Baby in a Manger

The Gospel of Luke for the midnight Mass of Christmas tells us where we are going to find our salvation and the peace that we all seek globally and at a local level.
— The Bishop’s Desk/Pg. 3

Artist finishes work

Midland metal artist Jonah LaMonica has completed a tabernacle commissioned by Our Lady of San Juan Church. Bishop Michael D. Pfeifer will visit the church for the tabernacle’s dedication Fri., December 9 at 5:30 p.m.

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Unto us this day ...

... a child is born

Merry Christmas 2005
Baby in the manger only way to lasting peace

By Bishop Michael D. Pfeifer

The Gospel of Luke for the midnight Mass of Christmas tells us where we are going to find our salvation and the peace that we all seek globally and at a local level: “and this will be a sign for you: You will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger.” The baby in the manger is the only way to lasting peace that we all seek for our individual lives, for our families, for our community, for our Church and for the world. On Christmas we celebrate the birthday of the Prince of Peace, and Christmas, his birthday, is a reminder of where true peace is found.

As we glance around our world this Christmas, and look at our own community and our families, we see how far we are from finding the peace and harmony the Christ child of Christmas wants to bring to all of us on Christmas.

Two thousand years ago many refused to believe that tiny baby born in a cold cave in the company of oxen, donkey and a few sheep, could possibly be the Messiah—the Prince of Peace.

They could not accept the cry of a helpless and docile baby boy was the voice of Almighty God, who came into our world to show us the path to peace. At the beginning, and still today, we are often blinded and do not recognize that the infant in the manger, the eternal Word of God, is the one who called forth heaven and earth from nothingness. It seemed impossible to the people when Christ was born that the same God who had worked such great wonders in creating the universe, should humble himself, so that in an even greater miracle, the Son of God would become a man, to live like one of us here on earth.

As we once again celebrate the birthday of Christ, it seems that we still refuse to accept the fact that in the small hands of that divine infant is the only place where we will find the secret of peace that we all want and pray for. Only in the outstretched arms of the infant in the manger is where we will find the peace necessary for human beings to live a fulfilling and meaningful life here on this earth. Instead of seeking for the peace that we all want in the infant in the manger, we often search for more modern recipes and ways for peace, which more human than divine, seem to ultimately complicate our lives and make our search ineffective.

Obviously, a world that trusts more in its own great technical accomplishments and intellectual advancements than in God is not able to understand the ways of God, the ways of the infant lying in the manger. God’s ways they seem are much too simple. It is true that two thousand years have gone by since the Prince of Peace came into our world, but even (Please See BABY/14)
We begin our Year of Reconciliation focusing on God’s mercy

By Bishop Michael Pfeifer, OMI

From much previous correspondence, all are aware that I have proclaimed a YEAR OF RECONCILIATION for all the people of the Diocese of San Angelo. In this special Year that begins with Advent, we are called to focus on God’s mercy and forgiveness which we especially celebrate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Penance.

I strongly encourage all people, especially as a family, to take advantage of the many opportunities to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Penance as we prepare for the birthday of Christ on Christmas. Jesus is the Prince of Peace and Reconciliation who brings us God’s mercy and pardon so that we can be reconciled to our God and one another.

Sin blinds us to the glory and goodness of Jesus. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation Jesus reveals to us the splendor of God’s forgiveness and the life of the Spemnos who are come among us in our lives. While I strongly encourage individual confession at scheduled times in our parishes, there will also be special Communal Penance Services during the season of Advent to celebrate this Sacrament.

The Advent Wreath also inspires us to live these special four weeks before Christmas in a spirit of repentance and reconciliation so that we can receive with new joy God’s mercy and love as expressed in the birthday of the child, Jesus. Wreaths have traditionally been used on joyous occasions as symbols of victory. The wreath

Co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord

A resource for guiding the development of lay ecclesial ministry.

By Bishop Michael Pfeifer, OMI

During their November 2005 meeting, the U.S. Catholic Bishops approved a statement, "Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord," which is a resource for diocesan bishops and for all others who are responsible for guiding the development of lay ecclesial ministry in each Diocese of the United States. This document is a pastoral and theological reflection on the reality of lay ecclesial ministry, and also an affirmation of those who generously serve the Church in many ministries and provides a synthesis of the best thinking and practices to support all those who take part in lay ministry for the Church.

"Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord" is a common frame of reference for ensuring that the development of lay ecclesial ministry continues in ways that are faithful to the Church’s theological and doctrinal traditions and that respond to the contemporary pastoral needs and situations of the Church and our culture. In this document, the U.S. Catholic bishops stress their strong desire for the fruitful collaboration of ordained and lay ministers who, in distinctive but complementary ways, continue in the Church the saving mission of Christ for the world-His vineyard.

I encourage all of our priests, deacons, women religious, and all pastoral leaders to study this important document and to help me, as bishop, implement what is being proposed in this document so as to better prepare and support good lay people - women and men -- who offer their service in ministry for the Church. To help all of our pastoral leaders become more familiar with this document, I am asking the Deans of the Diocese during the next
‘Your kindness a light of God’s love in our moment of need’

Dear Bishop Pfeifer:

Thank you very much for the four donations you’ve sent of $3,732.02, $7000.00, $7,332.04 and $19,096.00 for a total of $37,160.06, from the priests and people of the Diocese of San Angelo. I deeply appreciate your generosity. Your kindness is the light of God’s love shining in our moment of need.

Hurricane Katrina has brought great suffering to the people of South Mississippi. The hurricane tidal surge of between 28 and 35 feet as well as winds in excess of 150 mph brought about a catastrophe in our diocese. The tidal surge devastated the entire 80 miles of our coastline and communities along bays and rivers for miles inland. Severe to serious wind damage affected every town for 100 miles inland. Tragically, some have also lost loved ones. The task of rebuilding is immense, but the spirit of determination in our people is strong.

The American Red Cross has determined that 38 percent (65,000) of homes in our area have been destroyed and another 22 percent (38,000) have major damage. Thousands of jobs have been lost. Ten of the 57 churches in the Diocese of Biloxi have been destroyed or gutted. Several others were so badly damaged by flood waters and wind as to remain unusable until repairs have been completed. Five of our 18 schools have been destroyed. Nine of our rectories and two convents have been either destroyed or so badly flooded that all personal belongings of the priests and nuns have been lost. These few statistics give a glimpse of the suffering all the people of our area are enduring. With God’s help and the help of others, I know we will go forward.

Again, I thank you for your support and I ask for your prayers. I know prayer is powerful and all of us are relying very heavily on this spiritual encouragement. As people of faith we know that we are called to trust in the love of God even in the most difficult times. The faith of our people remains strong. The love of God, shining through your kindness, is further evidence of the love of God working in our midst. I pray that God will bless you, your loved ones and all the people of the Diocese of San Angelo.

Sincerely in the Lord,
Most Reverend Thomas J. Rodi
Bishop of Biloxi

San Angelo Diocese students chosen to sit on stage with Pope at World Youth Day

Submitted by S. Adelina Garcia, OSF

Paul Downing and Megan Crocker, two students at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth and parishioners from St. Ann in Midland accompanied Sister Adelina Garcia, OSF, from the Office of Education and Formation to join other pilgrims in Germany. They departed August 11, 2005, to Atlanta, Ga., and then continued on to Amsterdam. There they took a bus to Braunfels (Limburg Diocese) for “Days of Encounter,” Aug. 12-15.

We were hosted by local families in seven communities (Braunfels, Waldsoms, Solms, Huttenberg, Greifenstein, Schoffengrund and Leun). These communities are served by two priests and one religious. We visited the local cathedral of Wetzler for an ecumenical service and had a guided tour of the city followed by a picnic with a group from the Czech Republic. In the afternoon we departed for Braunfels and toured the city and local castle followed by a barbeque and games in Kurparktreff. On the 14th we participated in the Altenberg Festival which began with a walking pilgrimage from Solms to Altenberg for an open air Eucharistic Celebration at the Altenberg Cloister, lunch and music. In the afternoon, we processed to the tomb of the blessed Gertrud (a medieval Benedictine nun). On August 15, we departed for Limburg for a Mass with Bishop Franz Kampshaus and then on to Cologne.

The theme of World Youth Day, “We Have Come to Worship,” was fitting. Over 700,000 people took part in this pilgrimage to visit the Cathedral of Cologne, where the relics of the Magi are kept. Since 1049 the Pope has had a seat of honor in the staffs of the Cologne Cathedral. Bishop Zurek of San Antonio joined us. The following day we proceeded to Marianfeld for the Vigil with the Pope. This was seven kilometers with backpacks and sleeping bags. The young people of our group had been selected to sit on the stage with Pope Benedict! They were asked to wear a national costume. We wore cowboy hats and western attire and carried a Texas flag.

What an experience! This was a once in a lifetime opportunity to meet people from all over the world, to listen to cardinals lead catechetical sessions, to visit holy places and pray, to see the pope and experience our universality. We thank Bishop Pfeifer for the opportunity he gave us to represent the Diocese of San Angelo.

‘He ascended into heaven ... and is seated at the right hand of the father’

“In the Gospels, Jesus often spoke about coming from the Father, and especially in John’s Gospel, He talked about returning to the Father. He came from the Father in love to bring God’s forgiveness, compassion and care for God’s people, and through His time on earth to accomplish His mission of salvation. But Jesus also pointed out that this was just the beginning, because He promised that once He would return to the Father, He would ask the Father to send in His name the beautiful Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would continue to be with us throughout the world and make Jesus and His message present in a way that Jesus could not have been present if He would have continued to just live on this earth.

The mystery we are talking about in this small phrase is called the Ascension -- which is closely linked to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus not only rose from the dead to show that He was the Son of God, but to also assure us that we share in the new life of God’s forgiveness, love and hope through Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection as well as His Ascension into heaven where He constantly intercedes for us with the Father. His Resurrection and Ascension are a sign, promise and power of our resurrection and ascension when our bodies will also be taken into heaven. From His place in heaven at the right hand of the Father, Jesus is constantly asking the Father to help us, we who are God’s children, while here on life’s journey on planet earth.”

— Bishop Michael Pfeifer

John of Kanty

c. 1390 - 1473
feast – December 23

Greatly revered in his native Poland, this saint, also known as John Cantius, spent most of his life teaching at the University of Krakow, where he was a noted professor of sacred Scripture. He also spent an interval as a parish priest, reputedly forced on him because of academic jealousy. At the university, he impressed on students the need for moderation and good manners in controversy, and was famous for his boundless generosity to Krakow’s poor. A personal austerity contributed to his reputation for holiness: He ate no meat and slept on the floor.
**DIOCESAN DATES**

**Bishop’s Calendar**

**December**

- 11 -- San Angelo, St. Margaret - Mass at 11:30 a.m.
- 12 -- Mass of Our Lady of Guadalupe, 6:30 p.m., Sacred Heart Cathedral, San Angelo.
- 13 -- Presbyteral Council, 11 a.m., Christ the King Retreat Center, San Angelo.
- 13 -- Bishop’s Annual Christmas Party, all priests, sisters, deacons and wives, 5:30 p.m., Christ the King Retreat Center, San Angelo.
- 14 -- San Angelo, San Angelo Ambulatory Center - Christmas Mass, 11 a.m.
- 14 -- Bishop’s Residence - Annual Christmas Party for Staff, 6 p.m.
- 15 -- Advent Night of Prayer with all priests, sisters, deacon and wives of the San Angelo Deanery, Sacred Heart Cathedral, San Angelo, 7 p.m.
- 16 -- San Angelo, Angelo Catholic School - Sacred Heart Campus - Annual Christmas Mass at 8:30 a.m.
- 16 -- Eden, Detention Center - Christmas Mass at 1 p.m.
- 17-18 -- Parish Finance Council Members, Christ the King Retreat Center, San Angelo.
- 18 -- Mass, St. James Church, Sanderson, 11 a.m.
- 20 -- Christmas Mass, 11 a.m., Baptist Memorial, San Angelo.
- 20 -- Penance Service, 7 p.m., Sacred Heart Cathedral, San Angelo.
- 24 -- Mass, 9 a.m., 10 a.m., Tom Green County Jail, San Angelo.
- 25 -- Christmas Day Mass, 9 a.m., Goodfellow Air Force Base, San Angelo.
- 26-29 -- Rest and Prayer.

**January**

- 1 -- Mass for the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, 10 a.m., Sacred Heart Cathedral, San Angelo.
- 2-6 -- Annual Region X Bishops’ Retreat, Pat Guidon Center, San Antonio.
- 7-8 -- Reconciliation Retreat, San Angelo - Christ the King Retreat Center, San Angelo.
- 8 -- Reconciliation Retreat Mass, CRKC, 11 a.m.
- 11-13 -- Rest and Prayer
- 14 -- Priestly Ordination of Emilio Sosa, 10 a.m., Sacred Heart Cathedral, San Angelo.
- 16 -- Dr. Martin Luther King Ecumenical Service, Noon, Sacred Heart Cathedral, San Angelo.
- 21 -- Diocesan Schools Commission Meeting, 9 a.m., St. Mary, Odessa.
- 22 -- San Angelo, Knights of Columbus Hall - Pro Life Mass at 11:00 a.m.
- 23-24 -- MACC Executive Board Meeting, San Antonio
- 26 -- Mass celebrating the First Anniversary of Perpetual Adoration Chapel, 6:30 p.m., St. Margaret, San Angelo.
- 27 -- Mass honoring Santa Angela de Merici, 6:30 p.m., Visitors’ Center, San Angelo.
- 28 -- Knights of Columbus District Council Banquet, 6:45 p.m., Holy Angels, San Angelo.
- 29 -- Youth and Young Adult Encounter, 1-7 p.m., St. Joseph, San Angelo.
- 31 -- Personnel Board Meeting, 11 a.m., Diocesan Pastoral Center, San Angelo.
- 31 -- Presentation to RCIA, 6:30 p.m., Holy Angels, San Angelo.

**Christ the King Retreat Center Schedule**

**December**

- 8 -- Office Closed-Immaculate Conception Holy Day
- 9-11 -- Rachel’s Vineyard Retreat
- 12 -- Heart of Mercy Prayer Group
- 13 -- Bishop’s Christmas Party for Priests, Sisters, Deacons & Wives
- 13 -- Presbytery Council LUNCH Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament
- 13-14 -- International Priests Gathering
- 15 -- Catholic Daughters Christmas Banquet
- 17-18 -- Pastoral and Finance Council Seminar
- 19 -- Jan. 1 Office Closed for Holidays and Vacation.

**Chancellor’s Calendar**

**December**

- 8 -- Feast of the Immaculate Conception, DOSA offices closed.
- 9-11 -- Rachel’s Vineyard, Christ the King Retreat Center (CKRC)
- 11 -- Retirement Fund for Religious Collection
- 13 -- Presbyteral Council, 11 a.m., Pastoral Center
- 13 -- Priests, Sisters and Deacons Christmas Party, 5:30 p.m., CKRC.
- 13-14 -- International Priests Gathering, CKRC
- 17-18 -- Parish Pastoral and Finance Council Workshop, CKRC.
- 23 -- DOSA offices closed, noon, Christmas holiday.
- 24-26 -- DOSA offices closed, Christmas holiday.
- 30 -- DOSA offices closed, New Year’s holiday, Noon.
- 31 -- DOSA office closed, New Year’s holiday.

**January**

- 2 -- New Years Day observed, DOSA offices closed
- 7-8 -- Diocesan Year of Reconciliation Retreat, CKRC
- 7 -- Basic Formation, 8:45 a.m., St. Francis, Abilene.
- 8 -- Encuentro, Abilene Deaney, 1 p.m., St. Francis, Abilene.
- 9-13 -- Assumption Seminary’s Seminarian Retreat, CKRC.
- 10 -- Staff Mass, 8:30 a.m., Diocesan Pastoral Center, 8:30 a.m., San Angelo.
- 10 -- Dialogue with Christian, Jews, Muslims, 7 p.m., Sacred Heart Cathedral Gymnasium, San Angelo.
- 13 -- Confirmation Retreat, 9:30 a.m., CKRC.
- 15 -- Detention Center Mass, Bronte, 10 a.m.
- 19 -- Mass, Wallace Unit Prison, Colorado City, 6:30 p.m.
- 20 -- Staff Meeting, 11 a.m., Diocesan Pastoral Center, San Angelo.
- 20 -- Meeting with pastor, pastoral council, 6:30 p.m., Immaculate Heart, Big Spring.
- 20-22 -- Engaged Encounter, CKRC.
- 21 -- Youth Ministry, Justice & Service, 9 a.m., St. Joseph, Odessa.
- 22 -- Encuentro, Midland-Odessa Deaney, 1 p.m., Our Lady of Guadalupe, Midland.
- 22 -- The Church in Latin America Collection.
- 29 -- Encuentro, San Angelo Deaney, 1 p.m., St. Joseph’s, San Angelo.
- 29 -- Mass, 9 a.m., St. Ambrose, Wall.
- 29 -- Diocesan Seminarian Collection.

**Necrology-December**

- 1 -- Rev. John A. Pierce (1979)
- 12 -- Deacon Nester Perez (1993)
- 12 -- Rev. James Aaron (1999)

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**The Sacrament of Penance**

By Bishop Michael Pfeifer, OMI

On the second Sunday of Easter, April 7, 2002, Pope John Paul II published a new apostolic letter on the Sacrament of Penance under the title of The Mercy of God. The stated purpose of this letter of Our Holy Father is to recall some of the canonical laws in force regarding the celebration of this Sacrament and to clarify certain aspects of these laws and how they apply to this great Sacrament of God’s mercy. This papal letter brings out that in some places there has been a tendency to abandon individual confession and wrongly to resort to general or communal absolution.

In this important letter, the Pope stresses that priests are urged to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance whenever reasonably asked and at days and times set down for the convenience of the faithful, especially before Masses and even during Mass, where priests are available. The Pope points out that any practice which restricts confession to a generic accusation of sin, or of only one or two sins, judged to be more important, is to be reproved.

In this letter the Pope clarifies when general absolution might be used. The use of general absolution is clearly defined as appropriate only when danger of death is imminent and there is not time for individual confession or in cases of grave necessity. Grave necessity exists only when first, there is a lack of confessors to hear confessions in an appropriate way and time. Second, when penitents would be deprived of sacramental grace or Holy Communion for a long time -- never to be interpreted as a period of less than a month. General absolution cannot be justified, however, simply because of lack of sufficient number of confessors at a great feast or pilgrimage, or the desire to include a longer pastoral dialogue with the penitent, or due to the penitent’s preference of general absolution.

The Sacrament of Penance is the Sacrament of God’s mercy and forgiveness. In this Sacrament our souls are profoundly touched by God’s merciful and forgiving love.
Benedict's papacy: Running on all cylinders but still gearing up

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY -- Pope Benedict XVI's pontificate was running on all cylinders in November.

Seven months after the pope's election, the Vatican was humming with internal policy meetings, public conferences, document preparation and liturgical celebrations.

The pope himself, although he stayed mostly behind the scenes, held important private meetings with political leaders from Iraq, Israel and Italy. But he continued to cut back on the group meetings and speeches that consumed much of his predecessor's time and energy.

"It used to be that any group that came to Rome would have a papal audience. (Pope) Benedict has become much more selective, and I think that's a good thing," said one Vatican official.

As Pope Benedict fine-tuned the rhythm of his papacy, the curial offices and other Vatican institutions were moving ahead on agendas that, in many cases, predate the new pope.

To list just a sampling of the activity:

- At the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, a commission held another in a series of meetings on reworking liturgical translations in English.
- The Vatican's major pontifical academies sponsored a series of international conferences in November on a wide range of topics: the science and ethics of water distribution, globalization and education, and the concept of the human person.
- This year even saw "dueling conferences," when a bioethics congress sponsored by the Vatican's Pontifical Academy for Life coincided with an international conference on the human genome, sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers.

"It's all too much," Swiss Cardinal Georges Cottier said of the glut of meetings, speeches and reports. Cardinal Cottier, the theologian of the papal household, addressed yet another Rome conference in mid-November, this one on infinity as viewed by science and theology.

Practically all the Vatican-sponsored events were scheduled or set in motion under Pope John Paul II, illustrating why "papal transition" is a matter of many months, not weeks.

If Vatican activity was frenetic, the pope's own schedule was merely busy. Elected at age 78, he has pared back the number of audiences and activities inherited from Pope John Paul.

(See BENEDICT/15)
Page Turners for Christmas

If there’s a Catholic reader and a stocking to be stuffed this year... you may just be in luck


Gift ideas for the Catholic Reader

“‘The Making of the Pope 2005,’” by Father Andrew M. Greeley, and “God’s Choice: Pope Benedict XVI and the Future of the Catholic Church,” by George Weigel, offer two very different lenses through which to interpret the final illness, death and funeral of Pope John Paul II and the conclave that elected Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as Pope Benedict XVI.

Since neither Father Greeley nor Weigel is free from the sin of polemical rhetoric, both can be stereotyped as representatives of two dueling visions of the legacy of the Second Vatican Council. It would be unfortunate, though, if their books were read only by people who already agree with them.

Instead, it is helpful to think of these books as examples of two ways of doing theology, and in a less divisive church they would be appreciated as complementary rather than competitive. Weigel writes a descending theology of church, consistent with a high ecclesiology and a focus on the teaching authority of the pope, cardinals and bishops. Father Greeley, in contrast, writes an ascending theology that begins with a decidedly low ecclesiology; he is concerned less with the magisterium (the church’s teaching authority) than he is with the lived experience of laity and parish priests.

Father Greeley is an engaging storyteller with a distinctive voice and an affectionate pastoral eye. He discusses the conclave with the acute political instincts of a Chicago-born Irish-American, attitudes which some will see as irreverent.

Meanwhile, the pleasure of reading Weigel’s well-crafted prose is too often marred by an unpleasant triumphalism and his disdainful dismissal of dissent.

As one would expect from the author of “Witness to Hope,” Weigel gives in the first 100 pages of his book a concise and masterful appreciation of the life and papacy of Pope John Paul. Weigel writes, “One way to think of the extraordinary wide-ranging magisterium of John Paul II is to imagine John Paul’s teaching as a set of keys for unlocking and understanding the teaching of Vatican II. Every item on the council’s agenda... received an authoritative interpretation in one or another document... In doing so, he helped rescue the genuine teaching of Vatican II from the slippery hermeneutic of the ‘spirit of Vatican II’ and from the crossfire of the ecclesiastical tong wars.”

Father Greeley, focused as he is on the experience of American Catholics, is convinced that the encyclical “Humanae Vitae,” not Vatican II, changed the relationship between laity and the magisterium. He writes, “The documents of the council were moderate statements, but the implications of these documents suggested that change was possible on other matters, too. The legitimacy of change in the church was the revolutionary event of the council. Moreover, matters that were once taught under pain of mortal sin were no longer considered sinful... Arriving on the heels of such widespread destabilization, the reaction of the laity and lower clergy to the birth control encyclical created a permanent divide in the church between the Vatican and the lower ranks of the faithful.”

Father Greeley’s anger stems from a deep concern that the church’s “credibility as a teacher... has been eroding for the last 35 years.” He continues, “Credibility cannot be restored by force. In our times the only appeal the church has is the rich beauty of its heritage.”

Weigel’s biographical chapter on the new pope opens with a lovely “verbal snapshot” — “what an exquisite person,” he says — which he then goes on to prove in his careful retelling of Pope Benedict’s personal and professional life. Weigel offers a helpful overview of issues that will concern this papacy; his writing on the new pope’s theology of liturgy is particularly fine.

Ultimately, both books are about listening. Father Greeley believes that “church leaders must learn to listen, not only because it is sound Catholic doctrine that the Spirit speaks at every level of the church and that the leaders’ task is to discern the Spirit but also because if they do not listen, they and the followers will be passing one another like silent ships in the night.” Father Greeley comes to this honestly — listening is at the heart of the charm of the social scientist — and so is describing reality as it is, no matter how uncomfortable the conclusions.

As Weigel knows, listening is essential to much of the church’s life, from the attentiveness of a priest in the confessional, to the solemn mystery of the Eucharist, to the pregnant silence that opens for the humble person at prayer — and the opening exhortation of the Rule of St. Benedict. Surely we can trust in the constancy and efficacy of the prayers of that great saint for the pope who has taken his name, and for the priest and scholar who, for all their differences, love and serve the same church.

Gift ideas for the Catholic Reader

Reviewed by Rachelle Linner
Catholic News Service

“Catholicism for Dummies,” an excellent apologetic primer on the faith, as is “Why Do Catholics Do That?”, “The Lamb’s Supper,” a well written tome by apologist Scott Hahn, and “365 Saints,” an insightful and educational daily devotion based on the lives of selected saints. At left, a look into the ramifications of Vatican II, 40 years after it was completed, noted scholar Alan Schreck.

BOOKS FOR THE CATHOLIC READER: Top, “The Making of the Pope,” and “God’s Choice,” new books (reviewed on this page). Other books previously released, “Catholicism for Dummies,” an excellent apologetic primer on the faith, as is “Why Do Catholics Do That?”, “The Lamb’s Supper,” a well written tome by apologist Scott Hahn, and “365 Saints,” an insightful and educational daily devotion based on the lives of selected saints. At left, a look into the ramifications of Vatican II, 40 years after it was completed, noted scholar Alan Schreck.
Preparing for the coming of Christ, as though he never left

By Jimmy Patterson

D
during this Advent we are eager to prepare for the coming of Christ. Not only was Jesus born in a very different world from the one we live in, but the way we think of the Baby Jesus, the Son of God, has changed over the years. There were no CHristmas trees, no Santa Claus, and no gifts in the manger. However, we have all been taught and conned through the little and church tradition will exist.

As we prepare for this second coming, perhaps we should consider that while yes, Christ will return, and I see Jesus six years ago, and on the face of the boy who has tried to collect gifts to help a loved one. We see a Christ in the faces of those veterans who humbly delivered Meals on wheels. I see Jesus in the forgiveness of a father and a sister and a brother Army, and even in the drug addict who had gone to the rec center on base. He was there, sitting on a couch, watching movies. Apparently, a movie had gone to the rec center on base. While he watched, a movie was turned on, and the people who deliver Meals on wheels, or who volunteer for the American Red Cross. We see him in the face of an employer who has allowed me to use my time off work to help a loved one. Everyone has had to make special connections, even passing connections, even passing on the way. Each of us is a link in a chain. Christmas is a time to think of the connections we make with one another. Thank God for the Rene D'Agostino, who in ensuring that the link was made.

By Father William J. Byron, SJ

This story possibly could have come from the U.S. Postal Service, Fed Ex, or any one of a large num-

By Jimmy Patterson

From the Editor

DECEMBER 2005

The Angelus

DECEMBER 2005

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Día de los Muertos en Odessa

At an All Souls Day Mass, Nov. 2, at St. Joseph’s in Odessa, parishioners prayed for the souls of people who had passed away.

En Espanol
La noche del 2 de noviembre en la Iglesia de San José en Odessa hubo un servicio de oración para recordar nuestros fieles difuntos tan queridos. Invitamos a la gente a traer fotos de sus queridos y ponerlas en una mesa que se convirtió en una lugar sagrado de amigos respetados. Después de cantar el Salmo 51 en que el Rey David pide perdón por sus pecados graves, y el Salmo 150 que pide a todos los instrumentos a alabar a Dios, escuchamos una lectura del Libro de la Revelación: el cielo nuevo y la tierra nueva, la nueva Jerusalén en que no habrá muerte, ni llanto, ni lamento, ni dolor. El Padre Marcos Miller, C.P.P.S. habló del gran amor de nuestro Dios hacia los fieles difuntos y de la relación continua entre nuestros seres queridos y nosotros. Estábamos celebrando la Comunión de los Santos. Entonces el Padre José Uecker, C.P.P.S. anunció, mes por mes, los que habían sido sepultados de nuestras iglesias - más de 100 personas - durante el año pasado. Después del anuncio de cada mes, se prendió una velita en memoria suya. El servicio se terminó con peticiones, el Padre Nuestro y un canto de alabanza.

Submitted by Fr. Joseph Uecker

En Ingles
On the night of November 2 at St. Joseph's Church in Odessa there was a prayer service to remember our dear faithful departed. People were invited to bring pictures of their loved ones and place them on a table which became our shrine of revered friends. After singing Psalm 51 in which King David seeks forgiveness for his grave sins, and Psalm 150 in which all the musical instruments are asked to give praise to God, we heard a reading from the Book of Revelation: the new heaven and the new earth, the new Jerusalem in which there will be no more death, nor mourning, nor lament, nor suffering. Fr. Mark Miller, C.P.P.S. spoke of the great love of God for the faithful departed and the continuing relationship between our loved ones and us. We were celebrating the Communion of Saints. Then Fr. Joseph Uecker, C.P.P.S. announced, month by month, those who had been buried from our churches - more than 100 people - during this past year. After each month's announcement, a candle was lit in their memory. The service ended with petitions, the Lord's Prayer and a song of praise.

Let us compare and prepare for the coming of our Christ

By Trudi Rutherford
Sacred Heart -- Coleman

Have you ever wondered how it is that we Catholics have the inimitable honor of uniting with Christ in body, blood, soul, and divinity? And have you ever wondered why we have that specific honor? I’m sure that most of us know, we just have not thought about it lately, or perhaps not for a very long time. It is so very awesome that the Christ would humble Himself to come to us mere mortals, that it humbles us, shames us, even. So maybe we try not to think about it.

I know I have done that in the past, been so disbeliefing, in denial, really, how a perfect God would submit to giving Himself completely to each of us coming down the aisle in line during the Liturgy to accept this gesture of total love. So I merely went through the motions of receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord. Thanking Him, of course, but never really thinking about the reality of it. Lately though, I’ve been doing some reading about the Eucharist. The Eucharist: the Son of God. God Himself since there is only one God, subjecting His Godhead to reduce Himself to a wafer of bread, a sip of wine to come into MY lovely heart and soul.

How did I prepare to receive this Majestic God? Did I travel far and wide to find a Church that was having a Liturgy? Did I receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation? Did I make a perfect Act of Contrition? Or even an imperfect one? Did I bow down in worship, tell Him how deeply I desired to have Him come in my heart? Did I talk to Him and all the angels and saints, asking for their help in receiving the Most High God?

On the other hand, how did Jesus prepare to come into my heart? We know that He prepared Mary from the beginning of time to be conceived immaculately so that she could conceive Him properly, purely and in a virgin state. We know Jesus came to this earth from His perfect place in heaven to be born in a barn, a stable built for animals, willingly, for us. We know that Jesus grew as a human being, in knowledge and wisdom, became a man even though He was divine, working like a man, by the sweat of His brow. We know that when He was thirty years of age, He began His public life, healing the sick, curing illnesses and preaching about the Kingdom. We know that He selected poor fishermen to be His followers so that once He was lifted up, we would have His Word still with us.

We know of His excruciating torment in the garden seeing beforehand all the agonies which He would experience for all the sins committed against Him, His heart-piercing betrayal, His unwarranted arrest, His mortifying scourging, His unspeakable humiliation and pain being mocked with a crown of thorns. We also know of His disgraceful parading before the crowd of scandal-mongers by Pilate, so weak from loss of blood, all the while mourning, but forgiving us all.

We know of His innumerable walk to Golgotha with the weight of our sins on His back, His shoulder, the Cross.

We know of His total acceptance at whatever cruelty was thrust upon Him. We have seen statues, images of Christ which are only a depiction, a mild and bearable facsimile of the grotesque tortures inflicted upon Him.

Then we crucified Him, where He hung for three endless hours before He finally expired.

This is how Jesus prepared Himself to come into our hearts. He wanted this much to be with us, for us to be with Him, united in the Sacrifice of the Cross through time. Can we receive Him with less than an iota of such preparation?

Producer says 10 hours aren’t enough to tell Pope’s life story

By Mark Pattison
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON -- Judd Parkin, who wrote the story that forms the basis for ABC's papal docudrama, "Have No Fear: The Life of Pope John Paul II," said that even if he had been given 10 hours of TV time, it would not have been enough to chronicle the pontiff's life.

As it is, ABC gave Parkin two hours, the results of which were seen Thursday.

"We wrote it as a three-hour script and the decision was made to tell the story in two hours," Parkin said. After commercials and network promotions, the actual running time is a bit less than 90 minutes. Even "if we had 10 hours, we would have had to make some very tough editorial choices about this man's life," he added.

In a telephone interview with Catholic News Service from Los Angeles, Parkin said he was not thrilled with the idea of going up against "Survivor" and "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation," two of the top-rated shows on Thursday.

"Piece of cake, huh? What can I tell you?" he mused, but added that Lorenzo Minoli, who produced the movie with Parkin, told him: "It is what it is."

"They couldn't give us a much more difficult time than (to be up against) the..."
Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

I am happy to present to you in an abbreviated form the Diocese of San Angelo’s financial report for the most recent year ending June 30, 2005 as prepared by our outside auditors, Carneiro, Chumney & Co., L.C. This audit has been carefully studied by the Presbyteral Council, the Diocesan Finance Council, the Diocesan Finance Officer and myself.

I want to express my sincere appreciation for your generous financial support upon which our church ministries depend. Your material generosity continues to keep a spirit of hope alive in the diocese.

I invite any of you who would like to receive the full audited financials to contact our Diocesan Finance Officer, Les Maiman, who will be happy to provide a copy to you.

Your servant in Christ and Mary,
Most Reverend Michael D. Pfeifer, OMI
Bishop of San Angelo

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### Financial Report for the Diocese of San Angelo

#### Year Ending June 30, 2005

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<tr>
<th>Revenue, Gains and Other Support</th>
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<td><strong>(89,254)</strong></td>
<td><strong>20,458</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,369,695</strong></td>
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| Change in Net Assets              | 473,047      | **(89,254)** | 20,458 | 404,251 |
| Net assets, as previously stated  | 3,011,022    | 1,032,870     | 1,267,412 | 5,311,304 |
| Prior period adjustment           | (35,393)     | (35,393)      | (35,393)   | (35,393) |
| Net assets, as Restated           | 2,975,629    | 1,097,477     | 1,232,019  | 5,315,911 |

**NET ASSETS, END OF YEAR**

3,448,676  943,616  1,287,870  5,680,162

The accompanying notes are an integral part of these financial statements.
Family

Like ‘Oz,’ Harry takes us to a mystical (and harmless) place

I am not much on media manipulation. In this business, you keep a keen eye out for it and frankly it irks me to see someone try to sway the masses in the name of the almighty dollar. You see it with all the major talk radio heads from Rush Limbaugh to Al Franken. It is everywhere, and I remain convinced that most of these people don’t necessarily have convictions that they hold to hard and fast, they just want your money.

When I am told I am ignorant for not believing a certain way, it rubs me the wrong way. Which is why I do a lot of channel flipping on my car radio, mostly away from whomever is trying to get me to buy their politics.

I do not think J.K. Rowling is guilty of media manipulation, though there have been those who believe that is exactly what she is doing.

The brilliant author of the Harry Potter series has just given us another installment of her series and while she will ultimately get rich off our desire to behold fantasy (just as L. Frank Baum, C.S. Lewis, Lemony Snicket and others have done throughout time), I do not believe she is secretly trying to sell me or our son witchcraft and wizardry or lure him into the occult. I wrote a children’s Christmas story several years ago, and homelessness and poverty were a part of the story, but that does not mean I was espousing them.

Our 11-year-old son James has read every Harry Potter book that has been written. Most of them multiple times. He read Book 5, The Order of the Phoenix, all 893-pages of it, in three days. And he was 9 at the time. James wants to be a Major League Baseball player when he grows up. He does not want to be a wizard. He does not want to practice magic. He does not pretend to carry a wand around and he does not try to put people under spells, although frankly sometimes he can leave his mother and me in a trance when he asks us to help him with his math.

In July, the media raised interest in a letter that Pope Benedict XVI had written in 2003 as Cardinal Ratzinger. In it, he expressed concerns about the books and movies’ subtle seductions that can arouse children’s interests in the occult. And I think Cardinal Ratzinger voiced legitimate concerns. If entered into unaware, perhaps children could take it that way. Mass media is open to all sorts of interpretation. Had my parents not taught me the difference between reality and fiction, there’s no telling how I would’ve turned out after watching -- and loving every minute of -- “The Wizard of Oz,” a movie that is so much a part of our culture it is simply part of who we are. Yet it contains witches, wizards, fantasy lands, flying monkeys and munchkins. Thirty-five years after my initial viewing, I’m still not real nuts about flying monkeys, not to mention the witch’s evil soldiers who paraded around to that scary cadence, but I know for a fact that I was not wooed into the occult after watching ‘Oz.’ It was fantasy, like Harry Potter, and if our parents do a proper job of raising us, they’ll teach their children about reality and fantasy and children will be properly equipped, just like most children born since the 1945 birth of ‘Oz.”

I would venture to speculate that most children whose parents don’t care enough about them to teach them that difference aren’t the kind of kids who would be giving time or money to see the movies, much less take the time to read the books. Reading is such a scarcity in today’s world that I’ll go out on another limb and say those who would devote the time to the now over 3,000 pages that have been devoted to Harry are intelligent, well-educated and likely well-adjusted children who won’t mistake Harry for reality.

It’s a good a story. A wonderful story. And that is all it is. We should avoid alarmism. There are far too many realities out there that are much scarier and more real to children than a story of a boy wizard (who incidentally kicks evil’s rear end every single time out, which is another reason to be wild about Harry.)

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Jimmy Patterson is Editor of The Angelus.

When a family member is homebound

By Bill and Monica Dodds
Catholic News Service

A family is wise to have a plan in place to make sure an aging parent remains safe when a winter storm hits. Here are some suggestions:

- Get current emergency information from the Red Cross. If at all possible, arrange for help before bad weather arrives. If you can’t get to your parent’s home, have a neighbor, a member of the parish or a volunteer do some grocery shopping for Mom. Even if she doesn’t need anything from the store, ask that person to stop in and make sure she’s doing all right.

- Have emergency supplies ready, and be sure those items are stored in a place that’s easily accessible for Dad. These include a flashlight with fresh batteries, transistor radio, non-electric clock, hand or battery-operated can opener, water and nutritious food that doesn’t need to be cooked.

- If Mom is taking medication, be sure there’s enough on hand to last through any emergency period. Remember that though she might not be able to get out, others may be able to come to her. Check with her pharmacy for suggestions in cases like this. If she’s on some type of life-support system, such as oxygen, contact her doctor and the local electric company ahead of time to see what they recommend.

- After the storm hits, encourage your father to stay indoors. Falls lead to broken bones. It’s better that he suffers a little cabin fever than spends weeks or months laid up in bed.

- Stay in touch. After the phone systems are back up and running, a simple daily call can work wonders in providing needed reassurance.

- If your parent’s gas or oil furnace has gone out but the electricity is still on, make sure he or she doesn’t try to heat the place with an appliance (such as an oven, with the door wide open).

- Remind your dad that a key to staying warm in an unheated house is wearing layers of clothing (underwear, pants, T-shirt, light shirt, heavy shirt, sweater, jacket, heavy coat, hat, gloves) rather than one bulky winter coat.

- If the fireplace is to be used, be sure the chimney has been cleaned recently and a screen is in place. Remind Mom not to try heating a room with a barbecue, hibachi or other type of grill that emits carbon monoxide.

And four items on a “don’t” list for your parent are:

1. Don’t overload an electrical outlet or extension cord with an electric heater.
2. Don’t have anything near an electric space heater. (And don’t sit too close, either.)
3. Don’t use candles for heating or for light.
4. Don’t shovel snow or worry about cleaning up debris. Someone will take care of that later.

Getting Emergency Help

Remind your parent it’s all right to call 911 if he or she isn’t able to stay warm or fix meals and no one else is available to help. If you lose contact with your parent you also can call 911 and ask for a police or community service officer to do a well-person check on Mom or Dad. Better still, you can ask that your parent be placed on an official list of individuals in the community who are to be contacted if a storm hits.
Jesus Christ Is Coming to Town

The people of the village were all excited. In just a few short weeks Jesus of Nazareth was coming there. Most had never seen or met Jesus but through the stories of travelers they heard of the many signs and wonders that Jesus had performed in other towns: healing the sick, raising the dead, walking on water, etc.

So the village elders decided to welcome Jesus in a special way. "We should prepare gifts for this Son of David," they said. "Every man, woman and child, get ready for the Messiah is coming."

Now James was a boy of 10, the only son of a widowed mother. He had sat at the feet of many travelers that had come through the town telling the exciting stories of Jesus of Nazareth. "Now what can I give to Jesus?" James pondered.

Even though they were poor, James had collected many things that he treasured through the years: a boat that had been carved out of wood by his father, a few silver coins that he had earned, and of course his blanket sewn out of lamb's skin that his mother had made for him when he was an infant. So James began thinking long and hard of what he could give Jesus.

James decided to go with his Uncle Joseph into Jerusalem and perhaps buy something special with his money. There were many markets there and surely something grand could be bought for Jesus. As he roamed the streets with his uncle he discovered so many wonderful items to buy. The air was full of the sounds of the sellers urging people to buy was especially exciting to him. He wandered a short distance from his uncle and as he rounded the corner, he was stunned by what he saw. Two armed men were attaching chains to a man. The chained man's wife and children were begging with the wealthy man to not take him away. "Lazarus, you have not paid back what you owe. I warned you over a week ago what would happen to you. Now you will be taken to prison until you pay back your debt to me."

Without thinking James came forward and showed the wealthy man his silver. "Will this be enough to release him?" cried James. Everyone stopped what they were doing and were stunned. The wealthy man paused and then answered angrily as if he were disappointed that suffering would not happen this day. He grabbed the money and went off.

They released Lazarus while his whole family smothered him with hugs and kisses. Meanwhile, James had slipped away before they could thank him.

The walk back to his village was long and James pondered his predicament on the way home. He felt good about what he had done but still he had no gift for Jesus.

Two more weeks went by and although James begged and appealed for odd jobs to be done to earn money nothing came about. One morning Uncle Joseph stopped by their small home. "James, go to Cleopas's farm before sunrise. They will be choosing young boys at daybreak to prune trees. Perhaps you can make some money for your project." Of course James was overjoyed.

He had a hard time sleeping that night. At the third watch, he decided to slip away and make sure that he would be there on time. The night was cold so he wrapped his lambskin blanket around him and headed to the farm.

As he made his way through the village the night air was especially crisp and cold. James stopped dead in his tracks. He had heard someone moan. He looked to his left and in the doorway lay a gray-haired woman shivering in the cold. He took off his blanket and lay it on her. Her gray eyes looked up at him as she struggled to crack a smile. "Bless you my child, bless you."

"Why are you out here? Where is your home?" whispered James.

"My only son died and I have no place to live. Please do not leave me," begged the woman. James sat down beside her getting as close as he could to warm her body as well as his.

"My name is Ruth. My son and I were on a journey. We had stopped here to rest because of my health. He died suddenly and now I have no place to live." She went on to tell James her whole life story. He could tell that the warm conversation meant more to her than the comfort of the blanket. Daybreak came and suddenly James realized where he needed to be. "I have to go, but I will return later this evening."

"Bless you my child, you go on your way. You have no idea what gift you have given me today," James gave her a warm embrace and left. Within the hour the woman died in peace.

James ran as fast as he could to the farm. He went exactly where Uncle Joe had told him to be but there was no one there. He was too late. The walk home seemed to take forever. He wrestled in his mind what to do now. James went looking for the old woman but she was nowhere to be found and neither was his lambskin blanket. James was crushed more from the loss of his new found friend than of the blanket.

"Well, at least I may have a few more days before Jesus arrives. Perhaps something will turn up," pondered James as he fell asleep at home. Fortunately, his mother did not ask as to what happened to his blanket…

The next morning, James awoke with a start. There was commotion all around him. A neighbor popped her head in and exclaimed "Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples are here. They are in the town square. Hurry, hurry!" Jesus and his disciples were here. They

James quickly put on his clothes all the while looking at his last and only possession -- the

(See KIDS/14)
memorization of a past event. Advent also reminds us of how Christ overcame sin. The custom of the Advent Wreath, normally consisting of a circle of evergreens, symbolizes the everlasting nature of God, and the evergreen represents continued everlasting life, love and forgiveness that comes from God through Jesus Christ.

The four candles [three purple and one pink] mark the four weeks of Advent and attest to the truth as Jesus as the Light of the world who overcomes our darkness and blindness caused by sin.

The purple candles are to show that Advent is a time for repentance, a time when we turn away from sin and toward God. The pink candle -- for the third week of Advent -- reminds us that we can rejoice because we are nearing Christmas Day and about to receive the Prince of Peace and Reconciliation.

Advent is more than just a yearly commemoration of a past event. Advent also focuses on the now. Isaiah tells us: "God comes to save you," stressing the constant saving love and mercy that our God has for us here and now. In this season, Jesus comes with Divine reconciliation, rather than reproaching and rejecting us for our sins. The one offended by our sins, is the one who comes to save us and bring God's mercy. He comes in humility, not a blustering entrance, no big show. He comes as an unknown infant, born in a stranger's stable, slipping into our world as quietly as he can so as not to shame us, but rather to let us know that we are loved by our God and that our God is always willing to forgive us when we fail and to take us into our true home of God's love.

During Advent, our spiritual focus should not be excessively on the "other worldly," because we may lose the capacity to enjoy life and to be active in life where we are today, and to be actively involved in making God's Kingdom happen in the society where we live. For John the Baptist, the Reign of God meant nothing less than the coming of the Messiah in whom the presence of God would be manifested. For Jesus, "thy Kingdom come" meant that God's reign is now, and not merely in the future. As this is the case, the task facing each one of us is to embrace the Kingdom by surrendering to God's will, by seeking God's forgiveness, by living in God's mercy and love with those who feel alienated or rejected, and by actively working for justice in our world.

This is a splendid way to begin our Year of Reconciliation. The cry of Advent is also a guiding light for us as we go through the Year of Reconciliation: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." [Mt 3:1]
VINEYARD: Lay minister needs stated

(From 3)

year to select pertinent passages of this document to be studied by our priests and all those who gather at the monthly deanery meetings. I also ask our Pastors to discuss with our Pastoral and Finance Councils and other parish leaders pertinent passages from this landmark document. The Office of Education and Formation of the Diocese will send to each Pastor questions for reflection that can be used with leadership groups.

While there are many dimensions to this document, I share here reflections from the U.S. Catholic bishops as regards the effective formation method that are necessary in preparing our lay people for ministry. An effective formation method addresses the whole person: emotions, imagination, will, heart and mind. It is the whole person who ministers, so the whole person is the proper subject of formation.

In this document, the Bishops point out that there are four areas of formation -- "human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral"--which is the same framework for the formation of deacons and priests and provides a framework for lay ecclesial ministers as well.

In the document, the bishops state that "lay ecclesial ministers need:

- human qualities critical to form wholesome relationships and necessary to be apt instruments of God's love and compassion;
- a spirituality and practice of prayer that roots them in God's Trinitarian life, grounding and animating all that they do in ministry;
- adequate knowledge in theological and pastoral studies, along with intellectual skills to use it among the people and cultures of our country;
- the practical pastoral abilities called for in their particular ministry."

Although the four elements of formation -- human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral -- are addressed separately in the document, they must be integrated as a unified whole in the person of the well-formed lay ecclesial minister, which happens best if these elements are integrated in the formation program itself.

As we consider the formation and preparation of lay people for ministry, we need to develop the best academic, theological, and pastoral programs, but we need to remember that the principal agent of formation and ministry is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of Jesus, sent by the Father, given in Baptism, poured out anew in Confirmation, bestows spiritual gifts and charisms on each of the faithful, to be developed and used in the service of others. When lay ecclesial ministers cultivate a special devotion and complete openness to the Holy Spirit, the power of Pentecost will be alive in their hearts and at work through their ministry.

This document, "Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord," should not be placed on a bookshelf, but needs to be studied carefully by all priests, by all deacons, women religious and pastoral leaders, and needs to be incorporated in the preparation and formation of the lay for lay ecclesial ministry. I am deeply grateful to Sisters Hilda Marotta and Adelina Garcia and their staff of the Office of Education and Formation for all that they are doing to help me implement this document.

TELEVISION: Two events spread over week tell story of Pope's legacy

(From 10)

No. 1-rated show on television," said Parkin. Currently, "CSI" is No. 1 in ratings.

"In an ideal world we'll bring people to the evening who don't normally watch. That's the idea," he said. "Given the multiplicity of choices, viewership rises for one night."

That's what happened five years ago, when Parkin penned the miniseries "Jesus" for CBS, which edged out ABC's "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire." "Millionaire" didn't lose that many viewers, but CBS reached people who did not ordinarily tune in.

In 2000, "Jesus" was competing -- although not head-to-head -- with an NBC made-for-TV movie, "Mary, Mother of Jesus." ABC aired a European clay-animation feature, "The Miracle Maker."

This year, ABC's "Have No Fear" beats CBS' miniseries, "Pope John Paul II," by three days.

"There was always that discussion" of being first to have a film about the late pope, Parkin said. "In some ways, it's more important to the network than it was to the producers; it's important to be the first ones out of the gate." He added, "You sort of forget about it. You become focused on the film at hand."

At a couple points Parkin was offered a look at the other network's script, but "I had to say no," Parkin said. "I'll watch it with interest when it airs. I know the director -- John Kent Harrison is a nice man. I feel a sense of camaraderie with him."

Cable's Hallmark Channel beat ABC and CBS to the punch in August with "A Man Who Became Pope," which did not deal with events surrounding his death but focused on his pre-papal life in Poland. Parkin said seeing other films and scripts would have blurred what he had set out to do with "Have No Fear."

Benedict XVI: New pope often gets right to the point

(From 6)

For example, Pope Benedict has dropped private audiences with most of the apostolic nuncios in various countries. Instead, he chats with them for a minute or two at the end of his Wednesday general audience.

The pope meets with political leaders and religious representatives, but they are usually brief encounters. He generally leaves policy details to officials of the Secretariat of State.

His audience with Francis Rooney, the new U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, was typical: The pope gave a speech about one page long, underlining a few key principles. Two days later, Rooney had a more detailed follow-up meeting with Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo, the Vatican's foreign minister.

When he wants to, however, the pope will take a more personal interest in the details -- as demonstrated by his half-hour meetings in November with Israeli President Moshe Katsav and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi.

For months, the Roman rumor mill churned out reports of an impending shake-up in the Roman Curia. It was to be Pope Benedict's "tsunami," the wave of appointments that would clear the deck and put his own definitive stamp on Vatican affairs from that moment on. The curial tsunami did not appear in September, or October, and as November drew to a close there was palpable disappointment among some Vatican watchers. It seemed to aggravate journalists that not much news was emerging about the pope's plans or projects.

In late October, Marco Politi, a veteran Vatican reporter for Italy's La Repubblica newspaper, wrote that Pope Benedict had introduced a new and "solitary" style to the papacy.

"He doesn't have friends in the Curia. He doesn't invite anyone to lunch or breakfast, and he doesn't allow groups of Catholics to attend his morning Mass," Politi wrote. "He lives, thinks, plans and makes decisions in the tower of his aloofness."

DOCUMENT: Who determines tendencies remains unclear

(From 6)

Further, the text does not spell out who should determine whether a candidate for the priesthood has homosexual tendencies. It says not a word about psychological testing of seminary applicants, which is another key and controversial issue at the Vatican.

In fact, in late 2002 the education congregation was concluding work on a separate document on psychological testing in seminaries. But that text disappeared from the radar, and congregation officials today refuse to comment on its status.

The new instruction does mention the seminarian's spiritual director and confessor as people who should dissuade a homosexual man from pursuing ordination. That presumes, as the document states, that a spiritual director would "ascertain that the candidate does not present sexual disturbances incompatible with the priesthood."

But according to canon law experts in Rome, that could raise potential issues regarding the relationship of confidentiality between the seminarian and his spiritual director.

According to Msgr. Gerard McKay, a member of the tribunal of the Roman Rota, a spiritual director could ask a seminarian about sexual problems, but he could not then use that information to have the seminarian removed.

The idea that the instruction contains "nothing new" is not really accurate. A 1961 Vatican document on religious order priests said homosexuals should be excluded from religious vows and ordination, but that was one line in a lengthy document. The new text addresses exclusively the question of homosexuality. That bothered some people even inside the Vatican.

"They should have written a more general document on self-control or on chastity," said one bishop who advises the Vatican on doctrinal and other issues.

"This instruction says very valid things, but there are many temptations or sins that need to be controlled before ordination," he said. "Instead, they have written an instruction that singles out homosexuals, which can create misunderstandings."

The bishop said it was clear the Vatican was not taking a "don't ask, don't tell" attitude on homosexuality. The document urges bishops and seminary officials to "be vigilant" in applying the norms, which underlines that the Vatican is serious about this, he said.
Lessons between right, wrong prevail in ‘Goblet’

By David DiCerto
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — Harry Potter is back, and his new adventure, “Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire” (Warner Bros.), conjures enough movie magic to cast a satisfying spell over audiences.

“Goblet of Fire” is the fourth movie adapted from the hugely popular fantasy novels by British author J.K. Rowling.

Directed by Mike Newell, the film is entertaining, intelligent and visually delicious, but despite considerable plot-pruning, at an unwieldy two hours and 37 minutes this “Goblet” runneth over a bit long.

Continuing the moodier tone set by 2004’s “Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban,” the new installment — the darkest thus far — is the first in the franchise to be rated PG-13.

From its spooky opening image, the film is probably too scary for young children, who might have nightmares, precisely what’s plaguing the bespectacled hero (a more grown-up Daniel Radcliffe) at the story’s outset. This is especially true for the scenes involving the “Death Eaters,” agents of the evil Lord Voldemort (Ralph Fiennes in fearsome face makeup), who finally makes his much-anticipated appearance in the series.

But for most of “Goblet of Fire,” the story revolves around a three-task, interscholastic competition known as the Triwizard Tournament to be hosted at Hogwarts.

Rooted on by Ron (Rupert Grint) and Hermione (a blossoming Emma Watson), Harry is chosen to compete along with Hogwartian upperclassman Cedric Diggory, French enchantress Fleur Delacour, and a Bulgarian bruiser named Viktor Krum.

The dangerous trials pit them against fire-breathing dragons, menacing mermaids and a sinister hedge-maze. But to bashful Harry, those perils pale compared to the harrowing ordeal of finding a date for Hogwarts’ annual Christmas ball, injecting some light-hearted romance into the abracadabra action mix.

The onset of awkward adolescence adds an interesting new emotional dimension to the relationships of the three young leads, who continue to mature along with the story. (The film could have done without an eye-brow-raising scene in which a frisky girl ghost cozes up to a thoroughly embarrassed Harry while bathing.)

Dependable support is provided by returning British stalwarts Michael Gambon, Maggie Smith, Alan Rickman and Robbie Coltrane, as well as by newcomers Frances De La Tour, Miranda Richardson and Brendan Gleeson.

Like past “Potter” films, “Goblet” is a treat for the eyes. But after three films, it’s getting harder to impress viewers with Quidditch matches and swooping shots of Hogwarts’ candlelit banquet hall. And though exciting, the action sequences including a requisite Play Station-ready aerial broom chase feel a bit deja vu.

As with the magical elements in its predecessors, those in “Goblet of Fire” should be viewed as time-honored storytelling devices, like those employed throughout the history of Western fantasy literature from childhood fairy tales (Cinderella’s pumpkin being turned into a car-
riage) to Arthurian legends and Shakespeare.

“Goblet of Fire” presents the clearest delineation between “right” and “wrong” in the series thus far, even introducing moral imperatives into the students’ hocus-pocus curriculum.

Despite lots of wand-waving, the real victories are won through self-sacrifice. As Gambon’s Dumbledorf counsels, “We must face the choice between what is right and what is easy.” Such life lessons would support the contention of Father Peter Fleetwood, a Vatican official formerly of the Pontifical Council for Culture, that “the chief concern of ... (Rowling) is to help children understand the conflict between good and evil.”

Beyond Narnia’ explores Lewis’ imagination

"C.S. Lewis: Beyond Narnia," Dec. 9, Hallmark Channel

By David DiCerto
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK -- Walt Disney's highly anticipated screen adaptation of "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" -- the first book of a seven-part fantasy series known collectively as "The Chronicles of Narnia" -- should swell the already legion fan base of C.S. Lewis' beloved, Christian-flavored children's tales.

But many of those thronging to theaters, or for that matter reading the books, may know little about Lewis himself, or the events and experiences in his life that inspired and gave shape to his magical stories.

To coincide with the film's release, a one-hour docudrama, "C.S. Lewis: Beyond Narnia," will debut Friday, Dec. 9, 7-8 p.m. CST on cable's Hallmark Channel and take a look at the man behind the enchanted wardrobe.

Produced for Faith & Values Media, the family-oriented and exceptionally well-made program examines Lewis' personal and spiritual life, interweaving theatrical-caliber dramatizations with commentary from Lewis scholars and others, including an interview with Lewis' stepson, Douglas Gresham.

Filmed on location in England, with Lewis (soulfully portrayed by Anton Rodgers) serving as a tour guide of sorts, the special traces the author's life from his idyllic childhood in Northern Ireland, to his student days at Oxford, his combat experiences during World War I, and distinguished academic career at Oxford, where he taught literature until his death one week shy of his 65th birthday in 1963.

But the real arc charted is that of Lewis' circular spiritual journey from cradle Christian, to avowed atheist, to staunch defender of Christian orthodoxy, and how he struggled to reconcile his faith -- especially his belief in a benevolent, omnipotent God -- with the existence of pain and suffering.

"Beyond Narnia" details how, when he was a young boy, the trauma of his mother's death and his father's subsequent emotional remoteness effected a seismic shift in Lewis' soul, leading him to feel that God had abandoned him.

Dispatched to boarding school, the Anglican lad who would become arguably the greatest Christian apologist of the 20th century increasingly sought escape from "a meaningless and nonsensical faith," confessing complete atheism by adolescence.

Not even the Great War could make him recant his hardened apostasy, with Lewis recalling how, despite the horrors of the trenches, he "never sunk so low as to pray."

Upon returning to Oxford, Lewis would find his skepticism challenged by his colleagues, a close-knit storytelling circle that included fellow fabulist J.R.R. Tolkien.

After much soul-searching, this most "reluctant convert in all England" took the leap of faith, acknowledging that "God was indeed God, whether I wanted him to be or not."

Lewis believed "imagination reflects heavenly truths," a contention that found its purest expression in the imaginative terrain of Narnia, a storybook realm populated by a fantastic bestiary culled from Lewis' lifelong passion for fairy tales and mythology.

Published in 1950, "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" was originally conceived earlier as an amusement for children evacuated to his Oxford home during the German air raids on London. It tells the story of four siblings who happen upon an enchanted wardrobe that serves as a portal to a magical world held under the wintry spell of an evil witch.