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Christmas 2020

Clockwise from top: The parishioners of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Fort Stockton participated in the town's Christmas parade, delivering hope in the parish people mover; one parishioner joined the parade in an old mail truck; Father Ryan Rojo and the baby Jesus at the Spanish Christmas Eve Mass at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Odessa; the nativity scene at Sacred Heart Cathedral in San Angelo.

Serving Catholics in the Diocese of San Angelo, Texas

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In December, Pope Francis declared two special years to be observed by Catholics around the world. The Year of St. Joseph is from December 8, 2020, to December 8, 2021, and the Year of the Family will be from March 19, 2021, to March 19, 2022. I invite Catholics in the Diocese of San Angelo to participate in these spiritual opportunities. The present article will focus on the Year of St. Joseph, and information on the Year of the Family will come later.

YEARS OF ST. JOSEPH

The occasion for the announcement of the Year of St. Joseph is the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of St. Joseph as patron of the universal church on Dec. 8, 1870, by Blessed Pope Pius XI, in the decree Quemadmodum Deus.

This special year is introduced by two Vatican documents, both of which are dated Dec. 8, 2020. One is an Apostolic Letter from Pope Francis entitled Patris Corde, offering personal spiritual reflections about St. Joseph. The other is a decree from the Vatican’s Apostolic Penitentiary, spelling out the plenary indulgence which is bestowed during this Year of St. Joseph.

Patris Corde

In Patris Corde, Pope Francis says that his own desire to write about St. Joseph has increased during the months of the coronavirus pandemic, experiencing “how our lives are woven together and sustained by ordinary people, people often overlooked. People who do not appear in newspaper and magazine headlines, or on the latest television show.” Like so many doctors, nurses, parents, teachers, and caregivers, St. Joseph is a person “who goes unnoticed, a daily, discreet and hidden presence.” He shows us how to deal with times of trouble with patience, hope, responsibility, prayer, and sacrifice.

Pope Francis says that, after Mary, there is no saint who is mentioned more frequently in the papal magisterium than Joseph. He reminds us that Joseph has a central role in the history of salvation; he is the patron of the Catholic Church, the patron of workers, and the patron of a happy death. The pope presents an extended meditation on seven qualities of St. Joseph: he is a beloved father, a tender and loving father, an obedient father, an accepting father, a creatively courageous father, a working father, and a father in the shadows.

In the context of the coronavirus pandemic, Pope Francis says that we can learn much from St. Joseph. He says Joseph “teaches us that faith in God includes believing that he can work even through our fears, our frailties and our weaknesses. He also teaches us that amid the tempests of life, we must never be afraid to let the Lord steer our course. At times, we want to be in complete control, yet God always sees the bigger picture.”

Pope Francis describes St. Joseph as a model of Christian realism that is helpful for us during this tragic time in our history. Joseph shows us how to “embrace the way things are, even when they do not turn out as we wish. Not with mere resignation but with hope and courage.”

What is an indulgence?

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 of the temporal punishment due for sin.

According to church teaching, the four normal conditions for receiving a plenary indulgence are the following: (1) truly repenting of our sin and letting go of our attachment to sin; (2) a sacramental confession; (3) reception of the Eucharist; and (4) praying for the intentions of the pope. A member of the church who has fulfilled those conditions may acquire a plenary indulgence by carrying out any one of the various particular actions which the church has designated for the plenary indulgence.

An indulgence can be obtained for oneself or for someone who is deceased, but it cannot be applied to other persons living on earth. A plenary indulgence can be acquired multiple times throughout the course of a year, but no more than once in the course of a day. A single sacramental confession is sufficient for gaining several plenary indulgences. A separate reception of Holy Communion and a separate prayer for the pope’s intentions are required for each plenary indulgence.

It is appropriate, but not necessary, that the reception of Communion and the prayer for the pope’s intentions take place on the same day as the indulged action. It is sufficient that the indulgence be obtained.

Litany of St. Joseph

See BISHOP, Page 22

Lord, have mercy. Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

Christ, have mercy. God made him master of his household, And put him in charge of all that he owned.

Patron of the Church, Let us pray.

Protector of the Church, O God, who in your inexpressible providence were pleased to choose Saint Joseph as spouse of the most holy Mother of your Son, grant, we pray, that we, who revere him as our protector on earth, may be worthy of his heavenly intercession. Through Christ our Lord. R/ Amen.

Reporting Sexual Abuse

The Catholic Diocese of San Angelo is firmly committed to creating and maintaining the safest possible environment for our children and vulnerable adults. If you or someone you know has been sexually abused by anyone who serves the Church, and you need a place to talk with someone about your feelings of betrayal or hurt by the Church, we are here to help you. To report incidents, call Lori Hines, Victim Assistance Coordinator, 325-374-7609 (cell), or write Diocese of San Angelo, Victim Assistance Ministry, PO Box 1829, San Angelo, TX 76902. If the incident occurred outside this diocese, our Victim Assistance Coordinator will assist in bringing your concern to the attention of the appropriate diocese. Please keep in mind that one always has the right to report abuse to civil authorities, and civil law requires that any abuse of a minor must be reported.
**Año de San José**

En diciembre, el Papa Francisco declaró dos años especiales para los católicos por todo el mundo. El Año de San José es del 8 de diciembre de 2020 al 8 de diciembre de 2021, y el Año de la Familia será del 19 de marzo de 2021 al 19 de marzo de 2022. Invito a los católicos de la Diócesis de San Ángelo a participar en estas oportunidades espirituales. El presente artículo se centrará en el Año de San José, y la información sobre el Año de la Familia vendrá más tarde.

**El Año de San José**

La ocasión para el anuncio del Año de San José es el 150º aniversario de la declaración de San José como patrono de la iglesia universal el 8 de diciembre de 1870, por el Beato Papa Pío XI, en el decreto *Quemadmodum Deus*.

Este año especial es introducido por dos documentos del Vaticano, ambos con fecha del 8 de diciembre de 2020. Uno es una Carta Apostólica del Papa Francisco titulada *Patris Corde*, la cual ofrece reflexiones espirituales personales sobre San José. El otro es un decreto de la Penitenciaria Apostólica del Vaticano que detalla la indulgencia plenaria que se otorga durante este Año de San José.

**Patris Corde**

En *Patris Corde*, el Papa Francisco dice que su propio deseo de escribir sobre San José ha aumentado durante los meses de la pandemia del coronavirus, experimentando que “nuestras vidas están tejiendo y sostenidas por personas comunes —corientemente olvidadas— que no aparecen en portadas de diarios y de revistas, ni en las grandes pasarelas del último show.” Como tantos médicos, enfermeras, cuidadores, padres, maestros, y trabajadores en la línea de fuego, San José es una persona “que pasa desapercibido, el hombre de la presencia divina, discreta y oculta”. Nos muestra cómo lidiar con tiempos difíciles con paciencia, esperanza, responsabilidad, oración y sacrificio.

El Papa Francisco dice que, después de María, no hay santo que se mencione con más frecuencia en el magisterio papal que José. Nos recuerda que José tiene un papel central en la historia de la salvación; es el padre de la familia celestial de Nazaret, jefe de la Familia celestial de Nazaret, con el jefe de toda su hacienda, San José. Dios incluye además creer que Él puede actuar inmediatamente en el momento de la vida, no debemos tener una mirada más pequeña. Dios incluye además creer que Él puede actuar inmediatamente en el momento de la vida, no debemos tener una mirada más pequeña. Dios incluye además creer que Él puede actuar inmediatamente en el momento de la vida, no debemos tener una mirada más pequeña.

**Indulgencias en el Año de San José**

El decreto del 8 de diciembre de la Penitenciaria Apostólica establece que el Papa Francisco estableció el Año de San José para que todos los fieles “puedan reforzar diariamente su propia vida de fe en pleno cumplimiento de la voluntad de Dios”. Durante este año especial, tenemos la oportunidad de obtener, “con la ayuda de San José, jefe de la Familia celestial de Nazaret, consuelo y alivio de las graves tribulaciones humanas y sociales que asedian el mundo contemporáneo hoy”.

El decreto concede la indulgencia plenaria a los fieles que, cumpliendo las condiciones normales enumeradas anteriormente, participen en el Año de San José de cualquiera de las siguientes formas:

a. contemplar el Padre Nuestro por lo menos 30 minutos, o participar en un retiro espiritual de al menos un día que implique una meditación sobre San José.

b. realizar una obra de misericordia corporal o espiritual.

c. rezar el rosario en familia o entre prometidos.

d. encomendar diariamente la vida a la protección de San José y rezar por la intercesión de San José para que quienes buscan trabajo encuentren empleo y que el trabajo de todas las personas sea más digno.

e. recitando una Letanía de San José a favor de la iglesia perseguida y para el alivio de todos los cristianos que sufren cualquier forma de persecución.

f. recitar cualquier oración legítimamente aprobada o acto de piedad en honor a San José.

El decreto continúa diciendo que, en el contexto actual de la pandemia del coronavirus, la indulgencia plenaria se extiende a los ancianos, los enfermos, los que sufren, y todos aquellos que por motivos legítimos no pueden salir de su hogar, en las siguientes condiciones:

a. arrepentirse verdaderamente de sus pecados y dejar ir su apego al pecado.

b. realizar una obra de misericordia corporal o espiritual.

c. rezar el rosario en familia o entre prometidos.

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Father Joseph Vathalloor, CMI
1942–2020

Father Joseph Vathalloor, CMI, passed away on December 17, 2020, at Shannon Medical Center in San Angelo.

Father Vathalloor was born Jan. 16, 1942, to Joseph and Rosa Vathalloor in Kerala, India. Father Vathalloor was born into a large family of 5 brothers and 3 sisters. He is survived by his brothers, Thomas in India, Matthew in New York, Father Matthew in Germany, Dr. John Joseph in India, and his sisters, Teresa in India, Sister Annamma in India, and Sister Sklomy in Germany.

Father Vathalloor was ordained a priest for the Congregation of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) in India on April 16, 1974. Prior to arriving in the Diocese of San Angelo in 2000, Father Vathalloor taught extensively in his congregation’s Catholic schools for 14 years and became a principal of their higher secondary school for 13 years.

Father Vathalloor was assigned to St. Margaret of Scotland Parish in San Angelo from February 2000 to July 2003, and served as pastor for Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Eldorado, St. Peter Mission in Mertzon, and Immaculate Conception Mission in Knickerbocker from July 2003 to December 2020.

Father Vathalloor was known for his gentleness and humility. Many people came to him from near and far for spiritual guidance. Many people in West Texas were able to benefit from his distinguished service and Christian witness for the past twenty-one years.

Arrangements were handled through Harper Funeral Home. The Vigil for the deceased was held at Sacred Heart Cathedral in San Angelo, Tuesday, December 22 at 6:00 p.m. The Funeral Mass was at Sacred Heart Cathedral, December 23 at 10:00 a.m.

See photos from Father Vathalloor’s funeral Mass, Page 24

Seminarian contact information

The seminarians will return to their respective seminaries beginning in January for the Spring Semester. In addition to the deep winter, the men will continue to have limited opportunities for fellow-ship outside their schools. With that, we encourage the faithful to write or call the addresses provided below. The young men will thus be reassured of the love and care of God’s people.

Kenrick Glennon Seminary (Graduate)
5200 Glennon Dr.
St. Louis, MO 63119

Deacon Kevin Lenius — Fourth Theology at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary

Notre Dame Seminary (Graduate)
2901 S. Carrollton Ave.
New Orleans, LA 70118

Joshua Basse — First Pre-Theology at Notre Dame Seminary

Necrology of Priests and Deacons

Please pray for our departed clergy

January
5 Rev. Andrew Wueste (2011)
7 Rev. Cornelius Scanlon, OMI (2020)
10 Rev. Francis Beazley, OMI (1992)
11 Deacon Paul Klein (2015)
18 Rev. Patrick Ryan, OMI (1975)
22 Deacon José Esparza (2011)
24 Bishop Thomas Tschoepe (2009)
26 Deacon D.J. Goetz (2003)
28 Rev. Cyril Lange (1971)
26 Deacon Jack Peterson (1987)
27 Deacon Horacio Yaney (2015)
28 Deacon Matthew Piepczak (2019)

February
2 Deacon Pedro Sanchez (2013)
5 Deacon David King (2006)
6 Deacon Ignacio Cisneros (2016)

June
9 Rev. Albert Fuytinck, CSSR (1997)
10 Rev. Leo E. Larvie (1978)
11 Deacon Ray Smith (2014)
20 Deacon Mark Reeh (2005)
22 Rev. Ed DeLeon, OMI (2017)
By Father Ryan Rojo
Director, Vocation Office
Diocese of San Angelo

Seminarians: An Update

This spring, the Diocese of San Angelo will have eight seminarians studying at three seminaries across the country. We welcomed one new man to the program: Jessie Ortiz, a parishioner of San Miguel Parish in Midland.

Jessie is the youngest child of Jessie and Jessica Ortiz. He attended Midland High School, graduating in May 2020, before spending the last semester at Midland College. Reflecting on the call to join the seminary, Jessie wrote, “I want nothing more than to give my life to God and have him work through me. I wish to bring others to Christ in the way I have been brought to him.”

Please keep Jessie in your prayers as he begins his seminary formation.

Our other men in formation bravely navigated the fall semester, coronavirus, and various applications for summer programs. We are hopeful that God will send more men to begin formation to become priests.

Work of the Vocation Office

The fall semester saw the Vocation Office beginning and overseeing many projects. The office launched a new website: dosavocation.org. On this website, there are discernment quizzes, application forms, and book recommendations.

The office also launched an initiative giving parishioners the opportunity to recommend potential seminarians to the Vocation Office. If you have ever seen a young man and thought he would make a good priest, you now have a tool to let us know.

Beginning in 2021, the Vocation Office of the Diocese of San Angelo will also debut an exciting project highlighting the stories of local priests, religious, and married people throughout the area. It is our hope that these videos serve as a conversation starter for other young people to consider God’s will for their lives. The videos will be available on the Vocation Office social media pages (Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube).

Stewardship Opportunity

A major push of our office is to grow the Seminarian Burse Fund for the Diocese of San Angelo. This burse is used to assist with costs related to seminarian formation, including the $40,000 average annual tuition costs. Like most endowments, the diocese draws from the interest to help cover these costs without ever touching the principal collected.

For 2021, the Catholic Extension Society will match donations made to the Seminarian Burse, $0.20 for each $1 donated (maximum individual donation of $25,000). The diocese’s goal is to raise $209,000, so as to receive a matching grant for $40,800, totaling $250,000!

To donate to our Seminarian Burse Fund, please contact the Vocation Office, or cut out the provided form and mail to our office at:

Diocese of San Angelo
Attn: Seminary Burse Fund
P.O. Box 1829
San Angelo, TX 76902

We thank you in advance for your generosity.

Top: The seminarians of the Diocese of San Angelo came together for their winter gathering at The Way Retreat Center in Midland. Pictured (left to right) are David Garcia, Francisco Camacho, Deacon Kevin Lenius, Humberto Diaz, Joshua Basse, Jessie Ortiz, Mauricio Romero, Vocation Director Father Ryan Rojo, and Mike Elsner.

Left: The newest seminarian for the Diocese of San Angelo, Jessie Ortiz, holds his acceptance letter, joined by his parents Jessica and Jessie Ortiz.

Below: Support new vocations in the Diocese of San Angelo by taking a discernment quiz, referring a worthy candidate, or making a financial investment to form future priests.

DO YOU HAVE A VOCATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD OR RELIGIOUS LIFE?

TAKE OUR DISCERNMENT QUIZ!

Scan the below code with your cell phone to take our discernment quiz.

THE VOCATION OFFICE WANTS TO MEET HIM!

Scan the below code with your cell phone to share his basic information.

I SUPPORT OUR FUTURE PRIESTS

You can contribute toward the Seminarian Burse Fund

with a monthly gift of:

$250 $125 $100 $50 $25 $10 $5 $1

with a one-time gift of:

$1,000 $500 $250 $100 $50 $25 $10 $5 $1

Please make checks payable to the Diocese of San Angelo Seminarian Burse Fund. Mail to Office of Stewardship & Development, Diocese of San Angelo, PO Box 1829, San Angelo, TX 76902.

Have you ever met someone and thought he would be a good priest?
Hope, stewardship, and a new year for the Catholic Charitable Foundation

By Mercedez Rassi

Every year the Catholic Charitable Foundation for the Roman Catholic Diocese of San Angelo provides grants to parishes, schools, and ministries throughout the diocese for various needs. These grants are usually reviewed and awarded in the spring, which in 2020 very closely aligned with the onset of the pandemic and the institution of lockdowns throughout our diocese. As such, this year’s grant review process looked a little different than in years past. For one, the entire process took place over video conference, as did all of the foundation’s board of trustee meetings for 2020. Secondly, our trustees took special care to understand that the needs of parishes, schools, and ministries might be more fluid than normal because of the unprecedented needs arising due to the economic turmoil surrounding the pandemic. And finally, this year was the first time I was working with our trustees as the executive director of the foundation to complete the grants process. Because the entire process was so new to me, I took special care to examine the way our trustees approached the process so that I could be more helpful in the future. What I saw and observed not only taught me a true notion of stewardship but also gave me hope despite the uncertain times before us.

Our trustees exhibited an authentic sense of stewardship in distributing the grant funds of our foundation with care and responsibility. In the Catholic Church, stewardship means recognizing that your time, talent, and treasures are gifts from God and should be used to serve him and his people. Our trustees recognized in the grants process that the Lord had entrusted to them the gifts given by the people of our diocese to our unrestricted endowed funds for the benefit of the parishes, schools, and ministries of our diocese. Each trustee approached the process with seriousness and prayer, understanding that every dollar available for distribution derived from a person’s sacrifice. Our trustees devoted time and energy to thoroughly understanding each grant request, each amount requested, and how to justly respond to these requests. All in all, the foundation worked to distribute $59,027 in grants for the 2020 grant cycle. With grants ranging from $1,250 to $5,000, our foundation supported repair projects, energy saving updates to buildings, classroom curriculum, additional equipment needed to respond to the needs of the poor in our diocese, and many other needs in our diocese.

Witnessing this process, working alongside our trustees to distribute these grants gave me hope during a very desperate time in 2020. The unrestricted endowment funds generate income from the generous donations of individuals and families who see needs throughout the diocese and want to contribute to meeting these needs. These gifts are then entrusted to the trustees of our foundation who use their own knowledge and skills to lead the foundation and responsibly distribute grants to meet the needs of our diocese. Each stage of the grant process illustrates how different types of sacrifice and stewardship lead to improving and growing our diocese in multiple ways. Each of these grants illustrates how our Catholic community is meant to be made up of the cumulation of all of our gifts. As the Body of Christ, we are called use what the Lord has provided us to serve one another. In this way, our individual gifts coalesce and become like the miracle of loaves and fishes, miraculously multiplied by the Lord in order to feed his people’s spiritual needs. As we go into the new year, let us examine how the Lord is asking us to renew our commitment to Him and His Church through acts of stewardship.

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**TYPICAL PAYMENTS PERCENTAGE OF PRINCIPAL**

- **60–64 years old**: 3.9–4.2%
- **65–69 years old**: 4.2–4.6%
- **70–74 years old**: 4.7–5.2%
- **75–79 years old**: 5.4–6.2%
- **80–84 years old**: 6.5–7.4%
- **85–89 years old**: 7.6–8.4%
- **90+ years old**: 8.6%

**For a personalized proposal, contact:**

Mercedez Rassi  
(325) 651-7300  
mrassi@sanangeldiocese.org  
catholicgiftannuity.org
New altar dedicated at St. Vincent Pallotti in Abilene

By Loretta Fulton

“My brothers and sisters, you are witnessing history this morning.”

With those stirring words, Bishop Michael Sis of the Catholic Diocese of San Angelo emphasized the significance of the dedication Mass for a new altar at St. Vincent Pallotti Catholic Church. The Mass was celebrated Dec. 26, which meant that members of the Abilene congregation got a special gift the day after Christmas.

The altar was built in Rome and shipped to Houston. From there, it was picked up by employees of the F.C. Ziegler Company in Tulsa, Oklahoma, who delivered it to Abilene and assembled it.

“It is a one-of-a-kind altar,” said Father Emilio Sosa, priest at St. Vincent since July 2018.

The altar was purchased with the proceeds of the sale of houses that a parishioner left to the church, Sosa said. The white Carrara marble altar, specially ordered from Rome, measures 84 by 48 by 40 inches. The most striking feature is a byzantine mosaic of a lamb on the front, representing Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

The altar is the crowning touch of a complete renovation of the church, directed by Sosa. A gifted artist, Sosa chose the designs for three new stained glass windows behind the altar and a new cross inset into the back wall. The renovation also includes new pews and flooring. Bishop Sis praised Sosa for his creativity and leadership in seeing the project through and for involving the congregation in the decisions.

“I’m very proud of you for what you have done,” Sis said.

The elaborate Mass was filled with Scripture readings, music, and the rituals associated with the dedication of the altar. Sis noted that everyone present will remember the historic day, with its COVID-19 symbols—masks and social distancing. Every other pew was roped off to ensure the proper spacing.

The Mass of dedication included sprinkling of blessed water on the altar and the congregation and the smearing of consecrated chrism oil on the top of the altar. Sis removed his chasuble, or outer garment, and replaced it with a white gremial apron. He explained that chrism, which shares a root word with “Christ,” is smeared on the hands of priests when they are ordained and was poured on his head when he was ordained as a bishop. It also is placed on the crown of the head of the newly baptized.

Sis poured the chrism around the top of the altar and then spread it with his bare hands.

“It is through that anointing that the altar becomes a symbol of Christ,” Sis said.

After the chrism was smeared on the altar, it was wiped off. A clear plastic sheet was placed over the altar top to protect the white cloth that covers the altar. Candelsticks and a container of burning incense were placed on the cover.

“As the smoke rises,” Sis said, “it symbolizes our prayers rising up to God.”

The dedication also included the sealing of a relic of St. Gemma Galgani, an Italian mystic who was canonized on May 2, 1940, by Pope Pius XII. She died at age 25 on Holy Saturday, April 11, 1903. A picture of St. Gemma and a certificate of authentication from the Vatican hangs in the entrance to the church.

Following the dedication and anointing of the altar, Sis presided over the Mass, with masked parishioners processing to the altar for the Eucharist. The altar had been in place for a week but couldn’t be used for Mass until the dedication, Sis explained.

Now that the altar has been dedicated, it will be used for decades to come. Besides its primary function, the altar is a beautiful work of art that immediately catches the eye when entering the nave of the church.

“It is the focal point of attention in this church,” Sis said.

This article and the accompanying photos were originally published on www.spiritofabilene.com.
**Light in the darkness**

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day" (Gen 1:1-5 RVSC). God's first act of creation was light! He revealed himself as light. The first epiphany!

How telling that cats often find a spot of sunshine coming in a window and stretch out to nap there — light and warmth. We, too, are creatures who seek out light, especially in these winter months when the days seem very short and are sometimes gray. Perhaps, because "you are children of the light and children of the day. We are not of the night or of darkness," St. Paul tells us in his First Letter to the Thessalonians (5:5 NAB), echoing the words of Proverbs 4:18-22.

The Jewish Christian writers of the New Testament would have been familiar with the Hebrew understanding of light as used in the Tanakh, the Jewish scriptures: the Law, the Prophets, and collected writings. According to Orthodox Jewish scholars, light was understood as the word of Elohim, the infinite, all-powerful God. When God spoke his words to Abraham, to Moses, to Jeremiah, to Isaiah, and to many others God encountered, he was present as light in his words (Brad Scott, "What Is the Light and Way of Elohim").

In the Old Testament, light is associated with righteousness, salvation, truth, and life: "The light of the righteous rejoices" (Prv 13:9 RVSC); "The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day" (Prv 4:18); "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" (Ps 27:1); "Oh send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me" (Ps 43:3); "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps 119:105); and in Isaiah's prophecy of the coming Messiah, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness, on them has light shined" (9:2).

The life-giving light of God is contrasted with darkness associated with evil and evil forces, judgment, lies, and death: "But the lamp of the wicked will be put out" (Prv 13:9); "The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble" (Prv 4:19); "Those who leave the paths of uprightness … walk in the ways of the wicked" (Prv 2:13); "Those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death … cried out to the Lord in their trouble. … He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death" (Ps 107:10,13-14).

In the Old Testament, darkness is never equal in power to light because God is the Word of light. The Gospel writer John tells us, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father (1:14). "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (1:4-5). God spoke his Word, his light, in his Incarnation in Jesus! "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'" (Jn 8:12). "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10).

When God encountered Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, he said to him, "I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (Rv 1:5)

The first American saint: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Life has never been easy for women. In every nation and in every age women who are alone and without any financial help have had to struggle to raise a family and achieve some career success and financial security.

Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton was one of those women. She was born in 1774 to a wealthy and influential Episcopalian family in New York City. Her father, Dr. Richard Bayley, was a renowned physician and professor at King's College, now Columbia University. Her mother was the daughter of an Anglican minister. She died when Elizabeth was three. From her childhood until her death 47 years later, Elizabeth learned to cope with all that life gave her.

She was 19 and a popular New York socialite when she married William Magee Seton, a first-generation American and heir to a wealthy shipping firm. The young couple set up housekeeping on Wall Street in New York. Rosemary Guiley writes in *The Encyclopedia of Saints* that Elizabeth became an active philanthropist. She and William's sister, Rebecca, were known in New York as the “Protestant Sisters of Charity.”

By 1797 Elizabeth had helped found the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children. She herself was the mother of five children. She and William were at the center of the city's lively social and cultural scene, but their happiness was short lived.

William's shipping business failed because of the Napoleonic Wars raging between France and England. He was left with a huge debt and mounting bills. And then he became seriously ill with tuberculosis.

Doctors recommended a warmer climate so he and Elizabeth and their eldest daughter traveled to Italy. They were planning to winter with the Filicchi family with whom William had done business. Just days after landing in Italy, William died on December 28, 1803.

Elizabeth and Anna Maria stayed with the Filicchis throughout the winter and spring of 1803-04 and often accompanied them to Catholic services. Elizabeth was touched by the beauty of the Mass and moved by the mystery of the Eucharist.

After her return to New York in 1804 Elizabeth began Catholic instruction. Her financial situation was critical. She was estranged from her relatives because of her interest in Catholicism. She became a Catholic in 1805. She struggled to support her family running a boardinghouse for boys and teaching at a girls' school.

She got some help from a Sulpician priest, Father William Du Bourg. He suggested that Elizabeth found and head a girls' school near the seminary in Baltimore. In June 1808 she opened St. Joseph's School for Girls. Other women came to join her and by 1809 they founded a religious community, the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph. The new community was approved by Archbishop Carroll of Baltimore in 1812. Elizabeth modeled her order on the St. Vincent de Paul Daughters of Charity. She pronounced private vows and became known as Mother Seton.

Richard McBrien writes in *Lives of the Saints* that her religious community established orphanages and hospitals and schools. Historians often credit Mother Seton and her community with laying the foundation for the Catholic parochial school system in the U.S. The small group moved to property given to them in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

Elizabeth's daughter Anna Maria died in 1816, and her daughter Rebecca died in 1816. Mother Seton died on January 4, 1821, slowly and painfully from the tuberculosis which had stricken all her family.

In 1823, her community, then known as the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, took charge of the Baltimore Infirmary established by the University of Maryland. This marked the beginning of women religious being involved in hospital work in the United States.

Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton was canonized by Pope Paul VI in 1975, the first native-born North American to be declared a saint. Her feast day is January 4.

Mary Lou Gibson writes about the saints for the *West Texas Angelus* from her home in Austin.

**Speaking of Saints**

Mary Lou Gibson
The greatest gift givers don’t always wear red

When most people think of Santa Claus, they think of a symbol of gift-giving. He is someone who is jolly, rewards those who are nice rather than naughty, and who always is readily identified by his beautiful red suit with accents of white fur. But there are very real people who have the potential to give us the greatest unimaginable gift of all, people who dress quite differently.

Some do not look in any way like the overweight gentleman that miraculously negotiates entry into homes through the tight spaces within chimneys without getting a speck of soot on his crimson wardrobe. Indeed, it may be hard to tell what color they are wearing because they are covered in filth. They are gaunt with skin pulled tightly across their bones, and starving. “For I was hungry and you gave me food” (Mt 25:35).

The color of the clothing that others wear, also, may not be readily discernible and consist of a minimalistic covering that is nothing more than tattered rags in their daily battle with intense heat. While a human working without food, death comes much sooner for those deprived of hydration. “I was thirsty and you gave me drink” (Mt 25:35).

Sometimes the color of the clothing is difficult to see because it is so dust-covered from miles of travel to a place where they are not known. We can be alone for a long time and still be all right, but when we feel alone, it can be devastating. “A stranger and you welcomed me” (Mt 25:35).

Maybe a “Santa” comes with no clothing at all: “Naked and you clothed me” (Mt 25:36). We may see this person wearing the yellow of a hospital gown: “Ill and you cared for me” (Mt 25:36); or perhaps dressed in orange or black and white stripes: “in prison and you visited me” (Mt 25:36).

Any gift that a representative of St. Nicholas may bring us at Christmas is absolutely nothing compared to the gift that the people in these six categories can give to us 365 days of the year. For the gift that they bring is the gift not of the momentary gleam that comes from opening a Christmas present, but the joy of being with God, our friends, and loved ones for all eternity.

We may mistakenly and pridefully think, of course, that it is we who are so wonderful as we make “sacrifices” in taking care of those in need. How arrogant we may be in our service to them! Satan will do all he can to make certain that we let the whole world know how kind we are and all that we give to others: “[But] take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them, otherwise you will have no compensation from your Heavenly Father” (Mt 6:1).

No, it is not us who bring the greatest gift to those who can benefit by our attempts to be of help, but it is the extraordinary and most precious gift that we may receive in return — but only if we truly serve with love rather than simply going through the motions. That is something that only God and each person knows for certain. Jesus tells us what this priceless gift is: “Then the king will say to those on his right ‘Come you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’” (Mt 25:34).

So many times when people see the sufferings of others, they question God’s love and wisdom. We see people throughout the world who are in such desperate need of the things that we Americans just take for granted. I will always remember my trip to Haiti many years ago where I saw children who looked like walking skeletons, and the taste of "mud cookies," which is all their mother had to feed them... dirt mixed with sugar cane syrup to find a valid excuse for not doing all we can to serve others in need ... they are innumerable and easy to find. If we don’t feel comfortable going out of our way and doing things for people, Jesus provides all the incentive we need: “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40).

Dr. James Sulliman, a graduate of Rutgers University and Florida State University, has 50 years’ experience in individual, marriage, and family therapy. He is also the Abilene-area pro-life coordinator for the Diocese of San Angelo.

Work: A sacred space for people to flourish

For people who prefer to keep their job and their faith separate, the Catholic Church poses a massive challenge. Catholic teaching simply does not see it that way. This isn’t about being a vocal believer at work, but about how work itself is an essential expression of human dignity.

The church’s body of teaching on work and the dignity and rights of workers bridges from the very beginnings of our society to contemporary phenomena and the most cutting-edge advancements in society.

The Genesis creation stories depict God as working and proclaiming the fruits of labor good. Being able to work and delight in that meaningful creative process is part of what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God. In his 1981 encyclical Laborem Exercens, St. John Paul II wrote that the Book of Genesis is the first “gospel of work” and that God also experienced work on earth as Jesus, a carpenter.

Work played a central role in birthing the entirety of modern Catholic social teaching. Pope Leo XIII’s landmark 1891 encyclical Rerum Novarum (Of New Things) addressed the challenges posed to working people and society overall by the Industrial Revolution. He laid a foundation that reverberates through Catholic teaching to present day. What we would now call wage theft, Pope Leo XIII addressed with: “To deprive any one of wages that are his due is a great crime which cries to the avenging anger of heaven.”

Rerum Novarum was so influential to Catholic thought that it sparked numerous "sequels" — subsequent popes applying the Gospel to other signs of their times. The teachings enshrined in these and other encyclicals are enumerated in the 2004 Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church.

This Vatican document describes work as a fundamental right and a good that workers have certain rights. These include: the right to a just wage, to rest, to a safe work environment, to unemployment assistance, to senior pensions, to health care, to disability insurance, to parental leave and benefits, to organize and to strike.

These rights carry with them implications for how society should be structured, as well as what the church advocates for in the public square. The principles of Catholic social teaching not only describe how individuals, businesses, governments and religious institutions can live in balance, but also challenges everyone, individually and systemically, to work toward the common good in solidarity with one another.

Catholic social teaching exists to promote human flourishing, which is one of those know-it-when-you-see-it concepts. Or not see it, as the case may be.

A person who cannot work because no jobs are available is not flourishing. A person who has to work multiple jobs essentially nonstop just to get by is not flourishing. A young adult who has no health insurance because their employment consists of a patchwork of short-term, part-time gigs is not flourishing. A family that is technically meeting its need but also continually in a state of scarcity, insecurity and social marginalization is not flourishing.

The compendium states: “The economic well-being of a country is not measured exclusively by the quantity of goods it produces but also by taking into account the manner in which they are produced and the level of equity in the distribution of income” (No. 303).

Income inequality, a reality that has worsened precipitously in recent decades, has drawn criticism from church leaders. The U.S. bishops’ 2013 Labor Day statement said that current imbalances "demand boldness in promoting a just economy... by creating jobs that pay a living wage and share with workers some profits of the company.”

Pope Benedict XVI wrote prophetically of the perils of rampant inequality in his 2009 encyclical Caritas in Veritate, noting that "not only does social cohesion suffer, thereby placing democracy at risk, but so too does the economy, through the progressive erosion of 'social capital': the network of relationships of trust, dependability and respect for rules, all of which are indispensable for any form of civil coexistence” (No. 32).

This is why Pope Francis carries on the tradition of applying the Gospel to ever newer "new things," including the widespread disruption of COVID-19, which has thrown millions out of work, and developments in artificial intelligence that could make entire job sectors obsolete in decades.

In November 2020, Pope Francis said progress in artificial intelligence should always be "joined to the common good." He has endorsed universal basic income proposals — regular monetary payments from the government — as a way of helping people flourish. Whether it's the factories of the Industrial Revolution or lines of binary code, the church opposes workers' humanity being sliced and diced by systems.

Work is a sacred space for flourishing, not a backdrop for exploitation and abuse. More than a way to pay the bills or sustain boredom to enjoy the fulfillment of his creativity, the church challenges us to make work where we become who God always intended us to be, and in doing so, get to know him better. The God who lavished the enjoyment of his creation wants the same for all of us.

Clemmer is a writer and communications professional based in Indiana. He edits Cross Roads magazine for the Diocese of Lexington.
**Bishop assigns new priest to parishes in Eldorado, Knickerbocker, Mertzon**

Bishop Michael Sis has appointed Father Anthony Franco as parochial administrator of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Eldorado and its two mission churches: Immaculate Conception in Knickerbocker and St. Peter in Mertzon. The date of the start of his assignment is Jan. 15, 2021. Father Franco is currently assigned as parochial vicar of St. Anthony and St. Joseph Parishes in Odessa. The communities of Eldorado, Knickerbocker, and Mertzon were previously served by Father Joseph Vathalloor from 2003 until his death last month.

**Two diocesan pro-life events to be streamed in January**

Two pro-life events will be streamed live from Sacred Heart Cathedral in San Angelo to the entire world in January.

On Friday, Jan. 22, 2021, Bishop Michael Sis will celebrate the Diocesan Pro-Life Mass. The Mass will begin at 6:30 p.m. and will be preceded by a march led by the Knights of Columbus at 5:45 p.m.

On Thursday, Jan. 28, 2021, Bishop Sis will lead a Holy Hour for Life at the cathedral from 10:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.

Both events will be streamed live on the Diocese of San Angelo YouTube channel. The Mass and Holy Hour are also being shared through the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in an initiative to accommodate for the inability to gather in person for the annual National Prayer Vigil for Life. Dioceses were invited to share a Mass for Life any time during the USCCB’s 9 Days for Life novena from Jan. 21 to Jan. 29. Dioceses were also invited to participate in Holy Hours from 10:00 p.m. on Jan. 28 to 8:00 a.m. on Jan. 29. The Diocese of San Angelo will host the first Holy Hour of the night.

**New Mass times for Stanton and Lenorah**

St. Joseph Parish in Stanton and St. Isidore Mission in Lenorah have new Sunday Mass times. Mass will now be at 9:00 a.m. Sunday at St. Isidore in Lenorah. St. Joseph in Stanton will have Mass at 10:30 a.m. and 12:00 noon.

**Perez elected to Presbyteral Council**

Father Freddy Perez was elected to the diocesan Presbyteral Council on Dec. 10, 2020. Father Perez will serve as the representative of the Midland-Odessa Deanery to the Presbyteral Council.

**Angelus seeks stories of pastoral plan implementation**

The parishes and ministries of the Diocese of San Angelo have completed the first year of the current diocesan pastoral plan, “A Future Full of Hope.”

We know there have been many challenges during this time. However, we have also discovered many blessings through the creativity of our clergy, parishioners, and parish staff members. Therefore, you are invited to share the good news from your parish about various ways you have sought to implement our diocesan pastoral plan. This could inspire other parishes to try something similar.

If you would like projects in your parish highlighted in the West Texas Angelus, please contact Brian Bodiford at bbodiford@sanangelodiocese.org for submission of articles or photos.
Members of the St. Stephen’s Women’s Organization organized the yearly Helping Hands of Midland “Dress an Angel” program for needy families of the Midland Independent School District’s Head Start program. Angels were adopted by parishioners of St. Stephen Parish in Midland. Bags for families were handed out on Dec. 13, 2020, with help from the St. Ann’s youth group, volunteers from the St. Stephen’s Women’s Organization, and their families. The parishioners of St. Ann’s also had a toy drive. Families could pick two toys per child when picking up Angel Bags.

The youth group from St. Stephen Parish in Midland completed their Advent service project on Dec. 22, 2020. This year the group focused on helping the homeless by making 40 bags, 20 for men and 20 for women. The bags included toiletries, water, food, blankets, socks, cough drops, and chap stick. The youth group were joined by three NET Missionaries who were home for Christmas break.
Installation of Father Felix Archibong as pastor

Bishop Michael Sis installed Father Felix Archibong (center) as pastor of St. Ann Parish in Sonora, Dec. 5, 2020. Father Felix Archibong cut a celebratory cake at the reception after his installation as pastor.

Our Lady of Guadalupe celebration in Fort Stockton

The parishioners of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Fort Stockton had a midnight Mass and procession on the feast day of their patroness, Dec. 12, 2020.

Misa de Gallo at St. Mary, Odessa

Bishop Michael Sis joined the faithful at St. Mary Parish in Odessa for the Misa de Gallo, Dec. 21, 2020. The 5:00 a.m. Mass is part of a traditional Filipino practice of early morning Masses for nine days in preparation for Christmas.

St. Therese Scholarship

This year, the student scholarship for academic excellence in the amount of $1,000 from St. Therese Catholic Church in Carlsbad was awarded to Rachel Porter, daughter of Jennifer and Ken Porter of Grape Creek, by pastor Father Santiago Udayar and his parishioners.
2020: Looking back

In pandemic, Catholic churches turned to technology, creativity, faith

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) — As the coronavirus pandemic upended normal activities and routines across the United States, Catholic parishes, schools and organizations had to quickly, and continuously, find ways to adapt.

For starters, this primarily involved technology: livestreaming Mass and teaching and meeting on Zoom platforms, but it also prompted outdoor worship, drive-thru confessions and, as the year went on, a return to socially distanced in-person Masses and classes at Catholic schools and colleges, with reduced crowd sizes.

When the pandemic first hit and dioceses around the country closed churches and bishops issued dispensations for the Sunday Mass obligation, parishes — with varying degrees of technical know-how — set up parish YouTube channels for the first time or dusted off their Facebook pages for online streaming.

Father Ken Gill, pastor of Our Lady Star of the Sea Parish in Solomons, Maryland, met with his parish staff after the Archdiocese of Washington announced there would be no public Masses as of March 14 and asked: "What can we do to stay connected?"

They decided that with the proper equipment, the parish could begin livestreaming Masses, so the pastor bought a laptop, a microphone and a camera, and a parishioner helped set up the connection to livestream daily Masses four days later.

By the next week he was broadcasting a noontime holy hour, praying the Angelus, the rosary, the Divine Mercy chaplet and Benediction with viewers and planning to add Stations of the Cross on the parish Facebook page.

"We’re using this opportunity to foment and create a stronger bond of community,” he said.

This happened at many parishes across the country and continued once churches slowly reopened because Mass congregation sizes have been limited.

Mary DeTurris Poust, director of communications for the Diocese of Albany, New York, said in late March she was inspired by what parishes were doing, saying they realized their parishioners were "hungry for spiritual connection and for the grounding nourishment liturgy can provide at this really critical and chaotic time.”

Parish closures also meant functions such as religious education classes and meetings had to move to an online format, getting many people familiar with Zoom, an online platform they might not have heard of a year ago.

"The internet is the blessing of all blessings" right now, Sister Susan Francois, an assistant congregation leader for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace, told Catholic News Service. She has held Zoom video conference meetings with team members across the country and in other parts of the world.

But Zoom fatigue also set in. Bishop Barry C. Knestout of Richmond, Virginia, used the platform a lot this past year with meetings, conferences and diocesan functions including a diocesan eucharistic congress in early November. After taking part in the U.S. bishops’ virtual fall meeting in mid-November, he acknowledged that "looking at computer screens is very draining.”

"Technology is a blessing,” because it enables people to do more, he said, but "it also has its limits,” noting people are meant for in-person encounters, which he said is what the sacraments are about and where grace comes in.

With fewer limits on congregation sizes outdoors, many parishes attempted to keep in-person outdoor gatherings, such as Masses, when possible, often in church parking lots, with congregants in their cars, listening on a radio channel.

In May, Larry and Diane Kahlcheuer, parishioners of Stella Maris Parish in Egg Harbor, Wisconsin, asked their pastor if he could offer Communion services at their home. And in June, when the Diocese of Green Bay announced resumption of public Masses at 25% church occupancy, the priest obtained permission from his bishop to celebrate outdoor Sunday Masses in the couple’s yard with social-distancing restrictions.

"Those in attendance bring their own lawn chairs or blankets and sit on the grass,” said Larry told The Compass, the diocesan newspaper. “Part of the diocesan guidelines is the taking of temperatures and a little squirt of hand sanitizer. The priest, during Communion, is sanitized and he distributes Communion. It’s all done (with) the strictest guidelines. People social distance, except for families, on our front lawn.”

The couple said the pandemic has been a challenge for their community, but it also has helped them to understand how important faith is to them.

"This whole COVID-19 situation, during the entire time when churches were shut down, I realized just how much the Eucharist meant to me and how much being fed by word and bread meant to my faith life,” said Larry.

"I’m a believer that I became stronger during this time. It’s been quite a nice walk to go through despite what this whole situation is about.”

Several S. bishops during a Nov. 17 discussion during their virtual meeting this fall said they have seen an unwavering thirst for the Eucharist and spoke of extraordinary measures people have taken to worship before the Blessed Sacrament.

Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, Texas, said he has seen people kneeling outside churches, praying for the chance to receive holy Communion. Similarly, Bishop Kevin W. Vann of Orange, California, said he saw people kneeling in the rain early one morning waiting for the city’s cathedral to open.

Several bishops said such yearning for the Eucharist presents an opportunity for the church to begin a new effort of evangelization and catechesis as the public celebration of Mass gradually expands and church leaders determine how best to encourage people to reengage in parish life.

At this virtual bishops’ meeting and in a survey this summer by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, the bishops expressed concern about people returning to Sunday Mass after the pandemic and noted that without their return, the financial outlook for church entities — parishes and schools — was grim.

Catholic schools have seen this firsthand, with more than 100 schools closing this year, many because of financial stress, worsened by the coronavirus pandemic.

But this fall, many Catholic schools — often with smaller enrollments than public schools — were able to reopen for in-person education with a number of health and safety protocols in place along with sneeze shields and plenty of hand sanitizers, disinfecting wipes, face masks and gloves.

For younger students, recess also was different, with students prevented from playing on the equipment or engaging in contact sports. School lunches were either delivered to the classroom or grab-and-go style, with students eating at their desks or outside.

This same creativity and adherence to safety guidelines was practiced at Catholic schools and colleges that reopened in person this fall after being primarily virtual during the spring semester.

On campuses, crowded lecture halls, sporting events and dining halls were no longer the norm and classes were either predominantly online or significantly smaller with separated seating and Plexiglass barriers. Dorms were at reduced capacities and primarily singles-only rooms.
Religious issues played big part in 2020 Supreme Court

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The busy year for the Supreme Court had the attention of the Catholic Church from major decisions to the final summer to fall arguments this fall around key issues impacting church belief and practice.

The court ended its previous term this summer with rulings on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, and decisions about Catholic school teacher firings, the inclusion of religious schools in a tax credit scholarship program and an opinion about abortion providers.

In one of the most anticipated cases of the previous term, the court issued a 5-4 decision June 18 against efforts by the Trump administration to end DACA, which has enabled about 700,000 qualifying young people, brought to the U.S. as children by their parents without legal documentation, to work, go to college, get health insurance and a driver’s license and not face deportation.

The high court called the Trump administration’s attempts to end the program “arbitrary and capricious.”

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops praised the court’s decision.

“To DACA youth, through today’s decision and beyond, we will continue to accompany you and your families. You are a vital part of our church and our community of faith. We are with you,” said the statement by Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, USCCB president, and Washington Auxiliary Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville, chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Migration.

At the end of June, in another 5-4 decision, the court said the exclusion of religious schools in Montana’s state scholarship program violated the federal Constitution.

When this case was argued before the court, two USCCB committee chairs said it was primarily boiled down to whether or not the “Constitution offers states a license to discriminate against religion.”

The USCCB also filed a friend-of-the-court brief, along with several other religious groups, in support of the plaintiffs, which said, “Families that use private schools should not suffer government discrimination because their choice of school is religious.”

Another case involving religious schools specifically focused on two California Catholic schools being sued for job discrimination for firing teachers. In a 7-2 decision issued in July, the court said the schools had acted within their rights.

The National Catholic Educational Association, in a friend-of-the-court brief in support of one of the schools, stressed the fired teacher, the school’s only fifth grade teacher, “bore particular responsibility for education and embodying the integral formation that is distinct to Catholic schools.”

The court also ruled this past summer that a Louisiana law requiring that doctors who perform abortions have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals could not stand.

The opinion, written by Justice Stephen Breyer, said the case was “similar to, nearly identical with” a law in Texas that the court four years ago found to be a burden to women seeking abortions. He said the Louisiana law, similarly, was unconstitutional because it posed a “substantial obstacle” for women seeking abortions while providing “no significant health-related benefits.”

“The court’s failure to recognize the legitimacy of laws prioritizing women’s health and safety over abortion business interests continues a cruel precedent,” said Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, USCCB chairman for pro-life activities.

The Supreme Court ended the year with decisions in late November and early December siding with worshippers who argued being constrained by state pandemic-related restrictions on attending in-person religious services was a violation of their religious freedom.

On Dec. 3, the court said federal judges should reexamine pandemic limits on attendance at California churches, based on its decision a week earlier lifting similar pandemic restrictions on congregations in New York.

“Even in a pandemic, the Constitution cannot be put away and forgotten,” the court’s majority opinion said, regarding California churches. “The restrictions at issue here, by effectively barring many from attending religious services, strike at the very heart of the First Amendment’s guarantee of religious liberty.”

These two court decisions were reversals from the court’s action this summer when Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was on the bench. The court then upheld Nevada’s limits on congregation sizes, denying a request by a Nevada church for permission to have larger gatherings, like those permitted in the state’s casinos, restaurants and other businesses.

Ginsburg died Sept. 18 at age 87 and was replaced on the bench by Justice Amy Coney Barrett on Oct. 26. Barrett, a graduate of the University of Notre Dame’s Law School, is the sixth Catholic judge on the current court. Reaction to her confirmation was just as divided as it was on the announcement by the president that she was his nominee choice just weeks before the presidential election.

Barrett’s first major case, just days after she was confirmed, was on a Catholic social service agency shut out from Philadelphia’s foster care program for not accepting gay couples as foster parents because of the Catholic Church’s teaching upholding traditional marriage.

In this case, the justices seemed inclined to leave the bulk of the law in place.

Mercy Sister Mary Haddad, president and CEO of the Catholic Health Association, urged the court to uphold the current law, saying that striking it down would be devastating to millions of Americans, including those with COVID-19. She said doing away with the health care law would “wreak havoc on the U.S. health care system and irreparably harm those most in need of care” in the middle of a pandemic.

The U.S. bishops have long emphasized that the poor and vulnerable must have access to health care, but they have objected to the legislation’s contraceptive mandate, requiring employee health insurance plans to provide contraceptive coverage.

Another November case examined President Donald Trump’s order to exclude immigrants living in the country illegally from the 2020 census for purposes of redrawing congressional districts. The U.S. bishops defended these immigrants’ right to be counted.

In a statement, Bishop Dorsonville said: “Denying the undocumented and the states in which they reside their rightful representation in Congress is counter to the Constitution and makes people feel invisible and not valued as human beings.”

“The church’s teaching is clear: Human dignity is most sacred, regardless of legal status,” he said. “For that reason, we once again affirm the need to count all persons in the census, as well as in the apportionment of congressional representatives.”

The USCCB, along with other Catholic organizations, also filed a friend-of-the-court brief in this case, arguing that excluding those without legal documentation from the apportionment base of the census sends a message that these individuals are not equal members of the human family.

In the summer and fall, the court gave the approval for a number of federal executions to take place, denying the appeals of the death-row inmates.

The court also sent some death penalty cases back to lower courts. In June, it sent a case back to the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals for further review, saying the death-row inmate had not been given sufficient legal counsel. It also granted a last-minute stay of execution for another Texas death-row inmate later that month saying the state prison officials needed to reexamine their rule that bans clergy from being with prisoners to the execution chamber.

The U.S. bishops have spoken against the federal executions which the federal government resumed this year after a 17-year hiatus and urged the Trump administration to end this practice, including in a Dec. 7 statement.

Catholic Mobilizing Network and Sister Helen Sister Helen Prejean, a Sister of St. Joseph of Medaille and longtime activist against the death penalty, have similarly called to an end to these executions and have also spoken against the Justice Department’s plan to expand how it carries out federal death sentences — to include electrocution, gas or firing squads along with lethal injections.

Sister Prejean told a reporter that a likely reason for this policy change was to “make sure that they can expedite these executions without any court cases about lethal injection.”

She noted that in many states there have been questions about the use of lethal injections as well as botched executions, which she said is the Supreme Court’s fault for having “allowed states to just experiment widely with drugs to kill people.”

Follow Zimmermann on Twitter: @carolmaczim
Catholic Voices

My top ten books for 2020

Father Ron Rolheiser

3. Frederick Buechner, The Magnificent Defeat. First published in 1966, this book only found me this year. An ordained Presbyterian minister, Buechner is theologian, poet, philosopher, novelist, and essayist and always worth the read, particularly this book. Some rare insights.

4. Mark Wallace, When God was a Bird – Christianity, Animism, and the Re-Enchantment of the World. As Christians we believe that God wrote two books: the Bible and the world of nature. We Christians, we have both books; animists and pagans have just the one book, the book of nature. Wallace submits that it’s time (both for a fuller understanding of our own faith and for a healthier relationship to the natural world) for us as Christians to take the book of nature more seriously and be less afraid of animism. His insights will stretch you but keep you solid doctrinally.

5. Gerhard Lohfink, Prayer Takes Us Home, The Theology and Practice of Christian. Gerhard Lohfink is a German biblical scholar and always worth reading. This is his fourth book in English and, like his others, it is a rare combination of scholarship, personal faith, and good clear writing.

6. Muriel Barbery, The Elegance of the Hedgehog. This is a novel written in 2006 that’s full of insight, wit, and surprise. Not for you if you’re looking for action. This is staring at a work of art, but asking yourself repeatedly, how could its creator be that clever?

7. Marilynn Robinson, Jack, Time magazine lists her as one of the 100 most influential people in America and that’s true, certainly for my own life. Marilynn Robinson is a highly acclaimed novelist and a deeply insightful religious writer. This book, Jack, will demand a little patience on your part. Don’t give up on it because nothing moves in the first 50 pages. In the end, the book will demand your attention.

8. Helen Prejean, River of Fire, My Spiritual Journey. The author of Dead Man Walking shares her autobiography. This is the conversion story of an exceptional woman who, it would seem, didn’t need a conversion. Candid, honest, deep.

9. Lyn Cowan, Portrait of the Blue Lady. The Character of Melancholy. Another book that was written sixteen years ago but only found me this year. It’s a book on melancholy written by a brilliant Jungian and mythologist. Here’s a tale: “Melancholy has even lost its name: melancholy is now ‘depression’, clinicalized, pathologized, and undifferentiated from the blue ‘melancholy’ formerly recognized by poets, philosophers, blues singers and doctors alike. It is now recognized as ‘malignant illness’ rather than a difficult, often painful affliction of the soul that is not an illness and doesn’t want treatment.” For Cowan, melancholy is your inroad to befriending the deeper parts of your soul.

10. Ira Byock, The Four Things that Matter Most. First published in 2004, this is a very popular book that deserves to be popular. Byock gives his whole thesis in the book’s opening sentence. The four most important things you will ever say are: Please forgive me. I forgive you. Thank you. I love you. These are words people tend to utter on their deathbeds. However, as Byock urges it, is a book we should read before our loved ones gather round our deathbed. The saddest words we say? “It might have been!”

Beyond these ten books, I also highly recommend Pope Francis’ new Encyclical, Fratelli Tutti. These are the ten books that spoke deeply to me this year. I can guarantee they will do that for you. But I can guarantee that none of them is a cheap soda!

‘Dominion,’ the values of the West, and the cross of Christ

The popular historian Tom Holland has written an extraordinary book called Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World. The subtitle sums up his argument. Holland is deeply impatient with the secularist ideology that reigns supreme in the academy and that tends to regard Christianity as a debunked, outdated religion, a holdover from a primitive, pre-scientific age, a block to progress both moral and intellectual. In point of fact, he argues, Christianity has been and continues to be the most powerful shaper of the Western mind, though its influence is so pervasive and so deep that it is easily overlooked.

His very effective strategy for bringing this out into the open is first to de-familiarize Christianity through a brutally realistic accounting of what crucifixion meant in the ancient world. To be put to death on a Roman cross was just about the worst fate that anyone at that time could have imagined. The very fact that our word “excruciating,” which designates the most agonizing kind of pain, comes from the Latin ex cruce (from the cross) fairly gives away the game. But more than the awful physical suffering of the cross was its unsurpassed humiliation. To be stripped naked, nailed to two pieces of wood, left to die in the course of several hours or even days, while exposed to the mockery of passers-by, even after death, to have one’s body given over to be devoured by the birds of the air and the beasts of the field was just about as degrading an experience as possible. That the first Christians, therefore, proclaimed a crucified criminal as the risen Son of God could not have been a more comical, unenviable, and revolutionary message. It turned upside down all of the ancient world’s assumptions about God, humanity, and the right ordering of society. If God could be identified with a crucified man, then even the lowest and most forgotten members of the human family are worthy of love. And that the earliest followers of Jesus not only declared this truth but concretely lived it by caring for the homeless, the sick, the newborn, and the aged made their message even more subversive.

Though he explores many other ways that the Christian philosophy influenced Western civilization, Holland identifies this idea, radiating out from the crucified Jesus, as the most impactful. That we take for granted that every human being is worthy of respect, that all people are bearers of equal rights and dignity, that compassion and love is the most praiseworthy ethical attitude is, quite simply, a function, whether we acknowledge it or not, of our Christian cultural formation. Proof of this can be found by looking back to ancient civilization, where none of these notions held sway, and by looking, even now, at societies unschooled by Christianity, where these values are by no means unquestioningly revered.

The bulk of Holland’s book is taken up with analyses of key moments in Western history, which reveal the influence of the master idea of the cross. I would put special stress on his reading of the Enlightenment, whose political values are unthinkable apart from the Gospel, and of the contemporary “woke” movements, whose preoccupation with the suffering of victims and the marginalized is the fruit of a culture at whose heart, for two thousand years, has been a crucified and unjustly condemned man. I particularly appreciated his coverage of the Beatles’ famous 1967 Abbey Road recording of “All You Need is Love” in front of a live audience. The sentiment conveyed by that iconic song is one with which neither Caesar Augustus nor Genghis Khan nor Friedrich Nietzsche would be the least bit sympathetic, but which in fact is deeply congruent with the teachings of St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Paul the Apostle. Like it or not, the Christian revolution massively shapes the way that we in the West continue to see the world.

With this part of Holland’s argument — and it takes up 90% of the book — I am in complete agreement. The point he makes is not only true; it is of crucial importance at a time when Christianity is, so often, put down or set aside. That said, for me, the entire book unravelled at the end, when the author admitted that he believes neither in God nor, obviously, in the divinity of Jesus or his Resurrection. The revolutionary ethic that flowed from those beliefs he finds compelling, but the convictions themselves are, he feels, without warrant. This distilling of an ethical system out of deeply questionable dogmas is a familiar move among the modern philosophers. Both Immanuel Kant and Thomas Jefferson endeavored to do just that. But it is a foolish enterprise, for it is finally impossible to separate Christian ethics from metaphysic and from history. If there is no God and if Jesus did not rise from the dead, how in the world is it the case that every human being is worthy of infinite respect and a subject of inviolable rights? If there is no God and if Jesus did not rise from the dead, how could we not conclude that, through the power of his awful cross, Caesar won? Jesus might be vaguely admired as an ethical teacher with the courage of his convictions, but if he died and remained in his grave, then power politics prevails, and the affirmation of the dignity of every person is just a silly wish-fulfillment.

It is instructive that, when the first Christians evangelized, they did not speak of human rights or the dignity of all or of other such abstractions; they spoke of Jesus risen from the dead through the power of the Holy Spirit. They insisted that the one whom Caesar’s empire put to death God had raised up. Tom Holland is absolutely right that many of the best ethical and political instincts of the West have come from Christ. But just as cut flowers will last only a short time in water, so these ideas will not long endure if we denigrate them from the starting facticity of the cross of Jesus.
Católicos involucrados en dar y recibir vacuna COVID-19
Por Catholic News Service

TIMONIUM, Maryland (CNS) - Margaret Whitty no pensó dos veces cuando tuvo la oportunidad de estar entre los primeros residentes del hogar de ancianos Stella Maris cerca de Baltimore en recibir la vacuna contra el coronavirus.

"Han hecho su tarea", dijo Whitty, de 93 años, sobre los investigadores. Recibió su primera dosis de la vacuna el 23 de diciembre.

Whitty, madre de ocho hijos, todos los cuales todavía viven en el área de Baltimore, llegó al hogar Stella Maris, patrocinado por las Hermanas de la Misericordia, en marzo, justo antes del inicio de la pandemia. Sus visitas a la familia han sido limitadas, a veces al aire libre en el patio, a veces detrás de un vidrio.

No ha podido asistir a misa en persona, sino que la ha visto en televisión. Ella celebró su 93 cumpleaños por Zoom desde un centro que cuida de ancianos en Maryland.

Representantes de la farmacia Walgreens llegaron al asilo de ancianos para distribuir más de 400 dosis de la vacuna Pfizer, que deben mantenerse a temperaturas extremadamente frías para que sigan siendo efectivas.

La vacuna de Pfizer es una de las dos que ha recibido la autorización de uso de emergencia de la Administración de Alimentos y Medicamentos. La segunda, de Moderna, fue aprobada el 18 de diciembre. Se espera que una tercera vacuna desarrollada por la firma británica AstraZeneca e investigadores de la Universidad de Oxford esté disponible a principios de 2021.

El cardenal Blase J. Cupich de Chicago también fue vacunado el 23 de diciembre y el cardenal Sean P. O'Malley de Boston recibió una vacuna el 24 de diciembre.

Los funcionarios del Hospital St. Anthony invitaron al Cardenal Cupich, de 71 años, a vacunarse como parte de una campaña desarrollada en respuesta a los informes de que algunas personas en las comunidades a las que sirve el hospital tienen dudas de recibir la vacuna.

Fue uno de varios clérigos del área de Chicago que recibieron la vacuna en el hospital que atiende a los vecindarios afectados de manera desproporcionada por COVID-19.

"Estoy agradecido al Hospital St. Anthony por sus esfuerzos por inspirar confianza en esta vacuna y al papa Francisco por su clara orientación moral sobre las vacunas COVID-19", dijo el cardenal Cupich en un comunicado emitido por la Arquidiócesis de Chicago.

"La pandemia ha devastado a familias y comunidades por todo el mundo, en particular a los pobres y marginados. Las vacunas ofrecen un rayo de esperanza de que el mundo se una en nuestra humanidad común para lograr la salud y la curación. Los líderes religiosos ahora deben dar un paso adelante y alentar a todos a vacunarse", agregó.

El cardenal O'Malley, de 76 años, recibió la primera de sus dos dosis de la vacuna Moderna el 24 de diciembre en el centro médico St. Elizabeth's en Brighton, Massachusetts.

Dijo que se dejó vacunar para demostrar que es segura y para alentar a otros a vacunarse cuando sea posible.

"Agradezco haber estado en fila para recibir la vacuna y animo a todas las personas a vacunarse mientras se presenta la oportunidad, como una importante acción de cuidado y preocupación por nuestros seres queridos, nuestras comunidades y nuestra nación. Con la ayuda de Dios y la excelente atención médica brindada en St. Elizabeth's y muchos otros hospitales, abrimos paso a través y más allá de la pandemia", dijo en un comunicado.

En Connecticut, los estudiantes y profesores de enfermería de la Escuela de Enfermería y Estudios de Salud Marion Peckham Egan de la Universidad de Fairfield se unieron a un equipo en el Hospital Norwalk de Nuvance Health para ayudar a administrar la vacuna.

Casi tres docenas de estudiantes comenzaron a vacunar a los candidatos elegibles el 22 de diciembre y estaban ayudando a administrar una clínica en el hospital. A los estudiantes y profesores también se les ofreció la oportunidad de recibir la vacuna.

"Como hombres y mujeres para los demás, nuestras facultad y estudiantes de enfermería de Fairfield están excepcionalmente preparados y ansiosos por participar en la clínica de vacunación COVID-19", dijo la Dra. Meredith Kazer, decana de la escuela Egan en la universidad dirigida por jesuitas, en un comunicado. "Durante estos tiempos difíciles, estamos agradecidos por la oportunidad de hacer nuestra parte para llevar esta pandemia a su conclusión".

En preparación para la administración de la vacuna, los estudiantes fueron entrenados bajo protocolos desarrollados por el Departamento de Salud Pública de Connecticut.

Una estudiante, Sarah Uwazany, de último año, dijo que estaba orgullosa de haber sido elegida para unirse al esfuerzo de vacunación.

"Al enterarme de esta oportunidad para los estudiantes de enfermería de último año, supe que quería participar en algo que tiene un impacto tan importante en el futuro de los trabajadores de la salud y la población en general", dijo Uwazany en un comunicado emitido por la universidad.

En otros lugares, las parroquias de la Diócesis de San Bernardino, California, se estaban preparando para servir como sitios de distribución de vacunas. Las agencias de la autoridad de salud pública han sido bien recibidas en las parroquias para administrar pruebas de coronavirus, ya que los informes de enfermedades se han disparado, así como las vacunas contra la gripe estacional.

El padre Francisco Valdovinos-Ruiz, pastor del Santuario de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe en La Meca, y María Teresa Pacheco, miembro de las Misioneras Guadalupanas del Espíritu Santo, salieron al aire a principios de diciembre ofreciendo un mensaje de radio en español animando a los residentes a tomar precauciones de salud y seguridad. Hágase la prueba y reciba la vacuna cuando llegue, informó Inland Catholic Byte, el periódico en línea de la diócesis.

La diócesis y la Conferencia Católica de California, que representa a los obispos católicos del estado en cuestiones de política pública, han organizado campañas para alentar a los católicos a recibir las vacunas.

Su mensaje explica que las vacunas no utilizan linajes celulares que se originan a partir del tejido fetal de un bebé abortado para el diseño, desarrollo o producción y, por lo tanto, son moralmente aceptables.

"Si bien ambas compañías usaron una línea celular contaminada en una de las pruebas de confirmación de su vacuna, los católicos deben considerar esta conexión con el aborto como 'remota' y no debe ser motivo para rechazar la vacuna por motivos morales", un comunicado de la diócesis.

Mientras tanto, en el hogar de ancianos de Maryland, Regina Figueroa, directora administrativa, le dijo a Catholic Review, el medio de comunicación de la Arquidiócesis de Baltimore, que la distribución temprana de la vacuna es "realmente solo el primer paso para superar este trauma horrible que todos hemos pasado"

"No va a arreglar todo de inmediato, pero definitivamente será parte de la solución", dijo.

Según el plan del gobierno, las farmacias nacionales Walgreens y CVS encabezarán la distribución de las vacunas a los centros de atención a largo plazo. Las empresas se asegurarán de que las vacunas tengan temperatura controlada mientras se preparan para administrar la vacuna a los residentes y al personal. Los vacunados al principio recibirán una segunda dosis en 21 días.

El personal y los residentes de los centros de atención a largo plazo son el segundo grupo que recibe las vacunas después de los trabajadores médicos de primera línea. Hasta el 20 de diciembre, los residentes de tales instalaciones han representado alrededor del 39% de las muertes, 113, 891 en total, según la fundación Kaiser Family.
Must Catholics refuse a COVID-19 vaccine made with a cell line from an abortion?

In the wake of announcements from multiple pharmaceutical companies about safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines, many are expressing ethical doubts about whether it is OK to take these vaccines. Do Catholics have a moral duty to decline an inoculation if it was unethical produced using a cell line that came from an abortion?

The short answer is “no.” This has been discussed and explained in several magisterial church documents in recent years.

In 2008, for example, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith reminded us in the Instruction Dignitas Personae that:

“Grave reasons may be morally proportionate to justify the use of such biological material. Thus, for example, danger to the health of children could permit parents to use a vaccine which was developed using cell lines of illicit origin, while keeping in mind that everyone has the duty to make known their disagreement and to ask that their healthcare system make other types of vaccines available.”

For a serious reason, therefore, Catholics may receive a COVID-19 vaccine having an association with abortion, and a serious reason could include a threat to one’s health and well-being. Those who are elderly or who face co-morbidities like diabetes, obesity or other significant health conditions are among the highest risk groups for adverse outcomes from infection, and who would clearly have a serious reason.

Included below is information comparing some of the COVID-19 vaccine candidates that may become available in the U.S. in terms of their association with abortion-derived cell lines, helpfully collated by the Charlotte Lozier Institute and alphabetically arranged:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company/Sponsor</th>
<th>Abortion-Derived Cell Line Used in Vaccine Development/Production?</th>
<th>Abortion-Derived Cell Line Used in Vaccine Laboratory Testing?</th>
<th>&quot;Ethical Profile&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allimmune</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arcturus Therapeutics</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AstraZeneca/University of Oxford</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Very Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immunity Bio &amp; Nanitek</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Very Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inovio Pharmaceuticals</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janssen/Johnson &amp; Johnson</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Very Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merck and JAVI</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderna</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novavax</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pfizer/BioNTech</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanofi &amp; GSK Protein Sciences</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanofi Pasteur/Translate Bc</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servier/T-Cellvax</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Pittsburgh</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virofire</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In hopeful anticipation of 2021

The year of Our Lord 2020 brought a lot of change, to put it mildly. To put it more strongly, one might say it was apocalyptic, and that wouldn't be wrong. "Apocalypse" is an uncovering or revealing.

Many things were revealed about the fragility of our political and health systems and will likely bring even more change in the years to come. This column has focused on our relationship to technology in light of our faith and something is being revealed there as well.

The lack of human presence we have experienced due to quarantines and lockdowns has taken a toll on mental and spiritual health. Loneliness and lack of social connection has been compared to smoking, obesity and lack of physical activity in its effects on the human body. The loneliness epidemic did not come out of nowhere in 2020; it was a troubling trend even before the pandemic.

Lack of presence was not new to 2020. As MIT professor and psychologist Sherry Turkle put it prior to the pandemic, friends and families were often "alone together" as they spent more time on screens and social media than with each other.

Turkle's phrase, which was meant to rouse us from our technological stupefying, actually became a COVID-19 ad slogan encouraging people to stay home, complete with its own hashtag and website, www.alonetogether.com.

Catholics felt the lack of presence acutely as liturgies were moved online and the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist was relegated to being viewed through a screen. Spiritual Communion prayers were uttered worldwide to keep the faithful connected to the sacrament by other means.

What was uncovered, by God's grace, was a catastrophic hunger that may have been laying dormant in many hearts that had grown cold or taken the availability of the Mass for granted.

It is in these moments that we are better able to see the way in which God helps us experience the greater good, even in the midst of suffering. A deeper appreciation for the true power and mystery of Christ's real presence in the holy Eucharist gives us the means for initiating a revival in the year to come.

The cycle of the liturgical year is a

See ROBINSON, Page 23

Make God the center, not ourselves

By Mary Marrocco Catholic News Service

How difficult it is to get out of the center of the universe. And how painful to find our way there.

It's a human dilemma. We tend to see ourselves as the center of everything. Even when we try to put ourselves and our egos second or third, we quickly find ourselves back at the center, trying to rearrange everything around us. We don't do the good we want to do (Rom 7:15) and end up stuck and baffled.

We might put this common, perplexing human problem under the heading of "addiction." Like the psychiatrist and theologian Gerald May describes addiction as whatever we put in the place of God and worship in his stead.

In our addicted state, everything we do is designed to get us what we crave; all other reality is manipulated to this end. We aren't likely to see our intentions clearly, being masters at deceiving ourselves about our true motives and methods. That's part of the human dilemma too, wrapped up as we are by the deceiver and unable to extricate ourselves.

For Heather, for example, controlling her weight is her addiction. Fooling others, manipulating the self and the world to keep us controlling, controlled and miserable. Or we might say, addicted.

See MARROCCO, Page 23
**Catholic Voices**

**Love is a balm for our suffering**

To say that 2020 was an overwhelming year is an understatement. 2020 touched us all, rich and poor, people of color and white people, and West Coast to East Coast. No country went untouched by the pandemic and its economic impacts. We all have a 2020 story to share.

Though the pandemic surpassed borders and class, its effects have lasted longer for some compared to others. For the uninsured and underinsured, the underemployed and unemployed, health care and essential workers, among others, the pandemic has created deep wounds.

This year has shown us how interrelated our inequities are in society. We saw how the pandemic devastated communities of color because of high risk factors related to general employment industries, crowded housing conditions, lack of appropriate access to health care, lack of child care, and more.

We also saw the unjust burden that health care workers were forced to carry with limited personal protective equipment, limited staff and technology. All this while political leaders refused to provide a consistent plan of action for relief and certain faith leaders offered controversial opinions on the role of the church during such a time.

I've been asking myself, Why is it so hard for us to understand the concept of solidarity and creating a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable? Why do people believe in conspiracy theories more than experts and public servants who have dedicated their lives to serving us?

For nearly a decade, I've worked as an advocate of vulnerable communities along with other nonprofits, government entities and health care providers. In my experience, we are most successful when we work together, not against one another.

Even if we may have fundamental disagreements, say on a topic like immigration, we still must have a dialogue and find a solution we can agree on. We use facts, research and people's experiences to make our recommendations.

Solutions don't come overnight, and the process can be cumbersome and frustrating. Even then, we choose to continue the dialogue. We come back to the table.

However, is it just me, or does it seem like people just quit on one another when it came time to discuss the pandemic? I often heard phrases like, "Do what's best for you." Yet, this method doesn't work for a crisis. It doesn't bring solutions to the table. It brings confusion.

I wish I could say I had a plan or a solution to share. I don't. I only have my reflections as I work to bring this year to an end.

Perhaps because we have so much in the U.S., we struggle to understand the concept of solidarity with those who have less. Perhaps because we live in an age of relativism, where everyone is right in their own way, we struggle to understand when things are truly wrong and unjust.

In the end, you may agree 2020 was a dark year, but it wasn't pitch black. There were glimpses of light shining through.

I witnessed so much hope. I saw hope in the doctors, nurses and health care staff who opened their doors to all who needed them. I saw hope in the immigrant farmers working through clouds of smoke to make sure we had fresh fruit and vegetables on our tables. I saw hope in grocery store workers who put themselves at risk so that we could have food and other necessities at home.

I saw courage in the marchers who risked it all so that Black voices would finally be heard. I saw strength in the immigration advocates and attorneys who worked to reunite separated families. I saw life in all those who chose selflessness this year.

As I think about this Christmas season, I am filled with a deep sense of gratitude to all who lived through 2020 with great bravery and humility. I once read that love is a balm for our suffering. May we all choose to be love for others.

Mother Mary, cover us with your mantle and bring us healing in 2021.

Edith Avila Olea works in immigrant advocacy. The 2015 winner of the Cardinal Bernardin New Leadership Award, she holds a master's degree in public policy and a bachelor's degree in organizational communication.

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**How generous are we?**

Someone I know is a waiter. Like restaurants across the U.S. during the COVID-19 pandemic, his establishment has been open, closed, carry-out only, 50% capacity — in other words, his income has bounced like a yo-yo.

The other evening, with renewed closure rules going into effect, he served his last table. He chatted with these customers, and when they left, he discovered they had left a $200 tip — more than the cost of their meal.

This, our season of giving, comes at a time of great need.

When I hear stories like this, it challenges my own generosity.

Am I a generous and spontaneous giver? Or do I parse out my treasure, my talents, my time, as if I'm budgeting for the electric bill? Do I overthink my giving? Or do I give freely and from my essence?

During Advent and Christmas, I have been called to reflect on John 1:5, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

The candle became a metaphor, of course, for my generosity. Some of us can't give up everything. We need to save for retirement. We need to provide for our families. So Jesus said, "Why not become fire?"

The older monk reached his hands up to heaven and his fingers became like 10 lamps of fire, and he said, "Give more."

Jesus told the rich man something that at first sounds like different advice. Jesus told him to give up all his possessions and then "follow me." Sometimes, when we read this, we decide it can't apply to us. Most of us can't give up everything. We need to save for retirement. We need to provide for our families. So Jesus isn't talking to me, is he?

It has taken me a while to realize the point of the story isn't about possessions. The point is that Jesus speaks to each of us individually about his will for us, but he always includes the call — we are always asked to follow him, and if we do, we become fire.

If we have the means, this year provides us the opportunity, the gift, of learning to stretch the warm fire of our generosity. Many parishes are experiencing a huge downturn in donations due to smaller crowds and closures. Food banks see lines snake mercilessly around city blocks. People are being evicted in unprecedented numbers. Our neighbors may be lonely or depressed and need a phone call.

My deacon friend was asked, "How much should I give?" He replied, "Give more."

Don't overthink it. We're called to be lavish, spontaneously, sacrificially generous with our time and resources.

When I light my candle, the flame reminds me of this.
Extreme heat, wildfires, storms marked advance of climate change in 2020

By Dennis Sadowski
Catholic News Service

CLEVELAND (CNS) — Extreme global temperatures, wildfires and hurricanes continued to plague the planet during 2020, prompting U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to appeal to the world to end its “war on nature.”

In a speech at Columbia University Dec. 2, Guterres warned that continued growth in fossil fuel extraction and usage would feed a growing cycle of warming that will place all of humanity in danger.

“The state of the planet is broken. Humanity is waging war on nature. This is suicidal,” he said.

Guterres’ concern emerged as the World Meteorological Organization projected that 2020 would end about 1.2 degrees warmer than the last half of the 19th century when industrialization led to increased usage of oil, coal and natural gas. Climate scientists expect 2020 to be one of the three hottest years on record.

Ecologists also expressed concern that widespread deforestation is leading to diminished biodiversity and increasing the risk of disease pandemics such as COVID-19.

A study published in the Aug. 5 issue of the science journal Nature added to a growing body of evidence that connects trends in human development and biodiversity loss to disease outbreaks.

The COVID-19 pandemic swept around the world by March after first being reported in China in late 2019. Cases continued to spike in the U.S. as 2020 neared its end, claiming a disproportionately higher toll in low-income and minority communities, according to federal data and the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center.

Meanwhile, nations continued to hold firm to their pledges to reduce greenhouse gas emissions under the 2015 Paris Agreement. The United States, however, formally left the accord Nov. 4, becoming the only country of the nearly 200 nations that signed it to abandon its promises to reduce emissions.

President-elect Joe Biden said Dec. 12 when he takes office the United States will rejoin the accord.

President Donald Trump announced in 2017 the U.S. would withdraw from it because he said it imposed an unfair economic burden on U.S. taxpayers.

Climate scientists said the changing climate worldwide fed more and stronger hurricanes, intense wildfires and rising coastal waters.

Citing how climate change most negatively affects poor and marginalized communities, Pope Francis continued speaking of the importance of caring for creation while questioning the benefits of increased consumerism and the burning of fossil fuels.

"Now is the time to abandon our dependence on fossil fuels and move, quickly and decisively, toward forms of clean energy," Pope Francis said as he marked the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation Sept. 1.

“We have caused a climate emergency that gravely threatens nature and life itself, including our own," the pope said.

Aking the pope’s longstanding concerns for the environment, global observances took place for the fifth anniversary of his encyclical, Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home.

A weeklong observance in May led by the Vatican Dicastery for Integral Human Development included online workshops that addressed ecological spirituality, sustainability and social justice advocacy and a rolling day of prayer.

As part of the observance, the dicastery announced a "Special Laudato Si’ Anniversary Year" that began May 24.

Across the U.S., church-led conservation and sustainability efforts gained momentum. Environmental programs in the Indianapolis, Chicago and Atlanta archdioceses and the Stockton, California, and Joliet, Ill., dioceses focused on alternative energy programs and advocacy to protect creation.

In a major effort, the Diocese of Richmond, Virginia, introduced a solar power program in collaboration with Catholic Energies, a program of the Catholic Climate Covenant.

The covenant also introduced the Catholic Climate Project, an intergenerational movement to respond through action and prayer to the challenges posed by climate change. The effort is set to build on what parishioners and organizations already are doing while inviting more people to deepen the Catholic commitment to protect creation.

2020 also marked the 50th anniversary of Earth Day April 22. In a statement on its website about the day, the California Catholic Conference noted that Earth Day awareness and activism have led to the Clean Air, Clear Water and Endangered Species acts.

“As Catholics, we are deeply committed to our environment and our home,” said the conference, which is the public policy arm of the state’s Catholic bishops.

In line with Pope Francis’ call for fossil fuel divestment, dozens of Catholic and faith-based entities announced plans to do so in two separate announcements during the year.

A tally by the Global Catholic Climate Movement-led campaign shows that since 2016 nearly 400 religious organizations worldwide have said they will divest.

High temperatures and long-term drought in parts of Australia, Siberia and the western U.S. and Canada fueled massive wildfires that claimed lives and destroyed entire communities.

Extreme temperatures in Australia saw fires that started in 2019 continue into early 2020 and then fire up again in November. Australian naturalists estimated that 1 billion animals lost their lives in the first round of fires.

California, Oregon and Washington endured fires never recorded on the scale the states experienced.

Archbishop Alexander K. Sample of Portland visited Southern Oregon Sept. 19-20 to meet some of the hundreds of people who lost homes earlier in the month to powerful wind-driven fires. In Sacred Heart Parish in Medford alone, almost 150 families, many of whom are lower-income Hispanics, lost their homes. Entire neighbor-

hoods in Talent and Phoenix, Oregon, disappeared.

A fire also ravaged Mission San Gabriel Arcangel in California in the predawn hours of July 11, leaving gaping holes in the church’s 230-year-old roof. The altar, along with the mission’s bell tower and museum, were spared, but the thick adobe walls were blackened.

Beyond the fires, 2020 was record setting for hurricanes. The Atlantic basin saw its highest number of named storms with 30 including 13 hurricanes, six of which were classified as major. Hurricane Laura was the strongest to hit the U.S. coastline, raking Lake Charles, Louisiana, 50 miles inland, Aug. 27 with 135- mph winds and torrential rains that caused widespread flooding.

Much of the diocese’s infrastructure sustained serious damage, as dozens of churches, several schools and chancery offices needed major repairs.

Prior to landfall in the U.S. Laura swept through several Caribbean islands including Hispaniola, where 35 people overall died in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Six weeks later on Oct. 9, the same area of Louisiana took a direct hit from Hurricane Delta. More than half of the Lake Charles Diocese’s 39 churches had tarps on their roofs after Laura, and most of those tarps blew off during Delta, soaking them anew.

In Central America, powerful hurricanes Eta and Iota — two weeks apart in November — inundated Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, forcing tens of thousands of people from their homes, which had filled with water and mud.

Honduran authorities reported at least 100 deaths and $10 billion in damage from the storms, the most devastating in 11 years. Officials said 1 million people lost their jobs or source of income.

Humanitarian aid agencies expect the severe damage inflicted on poor communities will result influence climate refugees to head north to the U.S. to seek safer surroundings and more secure livelihoods.

And in the Philippines, Typhoon Goni, the strongest storm of the year on the planet, left 25 people dead and thousands of people displaced by flooding and wide-scale destruction of homes and farms. It was the second super typhoon of the season in the Pacific basin.

Follow Sadowski on Twitter: @DennisSadowski
By Dennis Sadowski
Catholic News Service

CLEVELAND (CNS) — Democrat Joe Biden became the second Catholic elected to lead the country Nov. 3, outpolling Republican incumbent Donald Trump by calling for national unity and cooperation and determination to overcome the coronavirus pandemic.

Garnering more than 81.2 million votes, the most for a presidential candidate in history, Biden was establishing his administration as he prepared to take the oath of office Jan. 20.

The election became all the more historic by the election of Sen. Kamala Harris, D-California, as vice president. She will be the first woman to hold the second-highest position in the federal government.

However, Trump had yet to concede the election Dec. 7 and continued mounting legal challenges to vote counts in several battleground states while casting doubt on the integrity of the country's electoral system.

Democrats, the media and various state officials said Trump's legal team has not produced any direct evidence to support its claims of a rigged election. They disputed a video purporting to show irregularities by election workers in Georgia and questioned claims in hundreds of sworn affidavits gathered by Trump's lawyers from witnesses who said they saw vote counts being altered.

As of Dec. 7, Biden was more than 7 million votes ahead of Trump, who had received almost 74.2 million votes, which also is a record-setting number.

In the all-important Electoral College, the Biden-Harris ticket held a 306-232 lead. Electors met Dec. 14 to cast their ballots, confirming the nationwide vote outcome. Congress will meet Jan. 6 to certify the Electoral College results.

Biden follows the late John F. Kennedy, who was elected in 1960, as the only other Catholic to hold the country's highest office.

Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, congratulated Biden on the victory Nov. 7, hours after news organizations declared that the Democratic candidate had won the race.

The election marked a "time for our leaders to come together in a spirit of national unity," Archbishop Gomez said in a statement. He also called on Biden and Harris to "commit themselves to dialogue and compromise for the common good."

The archbishop celebrated the freedom that allowed Americans to assert their views at the polls. He also said he believed "at this moment in American history, Catholics have a special duty to be peacemakers, to promote fraternity and mutual trust, and to pray for a renewed spirit of true patriotism in our county."

On Nov. 12, Pope Francis called Biden to congratulate him on winning the election. In a readout on the call, the Biden camp said the president-elect thanked the pope for "extending blessings and congratulations and noted his appreciation for His Holiness's leadership in promoting peace, reconciliation and the common bonds of humanity around the world."

Five days later as the USCBB concluded the public portion of its annual fall general assembly, Archbishop Gomez announced the formation of a working group of U.S. bishops to address issues surrounding the election of a Catholic president and policies that may come about that would be in conflict with Catholic teaching and the bishops' priorities.

Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron of Detroit, USCCB vice president, was named to head the working group, which will include conference committee chairmen in a number of areas where disagreement is expected between the church and the future Biden administration.

Archbishop Gomez acknowledged the president-elect "has given us reason to believe his faith commitments will lead to certain policies we favor," such as immigration, aid to refugees and the poor, racial justice, capital punishment and climate change.

He expressed concern, however, that Biden "will support policies that are against some fundamental values we hold dear as Catholics," including "repeal of the Hyde Amendment and his support for Roe v. Wade."

The 1973 Supreme Court Roe v. Wade decision allowed legal abortion throughout the United States. The Hyde Amendment forbids the use of federal funds to be used for abortions, with exceptions in cases of rape or incest or to save the life of the mother.

Archbishop Gomez said support by a Catholic politician for such policies and others that threaten the common good "creates confusion among the faithful about what the church actually teaches on these questions."

A spokesperson for the USCBB told Catholic News Service Dec. 2 that the working group had not yet met.

In the run-up to the election, both campaigns initiated special outreach efforts to Catholic voters. Catholics for Trump and Catholics for Biden worked to mobilize the Catholic vote for each respective candidate.

Polls showed almost an even split among Catholics for Trump and Biden, falling in line with the past three presidential elections.

Data compiled by Associated Press/VoteCast showed that Trump received 50% of the overall Catholic vote to Biden's 49%. Trump won white Catholics by about 15 percentage points.

Edison Research exit polls estimated that about 52% of all Catholic voters chose Biden while 47% preferred Trump.

Both surveys indicate that Biden's Catholic faith did not significantly sway Catholic voters.

Meanwhile, Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory of Washington, who received his red hat at the Vatican Nov. 28, has said he hoped to collaborate with Biden where possible while respectfully pointing out where the president-elect's policies diverge from Catholic teaching.

He also told CNS Nov. 24 he would not prevent the new president, who attends Mass every Sunday, from receiving holy Communion in the archdiocese.

"The kind of relationship that I hope we will have is a conversational relationship where we can discover areas where we can cooperate that reflect the social teachings of the church, knowing full well that there are some areas where we won't agree," Cardinal Gregory said. "They are areas where the church's position is very clear," particularly its opposition to the president's support for legal abortion.

The election year opened with Trump facing impeachment by the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives. House members voted along party lines to impeach Trump Dec. 18, 2019, for abuse of power by enlisting a foreign government to investigate a political rival — Biden — ahead of the election and obstruction of Congress' investigation of the matter.

Impeachment hearings ran for 10 days, Jan. 22–31, in the Republican-led Senate. With 67 votes needed for a conviction, the Senate Feb. 5 voted 52-48 on the first count and 53-47 on the second count to acquit the president.

Trump celebrated the Senate vote the next morning at the National Prayer Breakfast, walking on stage and displaying newspapers announcing in bold headlines that he had been "Acquitted." As four members of Congress and a well-known economist called for healing, unity and "love of neighbor" at the 68th annual event attended by more than 3,000 people in Washington, Trump broke ranks and criticized Democrats for impeaching him while he hailed Republicans who acquitted him.

The president accused Democrats, whom he called "very dishonest and corrupt people," of putting his family and the country through a "terrible ordeal" before delivering prepared remarks.

Trump recapped actions his administration had undertaken including steps to support prayer in classrooms, and persecuted religious minorities such as the Yazidis in Iraq and Christians elsewhere, policies to protect unborn children and the formation of the international Religious Freedom Alliance involving about 25 nations. - - -

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sacramental confession, reception of Communion, and the prayer for the pope’s intentions be carried out within several days before or after the indulged action.

INDULGENCES IN THE YEAR OF ST. JOSEPH
The Dec. 8 decree by the Apostolic Penitentiary states that Pope Francis established the ‘Year of St. Joseph’ so that all the faithful “may daily reinforce their own life of faith in complete fulfillment of God’s will.” During this special year, we have the opportunity to obtain, “with the help of St. Joseph, head of the heavenly Family of Nazareth, comfort and relief from the serious human and social tribulations that besiege the contemporary world today.”

The decree bestows the plenary indulgence to members of the faithful who, fulfilling the normal conditions listed above, participate in the Year of St. Joseph in any of the following ways:

a. contemplating the Lord’s Prayer for at least 30 minutes, or participating in a spiritual retreat of at least one day which involves a meditation on St. Joseph
b. carrying out a corporal or spiritual work of mercy
c. reciting the rosary in families or among betrothed
d. daily entrusting one’s life to the protection of St. Joseph and praying for the intercession of St. Joseph so that those in search of work may find employment and that the work of all people may be more dignified

The decree goes on to say that, in the current context of the coronavirus pandemic, the plenary indulgence to members of the faithful who, fulfilling the normal conditions listed above, participate in the Year of St. Joseph in any of the following ways:

a. contemplating the Lord’s Prayer for at least 30 minutes, or participating in a spiritual retreat of at least one day which involves a meditation on St. Joseph
b. carrying out a corporal or spiritual work of mercy
c. reciting the rosary in families or among betrothed
d. daily entrusting one’s life to the protection of St. Joseph and praying for the intercession of St. Joseph so that those in search of work may find employment and that the work of all people may be more dignified

e. reciting a Litany of St. Joseph in favor of the church persecuted and for the relief of all Christians who suffer any form of persecution
f. reciting any prayer legitimately approved or act of piety in honor of St. Joseph

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e. reciting a Litany of St. Joseph in favor of the church persecuted and for the relief of all Christians who suffer any form of persecution
f. reciting any prayer legitimately approved or act of piety in honor of St. Joseph

g. reciting a prayer in honor of St. Joseph in the Litany of St. Joseph, which is featured in the Prayer Square in this edition of the West Texas Angelus.

Prayers in honor of St. Joseph
There are many different prayers and acts of piety in honor of St. Joseph. These can be found in most Catholic prayer books. One of them is a Nine-Day Novena to St. Joseph, which can be prayed by anyone at any time. The following is an ancient version of this novena prayer:

“O Saint Joseph, whose protection is so great, so strong, so prompt before the throne of God, I place in you all my interests and desires. O Saint Joseph, assist me by your powerful intercession and obtain for me from your Divine Son all spiritual blessings through Jesus Christ, Our Lord; so that having engaged here below your heavenly power, I may offer my thanksgiving and homage to the most loving Fathers. O Saint Joseph, never weary contemplating you and Jesus asleep in your arms; I dare not approach while you are near your heart. Press me in your name and kiss his fine head for me, and ask him to return the kiss when I draw my dying breath. O Saint Joseph, hear my prayers and obtain my petitions. ( Mention your intention. ) Saint Joseph, pray for us. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Another prayer in honor of St. Joseph is the Letanía de San José. Pope Francis shares a prayer to St. Joseph, which he encourages all of us to pray. Here is the text of that prayer: “Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary. To you God entrusted his only Son; in you Mary placed her trust; with you Christ became man. Blessed Joseph, to us too, show yourself a father and guide us in the path of life. Obtain for us grace, mercy, and courage, and defend us from every evil. Amen.”

OBISPO
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b. tener la intención de cumplir, cuanto antes, las condiciones de la concesión sacramental, la Comunión eucarística, y rezar por las intenciones del Papa, en su propia cas a donde su condición los detenga
c. recitando un acto de piedad en honor a San José, ofreciendo a Dios sus sufrimientos y las dificultades de su vida.

ORACIONES EN HONOR A SAN JOSÉ
Hay muchas diferentes oraciones y actos de piedad en honor a San José. Estos se pueden encontrar en la mayoría de los libros de oraciones católicos. Uno de ellos es una Novena dedicada a San José, que puede ser recitada por cualquier persona en cualquier momento. La siguiente es una versión antigua de esta novena:

“O San José, cuya protección es tan grande, tan poderosa y efica zante ante el trono de Dios, en tus manos entregó todos mis intereses y mis deseos. Oh San José, asiste con tu poderosa intercesión. Obtén para mi, de tu Divino Hijo, Nuestro Señor, todas las bendiciones espirituales que necesito. A fin de que, habiendo conseguido, aquí en la tierra, la ayuda de tu poder celestial, pueda ofrecer mi gratitud y homenaje al Padre más Amoroso. Oh San José, nunca me cansaré de contemplarte con el Niño Jesús dormido en tus brazos. No me atrevo a acercarme mientras que el Niño reposa sobre tu corazón. Abrazale fuertemente en mi nombre, y de parte mía, besa su fina y delicada Cabecita. Luego, suplicale que me devuelva ese beso a la hora de mi último suspiro. San José, patrono de los moribundos, ruega por nosotros. (Menciono tu intención) Amén. San José, ruega por nosotros. En el nombre del Padre y del Hijo y del Espíritu Santo. Amén.”

Otra oración en honor a San José es la Letanía de San José, que se presenta en el Espacio de Oración en esta edición del West Texas Angelus.

Finalmente, al final de su carta Patris Corde del 8 de diciembre, el Papa Francisco comparte una oración a San José, que nos anima a todos a orar. Aquí está el texto de esa oración: “Salve, custodi o del Redentor y esposo de la Virgen María. A ti Dios confió a su Hijo, en ti María depositó su confianza, contigo Cristo se forjó como hombre. Oh, bendecido José, muéstrate padre también a nosotros y guíanos en el camino de la vida. Concédanos gracia, misericordia y valentía, y defiéndenos de todo mal. Amén.”

KNICKERBOCKERS
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receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among the saints, are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:17-18 NKJV).

This is a succinct statement of God’s promise to us through Jesus Christ: transformation from darkness to light, deliverance from the power of Satan, forgiveness of sins, sanctification in faith with all believers leading to eternal life.

However, as John wrote, “the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen, that his deeds have been wrought in God” (Jn 3:19–21 RSVCE). “I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness” (Jn 12:46).

What does God require of us believers who have been gloriously delivered from darkness into his light? What does God require of us, as he did the multitudes, as we read in the Gospel of Matthew: “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (5:14–16).

We are to commit ourselves daily to Jesus who acts “with us, in us, and through us” (the WIT prayer, Fr. David Knight) to a darkened world — desperately in need of his light. St. Paul instructs us in his letter to the Ephesians, “for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and refrain from unbecoming talk just as you learned it from me, the Lord” (5:8–10). “For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:5–6). What does the Lord require of us? To allow him to live his light and his truth in us through us so he can transform the darkness wherever we are.

On October 16, 2002, St. John Paul II published an Apostolic Letter Rosarium Virginis Mariae, in which he introduced five mysteries which he called The Mysteries of Light, or Luminous Mysteries, that refer to the public life of Jesus. (They had been originally proposed by St. George Preca of Malta in 1957.) The fourth Luminous Mystery, the Transfiguration, prefigures Christ’s resurrection, the final victory of light over darkness. We see the glory of God in the luminous face of Jesus and a promise of our own resurrection and eternal life. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. … He was … speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him!’” (Mt 17:2, 5). We do well to listen and heed: “If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin (1 Jn 1:7).

All scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, gives witness to the cosmic struggle between light and darkness, good and evil, truth and falsehood in the world, in the church, and in each of our lives. "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory [over Satan, sin, and death] through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:57) in his resurrection from the dead!

In the final consummation of the world, according to the Revelation to John: "There shall be no night there: They shall reign forever and ever” (21:22-24; 22:5 NKJV). Amen and Amen.

Father Knick Knickerbocker is a retired priest of the Diocese of San Angelo, ordained under the Pastoral Provision which allows for the reception of married former Episcopalian priests into the Catholic Church. He and his wife, Sandie, write a monthly column for the West Texas Angelus.
**PANDEMIC**

Continued from Page 14

The academic calendar also was different. Most colleges started earlier, eliminating fall holidays and ended their in-person session either just before Thanksgiving break or concluding the semester virtually, with online exams, in the first few weeks of December.

Parishes also have been complying with restrictions amid reopening. This summer, in the Diocese of Portland, Maine, the effort to reopen churches, even in a limited fashion, prompted creativity among clergy and parish staff. No more than 50 people could be in attendance, masks were mandatory and temporary pew-seating arrangements ensured social-distancing guidelines were followed. In addition, reservations were required to make sure capacity wasn’t exceeded.

As parishes and schools have taken steps to slowly reopen and the coronavirus pandemic shows signs of worsen-

**BIOETHICS**

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effective version for the serious reason of danger to our health.

Relying on cell lines from abortions to manufacture a COVID-19 vaccine provokes strong moral objections and some can and will refuse the vaccines on these grounds. While it is a personal decision of conscience as to whether or not to accept a vaccine, it is important to be clear that the church, for her part, does not require us to decline it on such grounds in the face of serious reasons, as in the situation of an elderly person or someone with multiple health issues who faces significant risks if they were to contract COVID-19. This fact, of course, in no way absolves or diminishes the serious wrongdoing of those who used cell lines from abortions to make vaccines in the first place.

Any time we decide to receive an unethically produced vaccine, moreover, we should push back. We need to do our part in applying pressure on the manufacturer, perhaps by sending an e-mail indicating our objection to the fact that their vaccine was produced using ethically controversial cell sources, and requesting that they reformulate it using alternative, non-abortion-related cell sources. Alternatively, we might write a letter to the editor of our local paper pointing out the injustice of being morally coerced to rely on these cell sources, or take other steps to educate and inform others.

Such efforts help expand public awareness of the problem and apply real pressure for change. Such efforts can be more effective (and require more authentic determination on our part) than merely “digging in our heels” or “taking a stand” and refusing to get vaccinated, which has the negative effect of subjecting us, and others around us, to heightened risk from various diseases.

While it is too early to know which COVID-19 vaccines will end up becoming available in the U.S., the pandemic is certain to elevate the profile of abortion-related ethical concerns among the public to a degree not previously seen, offering a unique opportunity to push for the elimination of these cell lines from future biomedical research and pharmaceutical development projects.

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 and www.fathertad.com.

The same can be said of our presence with one another. The “fasting” from human and liturgical presence that we have endured for more than a year will ultimately give way to a deeper reunion with our faith and with one another; a reunion that prefigures that which is to come when we are united with God in the most real and lasting presence of eternity.

Robinson is director of communications and Catholic media studies at the University of Notre Dame McGrath Institute for Church Life.

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and the sense of unveiling and fulfillment that comes with anticipation and mystery that comes with Advent and Lent, fasting and feasting so that we become attuned to the sense of another. The church, in her wisdom, has given us periods of revelatory sign of hope as one calendar year passes into another. The church, in her wisdom, has given us periods of

PANDEMIC

Continued from Page 14

ing before improving, church and school leaders have maintained that the key in all of this is flexibility. They have stressed that reopening requires strict adherence to new protocols and the flexibility to switch gears if necessary.

Baltimore Auxiliary Bishop Adam J. Parker emphasized this same view several months ago when the pandemic’s outbreak in the United States was still new.

“We’re really grateful for the patience our faithful parishioners, parish leaders and pastors have shown throughout the pandemic,” he said. “We ask for that to continue because it is such a complex matter and there is no precedent for it. We’ve practically rewritten the entire archdiocesan policy manual over the past five or six weeks. Now, in some senses, we are going to be writing it again.”

Contributing to this report was Mark Zimmermann in Washington, Sam Lucero in Green Bay and Dennis Sadowski in Cleveland.

Follow Zimmermann on Twitter: @carolmaczim

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**MARROCCO**

Continued from Page 18

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God looking up to Mary. God’s humility, listening and obedience create the possibility of ours. He shows us how we become like him. And so we can take our natural place at the center of creation, not to dominate it but to love it as God does. To finally become fully human, fully alive.

Heather tasted this freedom when, for a moment, she felt the delight of the heaven she looked down on. She realized the food she really wanted was what she already had, and in her joy she let go of everything else to taste that one thing: the Eucharist. The humblest thing of all.

For a moment, she wasn’t the center of the universe. Nothing changed, but everything changed. Paradoxically, that’s the first step into the center of the universe in the way we are meant to be there, not by self-absorption but by love.

The next steps on Heather’s journey may not be easy. The journey of the Magi, of the shepherds, wasn’t easy. But I doubt they counted the cost, or even noticed it.

They surrendered all joyful, on their way to look down to the little one who opened up heaven to all. They beheld Christ, vulnerable and poor, in the arms of the woman who knew how to let go of everything so as to bear everything up.

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Marrocco can be reached at marrocco7@sympatico.ca.

Father Bala Anthony Govindu and Father Prem Thumma bowed to the altar after reading the first and second reading in Father Joseph Vathalloor’s funeral Mass.

Bishop Joe Vásquez of the Diocese of Austin, originally a priest of the Diocese of San Angelo, gave the homily at the funeral Mass.

Many priests of the Diocese of San Angelo were in attendance.

Bishop Michael Sis of the Diocese of San Angelo incensed Father Vathalloor’s coffin.

After the conclusion of the funeral Mass, priests prayed a prayer traditional to the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, the rite to which Father Vathalloor’s home province belongs. The prayer was offered in the Malayalam language.

Deacon Michael Kahlig, Bishop Michael Sis, Father Mamachan Joseph, Bishop Joe Vásquez, Father Ryan Rojo, Deacon Victor Belman, and Father Adam Droll stood at the altar during the preparation of the Eucharist.