation’s journey.”

Fr. Romanus’ death is the third passing of a Diocese of San Angelo priest in 2015. Msgr. James Plagens, who served St. Ann’s-Midland on senior status, died April 17, 2015, after 49 years in the priesthood. James S. Kaston, who served the diocese from 1977 to 1990 at churches in Junction, McCamey, Brady, and Melvin, died Monday, December 14, 2015. He left active priestly ministry in 1990 and was living in San Antonio.

Although he was incardinated in the Diocese of San Angelo, Fr. Romanus never forgot his homeland. He returned often to visit family and friends.

“Fr. Romanus requested that his body be returned to his home Diocese of Okigwe for burial, and we will honor that request,” said San Angelo Bishop Michael J. Sis. “In his early years, he knew the tremendous hardships of the Biafran War in Nigeria. He and his only brother, Dominic, were orphans. Despite the many challenges of life in this world, Fr. Romanus lived with a joyful spirit. It was a blessing to be able to take part in his 25th anniversary of priestly ordination in November 2014 in Coleman.

While his untimely death by natural causes brings us the pain of loss, I am very grateful for his years of dedicated service to the people of God in the Diocese of San Angelo in Abilene, Clyde, Eden, Eola, Millersvieu, Coleman, and Winters. We will never forget this enthusiastic and uplifting priest.”

Fr. Romanus was born to Lucy and Joshua Akamike in Iheje, Imo State, Nigeria, on October 30, 1954. He is survived by his brother and sister-in-law, Dominic and Blessing Akamike, and their six children.

He was ordained a Roman Catholic Priest for the Diocese of Okigwe in Nigeria on July 8, 1989, at St. Ita’s Catholic Church in Iheje. Following his ordination he served at the following parishes: St. Columbus Catholic Church, Nsukka; All Saints Church, Avutu, Obowu; and St. Ignatius Church, Umunumo, all in Imo State, Nigeria. Outside the shores of Nigeria, he served at Holy Spirit Parish in Brisbane, Australia and Good Shepherd Parish in Auckland, New Zealand.

In July 2000, he entered the Diocese of San Angelo. In 2008, he was incardinated in the Diocese of San Angelo and served at the following parishes: Sacred Heart Church in Abilene, Sts. Joachim & Ann Church in Clyde; St. Charles Church in Eden; St. Phillip Church in Eola; Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Millersvieu; Sacred Heart Church in Coleman; and Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Winters.

In addition to his parish assignments he served on various councils and boards including the Diocesan Presbyteral Council. He earned a Masters Degree in Counseling and Psychology from Angelo State University. He studied Social and Behavioral Sciences in Capella University, Minnesota, and earned a PhD in General Psychology.

THE WAY

(From 2)

community. The response and support has been phenomenal. There is a definite need for this type facility.”

More than $7 million — roughly half of the needed start-up expenses — has been raised through foundations and private donors through 2015.

The Way will also be a go-to site for couples who may not have a church home but who want to marry in a church setting. Kara Harris, who serves on The Way’s advisory board and is the Coordinator of The Relationship Center and Weddings at First United Methodist Church in Midland, expressed her eagerness with the opening of the center.

“This retreat center will be a tremendous benefit to the community of Midland and West Texas. I’ve had to travel great distances to both attend and help lead retreats. It will be wonderful to utilize such a nice facility right here — to be at home in Midland and yet afforded an escape to a beautiful oasis in the desert to meet with God.”

The Way will feature:
- seven casitas, accommodating up to 80 overnight guests
- The Hacienda will feature a spacious living room, modern kitchen, indoor/outdoor dining, and five bed-

rooms;
- a chapel, which will seat 150;
- a commercial kitchen with seating for 150.

Organizers’ research shows The Way will host 3,500 visitors in just its first year of operation, and eventually 8,000 per year.

“With other retreat centers in the area, there has been an advance scheduling requirement of 8-12 months,” Fralin said. “With 150 churches and 200 businesses in the area, we will certainly fill a need of our faith-based and business communities.”

Organizers have targeted Fall 2017 for the opening of The Way.
ORDERS

(From 6)

the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel
Rev. Fabian Maria of Jesus Crucified, O.CARM., Prior.
Rev. Martin Mary of the Blessed Sacrament, O.CARM.
Brother Alan Tian Le, Bro. Augustine Mary of the
Mother of God, O.CARM.; Bro John David of the Holy
Cross, O.CARM.; Bro. Joseph Mary of the Holy Rosary,
O.CARM.

Our Lady of Graces Carmelite Monastery, Rev. Anthony
Sloan, chaplain (Sisters listed above).

Religious Orders Serving in the Diocese of San
Angelo

PRIESTS
C.P.P.S. -- Precious Blood Fathers
O.CARM. -- The Carmelites
CSI -- Carmelites of Mary Immaculate
MSP -- Missionary Servants of the Word

CONGREGATIONS OF WOMEN
ICAS -- Institute of the Coadjudators of the Social
Apostolate
O.CARM. -- The Carmelites
CSA -- Catechetical Sisters of the Arogyamatha
CDP -- Congregation of Divine Providence
MCDP -- Missionary Catechists of Divine Providence
OP -- Sinsinawa Dominicans
OND -- Oblates of Notre Dame
OSF -- School Sisters of St. Francis
OSF -- St. Francis Mission Community

NUMBERS

(From 6)

Catholicism at the University of Notre Dame. The findings "help illuminate
present realities of U.S. women's religious life," the report said, "and point
toward priorities that will help ensure a vibrant future."

Two aspects of U.S. religious life
today, according to the report, have not
changed: the increasing average age of
women religious and their declining
numbers.

"Only 9 percent of religious sisters are
younger than 60; more than two-thirds of
women and men vowed religious are
older than 65," the report said.

"Women's religious life is presently
completing a fifth consecutive decade of
decline," it added. "The number of U.S.
sisters has decreased by 72.5 percent in
the last 49 years, and while there are
recent signs that the pace of decline has
slowed, there is nothing suggesting that is likely to be reversed."

At the same time, "the most encour-
gaging conclusion drawn from recent studies of U.S. Catholic sisters is that ... many U.S. Catholic women are still drawn to
religious life," the report said. Research
shows that "while there is a great deal of
concern about the future of individual
communities and ministries, the majority
of sisters remain optimistic about religious life," it added.

The report placed the figure of women religious in the United States today at
roughly 50,000 -- about the same num-er as there had been in 1939, when U.S.
population numbers were lower but
vocations were on an upswing. Crowded
novitiate's "and overflowing convents" in
the mid-20th century were an "anomaly,"
it noted.

"Decreased contact with sisters not
only reduces the number of women
entering religious life, but also may
make adjusting to religious life more dif-
cult for those who do enter. Increasing
sisters' contact with nonmembers should
be a priority," the report said.

CONSECRATED

(From 6)

communal prayer seven times each day.
Private prayer times were determined by
each Sister's work schedule.

For Dominicans, the purpose of study is
to seek the truth through dialog, questions,
and consultation, as well as through reading
and learning from others. The Sinsinawa
Dominicans provided many opportunities
for enrichment study and degree study.
The community made sure I was well-pre-
pared for ministry.

The founder of the Sinsinawa congrega-
tion was an Italian Dominican, Father
Samuel Charles Mazzuchelli, OP. He expec-
ed the Sisters to go where the work was
great and difficult. San Angelo qualified.
Members of the Order are committed to
preaching the Word of God, living it, and by
encouraging others to live gospel values
daily. We live the gospel through service to
others. Dominicans preach in a variety of
ways -- in campus and parish ministry and
social work and health care, as well as
through teaching and as writers, artists, and
spiritual directors. Whatever method the
preaching employs, the goal is to model
God's love and justice.

The fourth pillar, community, is an invita-
tion to communion as it awakens us to our
solidarity with all our brothers and sisters.
Today community can mean Sisters living
in large groups, such as at the Motherhouse,
or in the Critical Care Villa. In these days of
shrinking numbers, it can also mean forming
a regional community with Sisters who live
in the same city or same state, but different
homes. We create community wherever we
serve.

In the final analysis, relationship is at the
heart of everything: relationship with our
God, our Sisters, families, with those with
whom and to whom we minister, and with the
world family. The author of the Acts of the
Apostles says, "And all who shared the faith
owned everything in common. They sold
their goods and possessions and distributed
the proceeds among themselves according to
what each one needed." (Acts 2:44-45)

Dear God, there are no words to adequately
thank you for the incredible gift of your call
to consecrated life. It has been a challenge,
but also beautiful and fulfilling. Your Grace
has sustained me. Never once have I ever
considered writing the secret code in a letter.

For those interested in learning more about
religious life, especially Sinsinawa
Dominican life, I invite you to visit
www.sinsinawa.org.

Sister Malachy Griffin is the Director of
the Office of Religious in the Diocese of San
Angelo.

FRANCIS

(From 11)

sage, "synodality" — walking together —
must mark its internal relationships, he said.
The themes of synodality and collegiality
have been present since the beginning of
Pope Francis' pontificate and featured in his
exhortation, "Evangelii Gaudium," published
in November 2013. But he developed the
notions further this year, particularly when
marking the 50th anniversary of the Synod
of Bishops.

"The journey of synodality is the journey
that God wants from his church in the third
millennium," the pope said Oct. 17. "A syn-
odal church is a listening church, aware that
listening is more than hearing. It is a recipro-
cal listening in which each one has some-
thing to learn."

In a synodal church, he insisted, leadership
is not about power, but about service. "We
must never forget: for the disciples of Jesus
— yesterday, today and forever — the only
authority is the authority of service; the only
power is the power of the cross," he said.

And the cross, he said opening the Year of
Mercy, is the clearest sign of God's mercy,
love and willingness to forgive sinners.
(From 2)

Gifts with their church friends.

It's been that way since 2003 when the International Rescue Committee opened a satellite office in Abilene. Since 2003, the IRC has resettled about 100 refugees a year, mostly from African nations, in Abilene. Many have found welcoming places to worship, particularly those who grew up in the Catholic tradition.

Abilene is home to four Catholic parishioners and all of them, along with the St. Vincent de Paul Society, reach out to refugees. In fact, the Rev. Bob Bush at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Abilene says his church has earned the reputation as "the most multi-cultural of any parish in the diocese," thanks in part to the refugees who attend.

One woman at Sacred Heart, Ngozika Ughanze, is not a refugee but a native of Nigeria. She is a teacher at Lee Elementary School in Abilene and also volunteers as an English as a Second Language instructor to help African refugees. She and other church members provide transportation for refugees in Abilene and offer other support as needed.

"We try to get them involved in church" as quickly as possible, Ughanze said.

On a Sunday afternoon in December, about two dozen of the 100 or so refugees at Holy Family Catholic Church gathered after Mass for activities. The children colored on sheets of paper provided. Children and parents alike enjoyed the refreshments.

Two couples who currently help the refugees at the church feel part of the family are Judie and Doug Eichorst and Marc Ntibandetse and Mia Gatoni. Marc and Mia, both from Burundi, are not refugees but assist refugees who attend Holy Family. They were living in the Dallas-Fort Worth area when they decided it was too big.

"That's how we came to Abilene," Mia said.

When they arrived, they found hundreds of refugees, many from Burundi, living in the city. They joined Holy Family Catholic Church and one day noticed a sign-up sheet for people who wanted to help refugees attending the church. They signed up and now both assist. Their children, Mirore, 3, and Muco, 4, immediately fit right in with the other children at the church. Even though Mia isn't a refugee, she understands how difficult it can be for someone from a different country and culture to assimilate. She and her husband and children found a community to fit into at Holy Family.

"That's something that makes me feel very good," Mia said.

When refugees first began arriving in Abilene 12 years ago, Holy Family Deacon Gary Rhodes and his wife, Suzanne, took notice and realized they should welcome the strangers to the church. Later, Terry and Mary Kossbiel began helping. And now, Doug and Judie Eichorst and Marc Ntibandetse and Mia Gatoni are assisting.

"It's been a real joy working with them," Judie said.

Their involvement began by offering rides to church, Doug said, and then taking refugees to job interviews, school, and other places. Now, they jump in whenever they can be of assistance in any way.

"It's been really a positive experience," Doug said.

SCHOOLS

(From 5)

Priestly vocations are robust in dioceses such as Lincoln, Nebraska, and Wichita, Kansas, where newly ordained priests serve their first assignment as high school teachers.

"It was short-sighted on the part of many bishops to remove priests from schools. The vocation crisis was exacerbated by their removal," Father Stravinskas said.

Parishioners must see the school as an integral part of the parish, not a separate entity, Father Stravinskas said. "We ought not to be talking about Catholic schools only during Catholic Schools Week."

Seminar participant Father Christopher Phillips, pastor of Our Lady of the Atonement in San Antonio, said he situated his office adjacent to the school lobby and keeps the door open to encourage student drop-ins. He also said the church and the school are connected by internal hallways.

"Give everyone an opportunity to use the school," for meetings and functions, and keep the parish informed of school activities through the bulletin, Father Stravinskas recommended.

He cited the commitment of Pope Francis to Catholic education. "When the pope talks about his experience, he gets almost rhapsodic," Father Stravinskas said. The pope's habits of a lifetime were instilled as a sixth-grader with the Salesians, he said.

"Pope Francis obviously doesn't buy the argument that Catholic schools are a distraction from the periphery," Father Stravinskas said. Educators must be mature, well-balanced, passionate, prayerful purveyors of values and customs, as well as content, and consider their craft a vocation, rather than a profession. According to Pope Francis, consistency and witness are indispensable factors in the education of young people, he said.

Vera Hough, a married mother of four children from Little Silver, New Jersey, urged participants to be "unexpected priests" in the daily lives of schoolchildren. Such a priest inspires by being present and sincere.

"You may never know the fruits of your labors as an unexpected priest. You will inspire others by your integrity," she said.

"Be faithful to the magisterium. Be yourself. Be ecumenical, but always faithful. You will nourish hearts, lighten heavy loads and foster healthy, Christian families."

CHANGE

(From 5)

Sixth, seventh and eighth grade students were divided into four houses named for patron saints: House of St. Bernadette, House of St. Blaise, House of St. Cecilia, and House of St. Jude. In the fall of 2014, the blessing of increased middle school enrollment precipitated the creation of a fifth house, House of St. Michael. The mixing of grade levels within houses is to create a sense of camaraderie and ownership, and to give the upperclassmen the opportunity to mentor and lead within each house. Each house is supervised, not led, by a middle school teacher. Our student house members elect officers, brainstorm the house activities, organize service projects, create prayer services, and schedule competitions and celebrations. Over the past five years, our house members have volunteered hundreds of hours when needed in our own school, in our parish, and in the Midland community. 1 Peter 4:10 teaches, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms." They have served willingly and humbly, knowing their personal abilities and talents are gifts from God meant to be used in His name. Our students continue to serve our school as kindergarten reading tutors and Mass buddies. They serve our parish by supporting the St. Vincent De Paul food pantry, leading the Feast of St. Francis pet blessing, and volunteering at the St. Ann’s Family Fair. They serve our community through their involvement with Keep Midland Beautiful, High Sky Children’s Ranch, and honor our community’s veterans on Veterans Day.

Our students have found our house system to be both fun and rewarding. Their enthusiasm to work and pray with and for one another, and to lead the school’s younger students with care shows our house system is preparing each middle school student to continue God’s work once they leave St. Ann’s, and to treasure the friendships created in the name of Jesus Christ and their House patron saint.
(From 7)

become, not sincere spiritual seekers, but rather perpetual spiritual samplers — happy to taste from the religious buffet but eternally afraid to commit. A perfect example of this is Reba Riley’s book, Post-Traumatic Church Syndrome: A Memoir of Humor and Healing where she describes sampling 30 religions before her 30th birthday; a spiritual quest set off by her religious parents’ divorce which caused her to discount and even resent the spiritual security she trusted in her early years.

Between Two Worlds

But why would divorce — especially if it is a so-called "good divorce" (characterized by low conflict and relatively good parent-child rapport) cause such disillusionment? Elizabeth Marquardt’s study of over 1700 adult children of divorce points to an answer. She found that even in the best of circumstances, divorce causes children to live between two worlds — Mom’s World and Dad’s World. When living in Mom’s World, kids don’t talk about life in Dad’s World for fear of upsetting mom. Vice-versa when living in Dad’s World. The only place these two all-important worlds come together is inside the child’s own head. No matter how much they love their children, the divorced mom and dad can do very little to give their children a narrative that helps their life make sense. The child must learn to do this for him or herself. Having taken on this incredibly difficult role traditionally reserved for adults, is it any wonder that these children are loathe to let anyone besides themselves makes sense out of life, the universe, and everything? After all, they’ve already been doing it for themselves their entire lives.

Likewise, in an intact family, religious rituals help bind the family together. But in a divorced family they often become one more point of conflict between Mom’s World and Dad’s World. In this scenario, religion actually becomes a burden—just one more difference between mom and dad that a child has to sort out for himself or herself.

Doomed?

Does this mean that all children of divorce are doomed to be spiritual wanderers? Of course not. But there is no question that divorce places an unappreciated spiritual burden on children. Seen in this light, it is not at all surprising to see an article written by a group of adult children of divorce appear in America Magazine opposing easy solutions for readmitting the divorced and remarried back into communion on the grounds that "children need...the church to stand with them and to speak the truth about what their parent or parents have done."

The bottom line is that a Church that wants to transform the culture and open hearts to Christ can never be soft on divorce. And the people who subscribe to such a faith could do much to save the world by turning their attention homeward and saving their marriages.

Dr. Greg Popcak is the author of many books including the new, revised and expanded 2nd edition of For Better ... FOREVER! A Catholic Guide to Lifelong Marriage. To learn more about his books, radio program and telecounseling services, visit CatholicCounselors.com

SAINTS

(From 7)

French bishops to support Arius. He did have to attend a third, but he refused to sign a pro-Arian document and was exiled to Phrygia (now modern Turkey). In 358, Pope Liberius capitulated to the emperor’s views leaving Hilary the virtually sole champion of orthodox belief in the West.

Rosemary Guiley writes in the “Encyclopedia of Saints” that Hilary used his time in exile to study and write. One of his most celebrated works is “De Trinitate,” a series of 12 books arguing that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have the same essential substance or nature. After a few years the Arian bishops feared the influence that Hilary’s writings would have in the East and pressured Constantius to return him to his see.

On his return to Poitiers in 360, Hilary traveled through Illyricum and Italy preaching against Arianism and making many converts. He received a hero’s welcome from the people in Poitiers. Guiley reports that the Arian persecution ended with Constantius’ death in 361 although the heresy remained strong.

Hilary then summoned all the bishops of Gaul to a synod in Paris and had them sign allegiance to the Nicene Creed, the doctrine issued by the Council of Nicaea in 325 in response to the Arian heresy. Omer Englebert writes in “Lives of the Saints” that Hilary’s perseverance and moderation purged all Gaul of heresy.

In his battle against Arianism, Hilary turned against the heresy one of its own innovations and strengths — that of hymns and he wrote some of his own. Englebert also notes that honor is given to Hilary for having softened Latin, making it more readily adaptable to Greek thought, and for the exact definition of the mysteries of our faith.

In character, Hilary was gentle, courteous and friendly, although his writings could be sometimes severe in tone. Along with “De Trinitate,” he wrote many other works including “Dy Synodis” and Commentaries on the Psalms and on Matthew’s Gospel.

Hilary died in Poitiers in 367 worn out by his travels, exile, and struggles. His remains were laid to rest there but some were later burned by the Huguenots. A final resting place is at the abbey at St. Denys.

John Delaney writes in the “Dictionary of Saints” that Hilary was one of the leading and most respected theologians of his times. He was declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius IX in 1851. He has also been described as the “Athanasius of the West” based on his defense of orthodox doctrine at the Synod of Bitterae in 356. St. Jerome called Hilary “the trumpet of the Latins against the Arians.”

His feast day on January 13 traditionally marks the beginning of the “Hilary” term (spring semester) at Oxford and Cambridge Universities and in the British law courts.

SANDOVAL

(Para 16)

tos quienes jamás pueden regresar a sus tierras, y, este año, a los cientos de miles de refugiados de Siria peregrinando por toda Europa.

Así es como nuestra tradición de dar regalos va más allá de ayudar a los más necesitados. Las beatitudes nos dirigen a los enfermos, los presos, los hambrientos y a las víctimas de injusticia, entre otros.

Quizás nos damos cuenta de que por el precio de un regalo de unos pocos centavos podemos comprar una vacuna que puede salvar la vida de un niño en un país en vías de desarrollo.

Tristemente, nuestra generosidad desvanece. No obstante, a veces vemos lindos ejemplos. Recientemente, mientras esperaba dentro de un taller, conocí a una mujer que me dijo que a menudo va a la cárcel del condado. Le tiene cariño especial a un joven abandonado por toda su familia. Aunque ella es pobre, dijo que de vez en cuando puede darle al preso algunos dólares para comprar algunos accesorios.

En mi vecindario en Connecticut, la agente de propiedad quien nos ayudó a buscar casa, cuida a un hombre que vive solo y quien sufrió una apoplejía. Aunque todavía trabaja, ella va a la casa de su amigo por una hora o dos cada día para cocinar y limpiar. Lo lleva a hacer compras, a la iglesia y a reuniones con su familia. "Siempre llevo una silla de ruedas en mi auto", me dijo. Gracias a ella, ese hombre puede sentir que tiene familia.

Recientemente nuestro gobernador, Dannel Malloy, aceptó a una familia de refugiados de Siria, quienes el gobernador de Indiana había rechazado. Indicó que no debemos temer de que un terrorista entre al país en medio de los refugiados.

Recientemente, mi hermano Antonio y yo visitamos a una tía internada en una casa de ancianos. La imagen más viva que nos quedó fue de personas en silencio, en sillas de ruedas en los pasillos aisladados. Viven un soledad fuerte, ellos con sus pensamientos. Un hombre me dijo: "No envejezca". Mi tía, por supuesto, mostró un gran gusto de vernos, especialmente a mi hermano, a quien no había visto por 25 años. Se nos hizo difícil despedirnos de ella. Me hizo pensar que estas son las personas que tenemos que tener en cuenta durante nuestro viaje de Navidad.
ANNULMENTS

(From 7)

The process is not expected to be the normal process of most cases and will probably be used on rare occasions.

Another significant change is in what is called the "competent forum." This refers to which tribunal a case may be tried in to determine validity. Now, a tribunal where the wedding was celebrated or where the petitioner or the respondent lives or where the most proofs can be collected can claim competence in a case. One significant change here is that now cases where the tribunal has no power to hear a case are usually decided by the nearest Ecclesiastical Court. The nearest court is called the "competent forum." This change is made to ensure that cases are decided in a timely manner and to avoid delays.

In the beginning of this article it was noted that the process is not easier. The most difficult part of the process is the writing of the story of the personal development of the parties and the story of the courtship and marriage. This is difficult because this often involves the opening of old wounds that people thought they had buried in the past. However, burying our hurts from the past never brings healing and peace. It only leaves us unsettled and causes other problems in our lives and relationships. It is through delving into the sore spots of the past relationship in prayer and offering the past to God while seeking healing and peace that many people who have found tremendous relief, healing, and peace while completing the annulment process. When people treat this as a merely administrative process that is what they get. When they treat this as an opportunity to "face their demons" while seeking the grace of God they find the reality of God's love for them and his eternal offering of mercy and peace.

To begin the annulment process, begin with prayer. Ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and for the strength to take each step in the process wrapped in the grace of God. Then contact your priest, deacon or parish office and ask for their help to begin the annulment. You may also wish to call the tribunal for advice or to answer questions you may have. Call us at 325-651-7500.

MOISES

(From 16)

Christmas therefore is the time when we are most likely to realize that a gift costing us a pittance can buy a vaccination that can save a life in the developing world.

Sadly, our concern for the needy often wanes in a short time. But there are people who set an inspiring example for us.

Recently while I was visiting an auto repair shop, a middle-aged woman cofounded that she regularly goes to the county jail. There she always stops to visit a young man whose family has rejected him. Though poor, as everything about her proclaimed, she said she can sometimes give him a few dollars to purchase incidentals.

In my neighborhood in Connecticut, the real estate agent who helped us find our home cares for a man who lives alone and was incapacitated by a stroke. Though she works, she goes to his house every day, spending an hour or two cooking and cleaning, takes him shopping, to church and to family gatherings. "I carry a wheelchair in my car all the time," she told me. Thanks to her, that man can truly say he has a family.

Recently, too, Connecticut's governor, Dannel Malloy, accepted a Syrian refugee family after the governor of Indiana rejected them. He indicated we need not give in to the fear that some terrorist will enter the country among the refugees.

Recently, my brother Antonio and I visited an aunt in a nursing home. The dominant visual image I took away was of people sitting in their wheelchairs listlessly, alone with their thoughts. And one man said to me: "Don't get old."

We live at a time of excruciating loneliness. My aunt, of course, was delighted to see my brother, whom she had not seen in 25 years. We had difficulty tearing ourselves away. It made me think that these are the people we need to keep in mind the most in our Christmas journey.

WOO

(From 15)

did me one better by saying that it would be just as appropriate for the just-beginning Year of Mercy convoked by Pope Francis, because of the compassionate spiritual counseling Anne receives from Father Paul, the abbot of the monastery.

I told Father Martin that I really liked the passage when Father Paul explained that he "liked helping people who didn't have as many invitations to see God in their lives" as the monks did. He believed that mothers and fathers, and doctors and lawyers, and teachers and janitors, a lot of them anyway, were holier than monks. "They had to make room for God in a world that often crowded out God," Father Paul thought.

By the time he had finished writing, Father Martin said he loved the characters he had created. He said Anne's questions about the spiritual life, and her relationship with God, which was affected by the anger she felt over the loss of her son, are experiences based on real life. "I tried to incorporate some of the struggles a lot of readers would have," he said.

Setting out to write a book that would help people feel more comfortable about their relationship with God, Father Martin found that telling the stories of his characters' lives was an effective way to accomplish that. "I had a great time doing that, being with these three characters, given to me by God in a dream," he said.
Images from the Funeral Mass of Fr. Romanus Akamike

December 23, 2015