Faith carries family after injury

OCTOBER 9, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Diocesan News, Featured
As Pam Surano left Mass at St. Benedict the Moor parish on August 30, 2020, filled with gratitude and eager for a Sunday family dinner, she got a call from her 13-year-old daughter, Mary, that changed their lives.

Mary had been jumping on a trampoline and landed on her head and neck. Pam rushed to see her.

“She was in her daddy’s car and I opened the door and I said, ‘Mary, get out and walk with me.’ She said, ‘I can’t.’ And I said, ‘OK wiggle your toes.’ And she said, ‘I can’t,’” Suranno said.

The accident triggered what was eventually diagnosed as a spinal stroke, leaving Mary unable to feel or move anything from the chest down.

*Pam Surano shares with Jennifer Antkowiak how she and her daughter Mary are relying on their faith amid tragedy.*
Many moments from that day are forever burned into Surano’s mind, including seeing her daughter moved from the car to the hospital.

“She fell forward,” Surano said. “And I’ll never forget the image of her falling forward like a broken little doll. She lost all control of her body, and it was just the most horrifying thing that I’ve ever seen, Just the most perfect little person, inside and out.”

Surano praised the medical teams who’ve been helping Mary. They have offered varying opinions concerning expectations for Mary’s recovery. But, as devout, active Catholics, Surano and Mary feel they have the answers they need through their connection with God. In fact, Surano said, one day Mary told her she heard God’s voice and wrote down His words:

“‘God told me, Mary, in order for Me to heal you, You must stay faithful and believe that I will, Do not forget that I will heal you. Your faith will allow me to perform a miracle and heal you, Then you can tell everyone and they will know My work and turn to Me.’

“And after she read that, she just started crying from the purest part of her soul, and I knew. Who writes that?” Surano asked. “Who says, ‘they will know my work and turn to me’? No one. She knew that was from God, and we read this every day and I say, ‘Don’t ask anyone anymore if you will walk, because you already have your answer.’”

Surano believes they’ve seen Jesus working through. Their Catholic community has offered a Mass and rosaries for Mary. She has received visits from their Pastor, and Pittsburgh Steeler Ryan Shazier, and well wishes from people they don’t even know.
“The prayers of this very special Pittsburgh community have just been a lifeline, just a life raft when we just felt we were drowning in sorrow,” Surano said.

Mary has continued to attend online classes through her school, Blessed Francis Seelos Academy, which has been a great source of comfort to the family. “If we stop learning, we stop living. She is living as fully as she can because her life is full. it’s full of prayer. it’s full of friends, family, school. Her school has been absolutely amazing,” Surano said.

School parents shared Mary’s story with staff at the National Shrine of Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos in New Orleans, hopeful for the intercession of the priest who served nine years in Pittsburgh and is known as a miracle worker.

“The priest from the shrine calls us and checks in with Mary and holds the cross of Blesses Francis Seelos, with the bones in the cross, and prays for her over the phone and she tells him, ‘well this happened today and that happened today,’” Surano said. “We just feel God working so powerfully.”
Sharing values and a new future

OCTOBER 9, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Catholic Schools, Featured
Ave Maria principal Lynne Lynch shares how common values and academic excellence unite the new school

Merging elementary schools is never simple, especially in the midst of a pandemic. But teachers, students and parents at the new Ave Maria Academy are rising to the occasion.

“Passions for Catholic education, and its history in our region, run deep,” principal Lynne Lynch told Father Tom Burke on the diocesan radio program Catholic Education Plus, airing Sunday. “The only thing which runs deeper than our ties with the past is our hope for the future. People want us to succeed.”

Lynch was principal of St. Thomas More School in Bethel Park, which merged with the former St. Bernard School in Mt. Lebanon, Our Lady of Grace School in Scott Township, and St. Anne School in Castle Shannon. Ave Maria Academy uses two
Ave Maria Academy was established as part of a new region—the South Hills Regional Catholic Elementary Schools. Instead of parishes running their own school, they now support regional schools in their area. Principals run school buildings campuses—in Bethel Park and Mt. Lebanon, and is working to build a new identity starting with the motto is “Shared Values and Academic Excellence.”

“From our shared faith comes our shared values—how we interact with one another, not only in church or schools, but in our homes and in general,” Lynch said. “Academic excellence is that high bar—academic rigor. Our parents want their children to be fully prepared.”

Shortly after the merger announcement, the coronavirus struck. The schools offered online classes for the rest of the academic year. To move ahead with the merger, teamwork was key.

“We had a lot of help from our families, teachers, regional administrator Sharon Brown and diocesan leadership,” Lynch said. “At Ave Maria Academy, our families are our first line of defense, as they monitor and check their children every morning.

“Everyone puts on a mask before they enter our buildings. Children do not move between classrooms—the teachers do. We social distance, our restrooms are cleaned every hour and teachers wipe down their homerooms at the end of each day. So, it’s pretty thorough.”

Lynch shares her time between both school buildings, alternating where she starts and finishes each day. She greets students for morning arrival and saying goodbye in the afternoon. “I normally walk through and interact with our teachers and staff,” she said. “I normally take a break to visit with our students during lunch or recess.”
under the direction of the regional administrator and business manager. A
governing board of pastors and lay leaders provides expertise and oversight to all
schools.

“I understand the sacrifices that parents make for their children,” Lynch said. “Thank
you for prioritizing their future.”

Catholic Education Plus airs Sunday at 6:30 a.m. on KDKA-AM 1020. Podcasts of the
show are available at https://www.radio.com/kdkaradio/podcasts/catholic-
education-plus-20662.

Lynch quizzes first graders at Ave Maria Academy, Mt. Lebanon campus
Duquesne program will form Church leaders

OCTOBER 9, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Diocesan News, Featured

Duquesne University’s move to establish a new Department of Catholic Studies is expected to help the Diocese of Pittsburgh educate and form lay persons for ministry in the Church.

The program, which will draw on the expertise and curricular resources of Duquesne’s nine schools, will begin admitting students in the fall of 2021. Its chairman will be Dr. Kenneth L. Parker, a convert to the Catholic faith and former Benedictine monk who earned a Ph.D. in historical theology from the University of Cambridge.
Dr. Parker currently holds the Ryan Endowed Chair for Newman Studies at Duquesne, where he is a professor of historical theology.

“As we move forward, the program will enable the university to attract future lay leaders,” he told The Pittsburgh Catholic. “Such study animates and focuses their life of faith, attracting them to some form of service in the Church.

“This is an exciting expansion of living out the university's mission—learning the Catholic faith and living it.”

Effective religious education is a key goal of the diocese's On Mission for The Church Alive! planning initiative. Duquesne University has long educated lay leaders across the diocese, including catechetical administrators, youth ministers, college campus ministers, Catholic school principals, religion teachers and parish catechists.

“Pittsburgh’s historic Catholic heritage and Duquesne University’s longstanding Spiritan charism—in accord with Catholic social teaching—promote dialogue on vital issues of our day through a distinctive Catholic lens,” said university president Ken Gormley.

The department is being funded initially through a gift from an anonymous donor.

The University Academic Council is reviewing proposals for majors and minors in Catholic studies, and may offer certificates, other credentials and graduate programs. The new department also is expected to encourage research and organize conferences and symposia.

“The department will promote local and global collaborations not only among the arts, humanities and social sciences but also among other areas such as law and
the health professions,” said Dr. Kristine Blair, dean of the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts at Duquesne.

Dr. David Dausey, executive vice president and provost at Duquesne, observed that “This department allows us to expand our footprint in Catholic studies while also building upon the charisms of the Spiritans and the careful study of the Catholic intellectual tradition.”

Duquesne University was founded in 1878 by a group of Catholic missionaries known today as the Spiritans. The university serves about 9,500 students.
Views from the Pews: How have you stayed connected to Christ?

OCTOBER 9, 2020

Categories: News

Tags: Featured, Views from the Pews

In “Views from the Pews,” we catch up with parishioners across the diocese and ask them a faith based question. This week, we asked our Facebook followers the question: “How have you stayed connected to Christ during the pandemic?” Below are a few of our favorite responses.

Follow @DioceseofPittsburgh on Facebook and Instagram to participate in future “Views from the Pews.”
“Working for the Knights of Columbus, it has not been difficult to feel connected to a great Catholic community. On the home front, we have been increasing prayer at home with our kids and finding several at-home programs to get the kids involved in their faith.”
--Ross Conklin, pictured with wife Stephanie and children Josh (8) Gianna (6) and Joseph (4), and family dog Coco. They are parishioners at St. Kilian Parish.
“I've joined the ‘Walking With Purpose Bible Study’ live on Facebook and Instagram.”

--Lisa Swanson, parishioner at St. Kilian Parish, pictured with her dog Toby
“I’ve stayed connected by live streaming masses with Bishop Zubik; listening to music and ‘The Message’ on Sirius XM; and being a part of a beautiful Discipleship Quad, a small faith sharing group at my parish.”

--Diane Cato Newland, parishioner at St. Aidan Parish, pictured with son Grant, a freshman at the University of Dayton, and Kayleigh a junior at Shaler Area High School
A gift that lives on

OCTOBER 9, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Diocesan News, Featured

Winning a nationwide Catholic art contest has helped Jaylee Duncan, 14, stay close to her late father, through memories of his art instruction and the contest’s link to a special string of rosary beads.

Jim Duncan, who had been her only drawing teacher, died a year and a half ago from cancer. When she was in fourth grade, he had advised her on a winning entry in the National Christmas Artwork Contest of the Missionary Childhood Association. Jaylee entered the contest again this year, receiving another award.

She remembered her father as she drew the brilliantly hued oil pastel and charcoal image of the three wise men.
“My dad knew a lot about drawing. He was very good at it,” said Jaylee, who attends the Lincoln Park Performing Arts Charter School in Midland, Beaver County. “If I was ever struggling to get something onto paper, he would help me out. He taught me some tips. And he didn’t take lessons either.”

Jaylee, her mother, Tracey, and two younger sisters live in Aliquippa, where the family attends St. Titus Parish and the girls receive religious education at St. Francis Cabrini. Four years ago, her CCD class participated in the Missionary Childhood Association contest. Twenty-two winners have their entries displayed throughout Advent and Christmas in the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. The pictures also are shared with officials at the Vatican.

The artwork on two grand prize winners became Christmas cards for Father Andrew Small, national director of the Pontifical Mission Societies, which oversees the Missionary Childhood Association.
formerly the Holy Childhood Association – encourages Catholic children to be aware of the needs of children in mission dioceses worldwide, to pray for them and to support them spiritually and materially. Jaylee had collected coins in “mite boxes” for the Missionary Childhood Association to help children in need.

Her first winning entry, a drawing of a kindly shepherd tending sheep beneath the star of Bethlehem, came at a pivotal time. When the winners went to Washington to receive their awards, Jaylee was accompanied by her CCD teacher because neither her mother or father could go. Her dad was diagnosed with cancer soon afterward.

Father Small had remembered Jaylee because it was unusual for a child to travel without either parent. When he heard soon afterward that her father was ill, he sent the family a rosary that Pope Francis had blessed and given to him at a meeting in Rome.

“It was an intense moment to see a young family that was experiencing the way of a cross so early,” Father Small said.

When Tracey Turner tried to speak about how much that blessed Rosary meant to her late husband and the family, she wept.

That kindness from Father Small is one reason the Duncans decided to enter the contest this year as a family activity. All three girls drew pictures.

Father Small was glad to see that Jaylee is still drawing and that he could help the family along a difficult path.

“Memories like these keep us warm, since the love we feel when we think of each other is exactly the same thing as being in God’s presence,” he said. “When we feel God’s love, we know that we are safe.”
Jaylee Duncan with her mom, Tracey
The Power of Word of Mouth Marketing

By Father Frank D. Almade
In 2002 the romantic comedy “My Big Fat Greek Wedding” starred an unknown actress, Nia Vardalos, who also wrote the Academy Award-nominated original screenplay. She got financing of $6,000,000—a modest amount in Twinkletown numbers. Critics were so-so toward the movie, but audiences loved it. Within six months it grossed over $368,000,000—61 times budget.
Three years earlier a shaky, scary first-film pseudo-documentary, “The Blair Witch Project,” hit the screen. Made for a paltry $750,000, with no marketing budget, it took in $250,000,000—333 times budget.

These are incredible numbers. Most Hollywood (and Bollywood and independent) movies are lucky to gross three or four times their budget.

How did “Wedding” and “Blair Witch” do it? Word of mouth. I was working in a diocesan office when “Greek Wedding” came out, and remember one of my staff raved about it. So I went to see it. It was laugh-out-loud funny, so I told all my friends about it. Word of mouth.

What does this have to do with the price of fish (as my dad would say) or with your parish?

My classmates and I recently celebrated our 42nd anniversary of priesthood. Each of us has our own vocation story and each features someone (a parent, grandparent, teacher, parish priest, aunt, friend) who told us about priests—what they do, who they are, how they minister to people in the name of Jesus. They were the “word-of-mouth” to us, sharing their faith and their love of the priesthood and the Church.

Our vocations did not come as thunderbolts from heaven. They came through ordinary people, faithful Catholics, whom we knew and trusted. Their witness opened up our imaginations to the possibility that God was calling each of us.

We are surrounded by ads: on the Internet, television, billboards, trucks, shirts, buildings, stadiums, even airplanes. But none of these merchandising vehicles is anywhere near as powerful as the homey words of your best friend's recommendation.
This is my invitation to share what you love with someone else. Share your love of God, of Jesus Christ, of the Church, of your parish, of the Catholic priesthood, of the vocation to married life or single life or volunteering or the diaconate. You don't have to worry about convincing anyone to do anything. All you have to do is share.

Tell someone about your love of the Eucharist, and invite them to come to church one time. Describe how a priest helped you in a time of need. Pass on what you learned by volunteering at a school or CCD program. Use the power of “word of mouth” to advertise your parish.

Like the sower of the seed in the Gospel parable, you never know what kind of ground your word of testimony will land on. Rocky and dry, or on fertile soil where it takes root and flourishess?

We need healthy, holy priests. Tell a young man you that you see these qualities in him, and that he should think about discerning a vocation to the Catholic priesthood. We need younger, enthusiastic volunteers. Let someone know how serving others in our parish is a wonderful way of following Christ. We need loving and faithful married people. Witness to the power of the sacrament of matrimony in your family.

Right now, my merged parish has five priests and three deacons. Wouldn't it be wonderful if, say, 20 years from now, because of your word of mouth, five more priests and three more deacons emerged from today's parishioners to serve the next generation? What if, in five years, the number of active parishioners doubled? How about if the holiness and outreach and singing and prayer of your parish became an inspiration to every Catholic church in western Pennsylvania?

Crazy, right? No less crazy than two small movies which made 61 or 333 times their budget — all because of word of mouth.
Father Frank Almade is the pastor of St. Joseph the Worker Parish.
Celebrating Our Lady of the Rosary Feast Day

OCTOBER 7, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Catholic Schools

What a sight in the sky near Archangel Gabriel Catholic School in Robinson earlier today! Students and teachers were outside, praying below a balloon rosary to celebrate the annual feast day of Our Lady of the Rosary. Many diocesan schools and parishes are praying to commemorate the day.

The celebration of the feast day goes back to 1573, when Pope Saint Pius V established it to thank God for a victory over a Turkish military invasion of Europe. He attributed the victory to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Today, we are reminded that Our Lady's prayers can overpower the mightiest of forces against us.
Pope Francis has called on the entire world to pray the rosary during the COVID-19 pandemic; asking for an end to the global health crisis. This powerful prayer also helps us develop a stronger relationship with God through meditating on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
Lifting up college campus ministers

OCTOBER 5, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Diocesan News

With big challenges facing the Catholic Church and society, college campus ministry is needed more than ever, says a local leader who’s been tapped by a national organization to help expand the Church’s college outreach.

Diane Magliocca, the campus minister at Slippery Rock University’s Newman Center since 1994, has been named one of 11 regional ambassadors of the Catholic Campus Ministry Association for this academic year.

“Campus ministry is so important,” she said. “We have to encounter students and call out their giftedness, not just for the Church but for the world.”
Other students and the wider community need to benefit from those gifts, she said.

“I think some of the greatest challenges we face include division, isolation, anxiety/despair and complacency.”

Only a quarter of the nation’s four-year colleges and universities have Catholic campus ministry programs, said Michael St. Pierre, executive director of the Catholic Campus Ministry Association.

“To grow we need as many dynamic campus ministers as possible,” he said. “Diane is highly respected, has great energy, loves the Church and can communicate well to students, college administrators and clergy.”

As a regional ambassador for the association, Magliocca will reach out to her colleagues in the Midwest region, identifying ways to renew, motivate and equip them.

“We want to help raise up a new generation of campus ministers who can evangelize in creative and exciting ways,” St. Pierre said.

Most Slippery Rock students are taking classes online with only small number on campus. Therefore, social media platforms and one-on-one presence are crucial for building relationships, Magliocca said. However, with health safety measures in place, students are gathering for Mass, joining in small groups for Bible study and prayer, holding weekly discussions online and are planning ways to engage in community service.

“I see so much resiliency, openness to the Spirit and hopefulness in the students,” she said. “Despite the pandemic restrictions, their first reaction was to express
appreciation on being able to still use the Newman Center. They are so optimistic, it renews us.”

*Diane Magliocca*
Walking with Jesus along The Way

SEPTEMBER 25, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Parish Life

For Catholics who have discovered a relationship with Jesus through the ChristLife or Alpha ministries, a new discipleship opportunity, The Way, offers a next step into deeper spirituality.

“People encounter Jesus in ChristLife and get excited about Him. But the question is, where is He going to lead me if I follow Him? What is He going to do in my life?” said Michel Therrien, president of Preambula Group, which sponsors The Way. He was formerly on staff at the Diocese of Pittsburgh as president of the Institute for Pastoral Leadership and director of evangelization.
The Way, an 8-week experience held in person or on Zoom, resembles a weekly retreat for 20-25 participants. They reflect on scripture about Jesus’ relationships. They read and discuss *Interior Freedom* by Catholic spiritual writer Jacques Philippe. Therrien offers short reflections.

“It’s a guided journey together where we move through a series of different spiritual topics from interior freedom to prayer, healing, forgiveness, faith, intimacy with God,” Therrien said. “They are all meant to help people get to know Christ more deeply and to recognize Him when He shows up inside our hearts. I think a lot of times God speaks to people, but they don’t know it because they don’t recognize his presence or voice.”

Jack Porter, a member of St. Pio in Blawnox, had long pursued a deep spiritual life. He registered for The Way – then known as Discipleship Forum — to find a community of Catholics with a similar goal.

“We met on Zoom, but I found you can make a real connection with people,” he said.

The book was a page turner, participants said.

“You just want to keep reading and reading. I had to slow myself down, to take in what I had read in the first few chapters and continue later,” said Judy Abbs, a participant from Ss. John & Paul Parish in Franklin Park.

Her experience started shortly after her annulment following a difficult divorce years earlier. The Way helped her focus on God’s call to “accept our past, forgive – not really forget, but know that we’ve learned from it and move on,” she said.
She came away from the program understanding “that I can live in the moment, not fear the future and I can come up with new dreams and hopes. That will only make me be a better disciple.”

One of the Preambula Group board members is Don Lovre, a parishioner at Ss. John and Paul who had been co-chair of the parish’s Our Campaign for The Church Alive! fundraising initiative. Lovre was captivated by Therrien’s vision of “getting out there and talking to people about Jesus in their own comfort zones, outside the Church.”

Participation “gave me an opportunity to look inward at myself and build my relationship with Jesus.”

One of the most important messages to him was about authenticity.

“Jesus loves me for who I am. Don’t try to be someone you’re not. Jesus walks with you,” he said. “It’s not all yellow brick road. You stumble, you hit potholes. There are many personal and professional things you run into. But it spoke to me about examining myself and my role as a Catholic.”

Registration is open for The Way discipleship forum. The fee is $50 for in-person and $35 for online. Learn more and register at https://mtyryou.org.
Back to the Future

Over the past six months you and I have learned a lot about worshiping “remotely.”

We learned how to Zoom for prayer meetings. We learned to FaceTime and YouTube our Masses. We longed for the day when we could return to Mass—as many of you are already able to do. We are making the most of being remote.

From a spiritual standpoint, however, “remote” is a paradoxical word. Although we have been remote physically, we are never remote spiritually from God.
God is for us; God is with us; God is within us.

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, walks with us in good times and in the not so good. He not only hears us when we call out; He is already with us unseen, waiting for our “shout out.” When you and I are in need—and there have been many occasions of genuine need during these past COVID months—Jesus is with us. He gives us the strength and grace and comfort to move forward.

We who follow Jesus are united for all time in a vast community of love and prayer. Our ancestors in the faith, many of whom are saints, pray for us from above and are with us. Many of them are our loved ones who have passed—spouses and parents, siblings and friends. And many who pray for us are still with us. While we may be physically remote from each other, as the Church, the family of Jesus, as the Body of Christ, we can never, ever, ever be alone or remote spiritually from one another.

You and I have and have had many prayer partners as we continue to face the challenges of the pandemic.

For several months, we could not gather physically for the sacraments. COVID prevented safe places for Confession or the public celebration of the Mass. First Holy Communions and Confirmations had to be delayed out of a necessary precaution for the good of all. We all felt the loss of not being together in person for prayer. When I had to make the decision to close our church buildings in mid-March, it was, as I have said on a number of occasions, one of the toughest decisions I have ever had to make as a Bishop. I had to explain that it was because the Church values and protects every human life. You tried to understand. Above all, I was encouraged to hear how many of you spoke up loudly about how much you value the Eucharist in your own lives. We were and are spiritually present to each other!
So many of our people—you, our people—have lost jobs or had your hours cut back. So many of you are hurting deeply and are in need of the prayers and encouragement from all of us. At the same time, so many of our parishes and Catholic Charities stepped into the gap with emergency assistance. We bore one another’s burdens. For them, I am profoundly grateful. We were and are spiritually present to each other!

Loved ones died, often isolated from family. For many months we could not gather for wakes, funerals or even burials. Our priests continue to work hard to offer comfort in these heartbreaking times. They are now offering memorial Masses for the departed. These provide comfort for the emotional pain of a delayed funeral, but we all recognize that the delayed funeral added spiritual pain to emotional pain. We were and are spiritually present to each other!

The loss of work and the closure of churches have had a major impact on our parishes. Our priests together with your parish staffs have been nothing short of heroic. Like so many of our parents and grandparents who had to make due in the lean times of the past, our priests and staffs are doing their best with far less resources and far fewer co-workers. Lay leaders have stepped up in many important ways to organize ministries, food pantries, online rosary groups, online Alpha and Christlife, discipleship forums, to name a few. We were and are spiritually present to each other!

The diocese has had to make many cutbacks as well. One of the first and most difficult was to suspend publication of the *Pittsburgh Catholic* newspaper.

The paper had been struggling financially for nearly two years. We were already planning to make significant changes to its publication schedule. Because its distribution was mostly at Mass, and the advertising income it relied heavily upon was tied to that distribution, there was little or no way to continue its publication.
The dedicated staff of the paper was the first to feel the force of its shutdown. Despite their longstanding dedication to the Church and to our diocesan weekly, we and they faced the harsh realities of COVID.

My staff and I all recognized that this decision had a difficult impact on parishioners who relied on the Catholic for news of the Church. This column marks the first online-only edition of a new Pittsburgh Catholic. It is beginning modestly with a much smaller staff than the print edition had. My prayer is that it will grow and that we will eventually have a print edition at least quarterly. In the meantime, I am asking our parishes to use THIS LINK to place it on their parish website and make printouts for inclusion in parish bulletins for those who are not online savvy. My hope is that these efforts can spread the good news about what’s happening in our diocese and beyond so that you can catch up on news of the Church. It’s not ideal. But it is a step in the right direction. It’s another example that we were and are spiritually present to each other.

In the midst of the challenges we have met, so many of you have inspired me with your faith and good works. You continue to advance the reality that our diocese is “On Mission for The Church Alive!”

The Spirit continues to breathe new life in us. One of the visible signs of that reality is the fact that we have the largest entering class of seminarians in many years. Fourteen new men have entered Saint Paul Seminary (in addition to the returning seven seminarians), beginning (and continuing) the many years of discernment and formation that may lead them to ordination as our priests.

Pray for them. They are already praying for you. At the beginning of the lockdown in March, when the seminarians went home to continue their studies “remotely,” they began a ministry of prayer for all of you. They invited you to submit prayer requests through THIS LINK so that they could pray for your intentions. They
continue to do so, caring for you as part of the communion of saints even though most of them are years from ordination. They were and are spiritually connected to you.

In each and all of the COVID experiences, we have looked beyond COVID and to our Christ to be “there” for each other and to be “here” with Christ.

Over the course of these past COVID months, we have heard the lingo “new normal.” What “new normal” looks like has not yet come fully to light.

But in some small way, this article is an attempt to go “back to the future” by building on the past, standing on the shoulders of our ancestors in passing on the Good News today and in the days, weeks, months and years ahead. In good times and in the not so good—we, you and I, are here for each other and for Jesus. We were and are spiritually present to each other!
From many parishes, The Church Alive!

SEPTEMBER 25, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Parish Life

Celebrating Labor Day at St. Agnes Church

Despite unforeseen challenges of merging multiple parishes during a pandemic, one determined pastor has found ways to bring God’s people together while keeping them safe.

St. Thomas the Apostle became a new parish on July 1. Since then, Father Dan Sweeney has led a Feast Day Mass, organized volunteers to renovate a parish building, held outdoor school fundraising celebrations, restarted the parish fish fry, conducted a well-attended Vacation Bible School, and has resumed faith formation in-person and remotely.

Nine churches are part of the new faith community in Munhall, West Mifflin, Whitaker, Duquesne and Homestead. Across the diocese, 29 groupings have
merged since last year to form new parishes.

Parishioners who feel comfortable venturing out after months at home are wearing masks, social distancing and using lots of available hand sanitizer.

“We’re taking every precaution and the people are responding,” Father Sweeney said. “For the most part they are very happy. It’s about belief in God.”

Babette Butler, who grew up at St. Therese of Lisieux Parish in Munhall, has attended many of the events. The first was the parish Feast Day Mass on July 3, which included welcoming new converts, followed by a cookout with live music and fireworks.

During the months of lockdown, “I missed receiving communion,” she said. “It’s also been nice to get out of the house and see people at the different churches.”

Parish teens normally fix up homes in Appalachia every July. This summer they stayed home at “Camp Corona,” enlarging the St. Agnes social hall and installing a new roof.

The annual parish festival at St. Therese was replaced by a Summer Celebration, with food booths spaced apart to pass an inspection by the county health department. A Labor Day Celebration took place in St. Agnes’ parking lot. Friday Fish Frys are back at St. Maximilian Kolbe Church, preceded by the Divine Mercy Chaplet. An Apple Festival was held September 20 at St. Therese, complete with hayrides, pumpkin painting and a meatloaf dinner.

“We do eat well!” said St. Therese principal Jon Cuniak, who is grateful for the events that have helped make up income lost due to cancellations. “Father Dan loves to bring people together. Things are moving.”
This week parishioners are heading to Lancaster, PA via motorcoach (seats socially distanced) to see the stage production Queen Esther. A trip is planned in late November to the Opryland Resort in Nashville, TN.

St. Thomas the Apostle Parish also continues to operate a food bank, a bereavement ministry, and to visit the homebound, according to pastoral associate Lori Ellis. A dozen weekend Masses are celebrated at eight churches. Faith formation is held at St. Rita and St. Therese, with options for home schooling as well.

Despite the pandemic, Butler feels a sense of growing unity.

“New people are volunteering,” she said. “It’s nice to meet a lot of them who I didn’t know. The church family has been a big part of my life.”

Hayride fun at the Apple Festival
Summer celebration at St. Thérèse Church
“Catholic at Home” with Jennifer Antkowiak

SEPTEMBER 25, 2020

Categories: Columns
Tags: Catholic at Home

Doing the Dishes with Jesus

During these long months of the pandemic, we have become frustrated and tired. Displays of anger, hatred, bitterness and violence fill our news channels and social media screens. Hearts have hardened. But that’s not what Jesus wants for us, or from us.

As Catholics, we feel called to emulate Jesus and create positive change. But how? We are human. Creating positive change takes energy, which many of us lack after months of stress and anxiety. When we think of how to make our community or our world better, we can feel overwhelmed. That may lead to guilt and more frustration.
Where can we find hope? How can we share love?

Try starting small.

“Not all of us can do great things. But we can all do small things with great love.”
-Mother Teresa

Read that quote again. Let its power sink in.

In the midst of busy days, frustrations and fears, we often overlook the importance of the little things we do. What little things are on your daily “To Do” list? Folding clothes? Packing the dishwasher? Taking out the garbage?

None of those things take long in the grand scheme of things. However, those little moments link together to make up our hours...our days...our weeks, month, years, and lives. Could our lives be more joyful if we made a serious effort to “do small things with great love”?

I say yes. In fact, I’ve tried it, and it works.

Instead of getting frustrated over washing the kids’ sports stuff, take a moment to smile and thank God for healthy children who are able to play sports. Trade frustration over doing the dishes (again) for a smile, while thanking God for the blessing of good food for your family. And yes, instead of being mad about having to take out the garbage – well, that’s a tough one to celebrate, but you get the point.

Go deeper. Use those minutes for quick private reflections on the good things that surround each chore as you complete it.
If this sounds like crazy talk, ask Jesus for help: “Please help me to do small things with great love. Please soften my heart and open my eyes to see and feel all the good things I have around me. Help me to be more appreciative of all that I have been given.”

My experience is that those mundane moments suddenly become precious opportunities for conversations with Jesus. Intentionally welcoming Him into our hearts in the little moments helps us build a stronger relationship with Him. Quality in-between-Sundays time with our Lord makes us realize that we are never alone.

There’s so much love in that! Wrapping our small things in the love of Jesus enables us to do great things with confidence because we know He is beside us. Our world needs the great things we each have within us.

No matter how desperate life may seem, we each need to remember that His plan for us is greater than anything we could imagine. That plan starts with us showing up for the small things, with hearts full of love.
A sports season unlike any other

SEPTEMBER 25, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Catholic Schools
In classrooms and gymnasiums and on playing fields, Catholic students are cooperating with new health and safety protocols, while understanding there are no guarantees in the age of COVID.

School athletic officials are stressing the safety message for young people playing football, soccer, volleyball and running cross-country this fall.

“I think we did a good job explaining the expectations, restrictions and guidelines to our student-athletes and parents,” said Sean Cannon, athletic director at Blessed Trinity Academy in Glenshaw. “Should we fail to follow the rules, no matter how we feel about them, we run the risk of losing a season.”
Temperatures are checked before games and meets, players and runners must wear face masks and socially distance when not competing, and fan attendance is limited.

“Our students and parents have been great,” said Joe Luvara, varsity football coach at St. Louise de Marillac School in Upper St. Clair. “The kids listen because they want to play and they understand the season could be cancelled at any time. And parents have been shouldering more of the load, cleaning uniforms and equipment nightly.”

Rob Glentzer, coordinator of the diocese’s soccer league, is aware of the fluid nature of playing sports during a pandemic.

“What we knew yesterday might not be true today,” he said. “We believe it’s in the children’s best interests to play sports if we can do it as safely as possible, realizing we can never eliminate all risks.”

In addition to the health benefits of physical activity, “young people learn life skills such as working together, communicating, good sportsmanship, humility, showing charity toward others and gaining self-confidence,” Glentzer said.

“So far, the plan is working well,” said diocesan athletic director Gary Roney. “Parents continue to make sacrifices in order for their children to participate in sports. Nobody cares more than mom and dad.”

Luvara commended Roney and the diocese for helping coaches organize leagues this fall. “The eighth graders especially wanted to play football and get ready for high school,” he said. His Trojan squad has started 2-0.
“I’m not surprised the kids are following directions,” Cannon said. “They missed playing and being with their friends during the spring season. It’s really gratifying to see what they can do when they’re really motivated.”

Roney looks at the big picture.

“Playing sports helps our young people grow,” he said, “and it gives us an opportunity to evangelize.”

_Blessed Trinity 4th grade cross-country runners Annalise Good (left) and Callie Kandravy_
Jackson Schlegal (#30) scores in a game between the St. Kilian JV World Cup and Olympic teams on Sept. 4

North Catholic High School girls cross-country team won an invitational Sept. 19-20 at White Oak Park
Take 5 with Father Joe Mele

SEPTEMBER 25, 2020

Categories: Columns
Tags: Take 5 with Father

Father Joe Mele is the administrator of the Morningside/Shadyside/Stanton Heights grouping.

Father Mele at an annual Saint Patrick’s Day party with his friend Kay Ruefle, former receptionist at Saint Sebastian Parish

1. How did God call you to the priesthood?

I always wanted to be a priest. I think that was the way it was in my generation. I struggled a little with the calling in high school but once I entered the seminary, I knew this was what God was calling me to do. I have been very happy ever since! The desire to be a priest, to love God and neighbor, to be bound more closely to Christ and to spend myself entirely for souls is the cause of my joy.
2. What is the most meaningful aspect of your ministry?

Without a doubt, the most meaningful aspect of my ministry is beginning each morning with a Holy Hour and then offering the Mass. I try very hard to celebrate the Sacraments in a way that inspires and invites full and active participation from every member in the congregation. I believe a priest’s principal duty is to pray for his people and try hard to lead his parishioners to holiness rooted in a deep personal relationship with Christ.

3. What is the most challenging part of your ministry?

I find happiness every day in the priesthood, but I believe that the COVID-19 pandemic is without a doubt the greatest challenge I have experienced in my 47 years of ministry. The biggest challenge is determining how to bring Christ to my people without being physically present with them. I am sure that saddens every priest right now.

I have always loved engaging my people and interacting with them on a deep and personal level. The pandemic has changed how that I do that. One way I minister to people amid the pandemic is by visiting my parish’s amazing young adult group during their weekly socially distanced bonfire after evening Mass. These are strange times but the blessings far outweigh the obstacles we must face.

4. What do you wish people knew about the priesthood?

I believe with all my heart and soul that the priesthood is a supernatural gift. It is a divine inspiration to work as a priest. I also believe without any question that the soul of a priest is changed forever when he is marked by an indelible seal at his ordination. I rely on the graces of my ordination for courage and hopefully humility as I go about my ministry.
I humbly accept that through my priestly ordination, I am made into another Christ, but I am still just a man, a brother, a friend and hopefully a good shepherd. Like any person, I have my own hobbies, interests and favorite foods. I also have successes and failures. I have learned over the years that my complete surrender to Christ brings not only personal satisfaction, but also an indescribable joy that I want to share with everyone I meet.

5. What is your hobby, or what do you like to do in your free time?

I have enjoyed taking parishioners on pilgrimages to Europe and other places. That was always fun for me. I also enjoyed power walking, working out and playing racquet ball. People are surprised to know I used to play the bagpipes. Now, I have slowed down a bit. I still enjoy taking walks but not as far or as fast. Like my dad, I love gardening and tend a rooftop garden. I love animals, so I feed the local bird and squirrels. I always had a dog until recently. I miss my dog Bayley very much. I am an avid reader and am currently studying the poet Michael O’Siadhail. I am also reading Overground Railroad by Candacy Taylor and The Irony of Modern Catholic History by George Weigel. But my favorite way to spend free time is a quiet dinner with a few friends or family.
Father Mele's dog, Bayley
Beginning this Sunday, September 20, 2020, the Diocese of Pittsburgh will shift to offering one live-stream Mass per week from the Boyle Hall Chapel at Saint Paul Seminary with Bishop David Zubik. The Mass can be viewed live Sundays at 10:00 a.m. on the diocesan YouTube channel.

The diocese recently welcomed its largest class of seminarians to the Saint Paul Seminary campus in a number of years. The Boyle Hall Chapel is the chapel they use for daily prayer and Masses. The twenty-two seminarians will be present for the Sunday morning live-stream Masses.

“Being able to connect with people through our live-stream Mass has been a blessing that’s come out of the pandemic,” Bishop Zubik said. “We’ve received
many notes of thanks from people who have health issues that keep them from their parish. We also hear from people who just don’t yet feel comfortable returning to worship in person and appreciate being able to celebrate the Mass online.”

In March, in light of increasing concerns about COVID-19, Bishop Zubik made the difficult decision to cancel all weekday and Sunday Masses in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. With a desire to help people worship together while apart, a diocesan team worked quickly to set up a livestream system, and Bishop Zubik was able to share daily Masses and morning and evening prayers livestreamed ever since, inclusive of Holy Week and Easter Sunday. Now, with parishes partially open and more diocesan clergy livestreaming Masses, the diocese is able to shift its schedule to allow the seminarians more use of their private Chapel, while keeping a Sunday connection with the faithful.

“We’re doing what we can to stay flexible during these unprecedented times. Nothing replaces experiencing the Holy Mass in person and receiving the Eucharist. I pray we will be able to worship together without any restrictions as we used to very soon,” Bishop Zubik said.

Spiritual resources are available on the diocesan website: https://diopitt.org/spiritual-resources.
Keeping students safe and learning

SEPTEMBER 15, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Catholic Schools

Students are learning an unexpected lesson as they work with their teachers and parents to receive a quality Catholic education during the coronavirus pandemic.

“Principals and teachers have been bold in trying new ideas to plan for every contingency,” Michelle Peduto, the diocesan director of schools, told Father Tom Burke September 13 on Catholic Education Plus on KDKA-AM. She is visiting the reopened elementary schools to see how the 32-page plan from the COVID-19 Educational Planning Team is working in the classroom.

The goal is “to help keep everyone safe and learning,” Peduto said.

*Students arrive for the first day of school Sept. 8 at Holy Cross Academy in Ross Township.*
The blueprint requires all students, faculty and staff to wear masks, and to practice social distancing and good hygiene. High school students who were the first to return to school have adjusted to wearing masks, she said, and elementary students are getting used to them.

“The children are also learning how to handle adversity, which is a great lesson,” she added.

About 85 percent of diocesan students currently are in the classroom, the rest are participating online.

“Livestreaming makes all the difference, so students at home can be with their classmates,” Peduto said. “Teachers are doing a great job.”

Serra Catholic High School in McKeesport has reopened after two students tested positive for the virus last week. The school building closed temporarily and sports programs were briefly suspended. The affected students followed health protocols including quarantine and are not experiencing symptoms.

Peduto said that, if cases increase, a change from in-classroom to remote learning may be necessary. She asks parents and students to continue to be patient.

Hear the entire interview at: https://kdkaradio.radio.com/media/podcast/catholic-education-plus.

Below: Michelle Peduto with Father Matt McClain on Sept. 10 at St. Wendelin School in Butler County.
Back to school, 2020

SEPTEMBER 8, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Catholic Schools

On September 8, 2020, Catholic elementary students stepped back inside classrooms across the Diocese of Pittsburgh for the first time in nearly six months.

When the coronavirus struck last March, school buildings immediately closed. Remote learning soon began.

“The students are doing great!” said Patricia Osekowski, principal of Holy Cross Academy in Ross Township. “Every one of them has a mask on. Their parents obviously worked with them.”

Michelle Peduto, diocesan director of Catholic Schools, also is pleased with the start of school.
“I was present at Holy Family School (in Plum) as the students arrived for their first day back since March 13,” she said. “It was wonderful to see the students, faculty and staff so excited to return. I am very grateful to our Catholic school communities as they work together to keep our students safe, healthy and learning.”

The official start of the elementary school year was delayed slightly to allow teachers more time to prepare their classrooms, practice new safety protocols, test systems for distance learning and hold in-service days for health and safety training.

Catholic high schools in the diocese remained on their original opening schedules.

Holy Cross Academy families donated forehead thermometers for every classroom and a thermal imaging thermometer to scan large groups of students as they arrive through the main school entrance. They also provided 40-inch TV monitors for every classroom so students learning from home can be virtually present among their peers.

Across the diocese, in-person, distance learning and hybrid plans are in place to deliver quality Catholic education to students.

Each school received diocesan reopening guidelines which reflect safe practices outlined in local, state and federal health directives. Individual schools then created implementation plans based on unique considerations of their building space, staff and student enrollment. Those plans were submitted to the diocesan schools office for review and approval.

“Safety is always our number one priority,” Osekowski said, “but this year that takes on a new meaning.”
Below: Patricia Osekowski, Holy Cross Academy principal, gives opening day details.
Reflection given by Fr. Matthew Hawkins at St. Benedict the Moor Parish, Pittsburgh, PA on August 29, 2020, the occasion of the Juneteenth Celebration, 2020

“In Ramah is heard the sound of sobbing, bitter weeping! Rachel mourns for her children, she refuses to be consoled for her children — they are no more” (Psalm 31:15)! One cannot read that passage from the Book of Psalms without feeling the loss of mothers all around the world who are losing their children to mindless violence.

Sometimes it is the result of officially sanctioned violence by the state; sometimes it is through acts of war; other times it is through random acts of crime, terrorism,
hatred, or revenge. But the sound of the bitter weeping of mothers over the loss of a child is no less painful despite the circumstances. It is all-too-frequent and is too painful to bear.

The suffering of a mother speaks to universal sorrow but there is a particular side to this as it has affected African American communities. For 400 years African American mothers have felt this pain as they were separated from their children during slavery, as their children were hunted down following emancipation, and as they were hung by lynch mobs under the systemic injustice known as “Jim Crow”.

For the next 75 years black mothers suffered this emotional pain as their children were killed in race riots in the north to prevent black families from moving out of urban ghettos, and their children were killed by angry mobs in the south to prevent them from using public accommodations, public parks, public water fountains, to sit at public lunch counters, and to freely choose where they would sit on public transportation.

The children of African American mothers have been killed through the state-sanctioned violence of public officials and through random acts of violence in the streets. And yet if I were asked to choose one word to sum up the history of African Americans that word would not be “racism,” nor “victimhood”, nor “suffering”, nor “despair”. The one word that I would choose to sum up the African American experience would be this: “resilience”.

Resilience is the defining characteristic of African American people and of African American culture. It is the resilience expressed by the Blues and the Negro Spirituals, which took pain and suffering and creatively transformed them into empowerment for survival. It is the resilience expressed by the spirituality that finds resonance in the Book of Exodus and the Psalms of lamentation. It is the resilience expressed by Martin Luther King when he said that he had been to the
mountaintop, and by little boys and little girls everyday as they vow that when they grow up they will “make a way out of no way.”

Resilience is the defining characteristic of the African American experience, yet it is rarely acknowledged by politicians nor is it highlighted in mass media. Resilience is the thread that runs through our lives and it has sustained us for more than 400 years.

Juneteenth is an American holiday celebrated primarily in African American neighborhoods to commemorate the date when enslaved families in Texas finally learned that they were free. The news of emancipation arrived in Texas more than six months after the Proclamation was issued. For the past 155 years, Juneteenth has been a celebration of the freedom and the dignity of the human person. It has been a celebration that has brought families together and strengthened the bonds within our communities.

The strength and resilience of African American families and communities is at the heart of these celebrations. This is why it is important, during the belated celebration of the holiday this year, due to the COVID crisis, to assess the challenges our families and communities face and the principles that will see us through to the future. Our very survival will depend upon the strength of our faith and on our family and community life.

Odd as it might sound, improbable as it might seem given the image of the Catholic Church in African American communities, I am willing to argue that the future resilience of our family and community life will find its fullest expression in the 10 major principles of Catholic social teaching. What are these 10 major principles and what have they to do with the future of our communities?
These principles have been compellingly summed up by Fr. William J. Byron, S.J. of St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia but I will make a special application of these principles to address the challenges facing us today.

The first principle is that of Human Dignity. Every human person has a claim upon the family of humanity by virtue of being a child of God in the image of his or her Creator. This is not measured by social status, or accomplishment, or ability. It is not measured by what you “can do for me” or by what you have done to me. If we cannot see the face of God in every human being then the cycle of violence, abuse and oppression will never end.

The second principle is respect for human life from conception until natural death. It follows from the first principle: all human life is sacred because all human life is a gift from God. When we treat human beings as disposable objects, whether this is to maximize profits in the workplace or to get revenge after being disrespected in the streets, then we have already destroyed the foundation upon which all rights have their grounding. We cannot hope to achieve universal respect for human rights if we are not willing to insist on universal respect for human life.

The third principle is the principle of association. We are not meant to be alone. Human beings develop the fullness of their humanity within the context of a community. Family and community life are essential to healthy personhood. We cannot be complacent about the alarming fragmentation of African American family and community life over the past 50 years and claim, at the same time, that we are working for the empowerment of the community. We are enriched by our associations and we are impoverished by their dissolution.

The fourth principle is that of participation. Social and economic institutions cannot work for the wellbeing of the human person if they make it difficult or impossible for people to participate in constructive and informed ways in the deliberation and
decision-making process of these institutions. It is folly to rely on social and economic institutions to make plans for us without our active participation and engagement in them.

The fifth principle is that of the preferential protection of the poor and the vulnerable. A mother loves all of her children but she will momentarily leave the older ones if the youngest one wanders out into the street and is at risk of being hurt. The same is true if one child is ill while the others are healthy. The preferential protection of the poor and the vulnerable is based on the insight and wisdom that equal treatment is not always equitable treatment. We must give special attention to the weakest and most vulnerable individuals and communities who are part of the human family. Above all, we must not allow them to be used as objects for exploitation.

The sixth principle is the principle of solidarity. Empathy is an essential quality of our humanity. Not only must we be prepared to help the most vulnerable among us, we must also be willing to accompany them on our journey together. We must keep them in our thoughts and spend time with them, not just money. We must realize that our fate is inseparably connected with theirs. It is a fundamental Christian teaching that our liberation, in Christ, is not an individual affair, but one that takes place in the context of a community.

An artist from an aboriginal community once said: “If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” This statement nicely sums up the Christian understanding of the principle of solidarity. We are bound together in this brief journey through life. Concern for the well-being of others is essential for our own well-being.
The seventh principle is that of stewardship. We have not been given charge over the blessings and bounty of this earth without being accountable for how we make use of them and what we leave to future generations. All that we think we possess will gradually pass through our fingers in time and will ultimately slip beyond our grasp. We are stewards, not owners, of the world around us and we must make good use of the resources with which we have been entrusted. The future generations, our posterity, depend on this stewardship. Ultimately we will be accountable before God for how we used or squandered the world's wealth and resources.

The eighth principle is that of subsidiarity. This principle emphasizes the importance of voluntary forms of social organization, at the level that is closest to the people and enables them to become part of a society that has a human face. The principle of subsidiarity means that people should never be reduced to being a mere number or nameless statistic. They should not be lost within the complexity of a soulless bureaucracy that is incapable of seeing their humanity. The beauty and diversity of humanity must be given room to flourish. Our most meaningful social encounters occur on a scale where the distinctive lives and personalities of families and individuals are not overwhelmed by the mechanical functioning of corporations or the state.

The ninth principle is that of human equality. At the core of this principle is a passion for fairness. To discriminate unfairly on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and social status is to send the message that “you are not one of us.” It is to draw lines of distinction that forever keep some people at the margins of society, with no hope of ever becoming part of the family and the community. By its very nature, unfair treatment is immoral. It is used to exploit, distract, scapegoat, and bully. It is premised on a false sense of oneself and a false sense of “the other”. It is a pitiful attribute that begins during childhood when we learn to ask: “Who do I
have to hate to be your friend?” We must resist the temptation to seek fellowship through exclusion.

The tenth principle is that of the common good. The principle of the common good is based on the understanding that the purpose of a society is not merely to protect us from one another, rather it is to create an environment in which human beings may flourish. It is to create an environment where people may be safe and healthy, and where they may be inspired, educated, and uplifted. It is to create a cultural environment that does not reduce humanity to beasts and machines, but allows them to participate in activities that draw out the best in them, and that enable them to actualize their fullest rational and creative potential.

These are the ten principles of Catholic social teaching. They are relevant for us today, during this Juneteenth celebration of African American communities. Catholics do not claim exclusive ownership of these principles. These principles are also embedded in the very fabric and nature of all humanity, regardless of faith or tradition. We are clear, however, that these principles inform our values as Catholics and that if others abandon these principles we will continue to adhere to them and to propose them to the larger society.

These principles directly address the challenges facing African American communities because they move beyond a narrow focus on merely ending the sin of racism, important as that is, but they also address the larger social conditions that will be necessary for us to move forward as families and as a community with or without the scourge of racism in our society.

These principles answer the three most important questions of any social movement: Where are we going? How will we get there? And where will we go after we arrive?
African American families and communities have endured much pain and suffering over the past 400 years, but we have also proven ourselves to be resilient. We are people who get up each time we fall or are knocked down. Scriptures promise that the weeping of mothers who have lost their children to acts of violence by the state or in the streets will be comforted, healed and restored. The scriptures promise: “With weeping they shall come, but with compassion I will guide them; I will lead them to streams of water, on a level road ...” (Psalm 31:9a). Let us always have the moral courage to boldly speak truth to power and let us also humbly participate in the quiet and subtle work of God to transform our families and communities into places where children may thrive and have a future. May God Bless You.
Got milk, gave God’s love

AUGUST 28, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Parish Life

Long before a free milk giveaway began at Good Samaritan Parish in Ambridge Thursday morning, cars were lined up around the block.

Volunteers sprang into action when the milk truck arrived, handing out up to two gallons per family. Some brought milk to a local senior center. Police officers also helped make deliveries.

Food insecurity continues to grow across southwestern Pennsylvania. Nearly one in every five Beaver County residents lives below 150 percent of the poverty rate, according to the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, as the coronavirus continues to spread.
“These are people who I call ‘COVID-poor’,” said Cindy Deschaine, who helped start a food pantry as director of outreach for the Beaver Valley parishes of The Great Grouping. “They worked and had a steady income until the virus hit. Now many have been told their jobs are not coming back.”

The American Dairy Association North East partnered with Schneider’s Dairy, AMI Food Group and local organizations including Good Samaritan Parish to distribute more than 4,000 gallons of milk in the region this week.

“We are happy to help,” said spokesman John Chrisman. “People are hurting.”

The giveaways are made possible by the government-funded Coronavirus Food Assistance Program, which has distributed more than a half-million gallons of milk since June. When restaurants and schools shut down, dairy farmers had to get their milk to market, and people needed the nutrition.

“There is no grocery store in Ambridge,” Deschaine said. “This gives us a boost, and we today also received 25 prepared meals from Costco.

“When people arrive here we see tears of joy and tears of humility,” she said. “By the time they leave they have felt the love of God and His grace.”

**Below:** The milk giveaway took place outside Good Samaritan’s food pantry, which is supported the four parishes in The Great Grouping and the community
When the pandemic prevented parishioners from the Diocese of Pittsburgh from making their annual mission trip to Appalachia, they decided to help their cash-strapped parishes and needy families close to home.

A large group of teens and adults from the parish grouping that includes St. Gregory in Zelienople usually travels each June to Preston County, West Virginia, where one in five children live below the poverty line. Since the trip wasn’t possible this summer, they decided to take part in three local service projects.
Katie Maloney, 18, helped to pick and can vegetables grown at Hosanna Industries in Rochester, PA, doing her part to help feed the hungry.

“It wasn't the same as our mission trip but it still felt good to help others,” she said. “I've been praying for the husband and wife we were with last summer in West Virginia.”

The couple, Max and Jennifer, needed more space in their trailer after adopting five young nieces and nephews. The mission team built a two-bedroom addition. The family is struggling right now, with Max out of work and the children at risk of falling behind in their schooling with no Internet connection at home.

Young adult leader Justin Meinert, 24, has volunteered with the mission team for the past decade, and finds himself constantly inspired by the people they serve.

“The poverty is eye-opening but they don't let it break their spirit,” he said. “They're extremely gracious and thankful for what we're able to do for them. It's made me more appreciative of what I have.”

This year, Meinert helped the team move some 60 tons of dirt to alleviate tripping hazards along sidewalks at St. Ferdinand Parish. Another group stained the gazebo at St. Gregory Parish and did landscaping, according to leader Mindy Pasquale.

“They missed working with the families they've gotten to know over the years,” she said. “They enjoy the faith, friendship and community.”

“I'm glad we still found a way to give back this summer and help the communities around us,” Meinert said.
Below: Katie Maloney of St. Gregory Parish (right) and Madi Yurich of St. Ferdinand pick beets, peppers and beans at Hosanna Industries.
New director of Victim Assistance Ministry named

AUGUST 14, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Diocesan News

As part of an ongoing commitment to provide healing support for victims of clergy sex abuse and the faith community as a whole, Laetitia Bridges has been named Director of Victim Assistance Ministry. This newly merged position in the Secretariat for the Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults represents roles and responsibilities of a victim assistance coordinator and director of the office for accompaniment.

“These roles naturally align, given the relationship between providing help and services to individual victims and raising awareness in the parishes and broader community about the healing process and the important role we all play in healing. We are excited about having Ms. Bridges join us because she brings to the diocese a
strong foundation in working with individuals who have been traumatized and also a wealth of education programs that we can offer to support our victims and their families,” said Jane Sarra, Secretary, Office for the Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults.

Bridges has more than 30 years of experience in pastoral care and spiritual leadership. She has shown great commitment to creating caring faith communities dedicated to accompanying those in need or crisis. Since 2005, Bridges has provided spiritual and administrative leadership as the Pastoral Associate to the former St. Bernard Church. She is also a licensed professional counselor, a national certified counselor, a certified lay ecclesial minister and a master catechist.

“Every victim needs to know there is someone who believes in them and is advocating on their behalf. I know this will be my most challenging work and I am humbled that our Bishop and the Secretariat have faith in my abilities,” said Bridges.

Sr. Anna Marie Gaglia, CSJ, who has been victim assistance coordinator since October 2019, is now Clergy Support Coordinator and working in the clergy office with Fr. Howard Campbell, who recently joined the team as the new Episcopal Vicar for Clergy in July, 2020.

Laetitia Bridges' start date with the diocese is September 1, 2020.
Living Stations offer hope

AUGUST 8, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Parish Life

Mike Stack kept teaching as he directed the young people who were preparing for one last dramatic presentation of the Living Stations of the Cross.

“Remember to show the love that Jesus has for each of us,” he instructed. “Simon represents every one of us, and how we should show kindness and help others with their burdens.”

This was no ordinary rehearsal. For the first time since the tradition of the Living Stations began 37 years ago at St. Ferdinand Parish in Cranberry, it was held outdoors, and outside of the Lenten season.
Normally, 30 teens and 20 adults present the prayer service seven times each year in different churches. When the coronavirus pandemic struck in March, however, they had to shut down after only two stagings. That was especially hard on the 17 high school seniors in the youth group, which also includes members of St. Gregory Parish in Zelienople. Most have been involved in the program since 8th grade.

“I leave for college on Saturday and have grown up with this group, so I’m glad we had one more chance to be together,” said Evan Moeller, 18, who portrayed Simon. “Our adult volunteers are so dedicated and really wanted to make this happen.”

Elena Ponpzius, 17, who played the role of Mary, said that the “Living Stations has helped me to grow in my faith, seeing the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus from a different perspective.”

The actor who portrayed Jesus, Mike Beggy, 18, found a blessing in the change of plans.

“It’s special to finish this way,” he said. “We didn’t know if we would have a final service, and it’s awesome to hold it outdoors for the first time ever.”

As the rehearsal unfolded under threatening skies, the stage crew set up the lighting, sound system and props. Then the teens put on their costumes and makeup one last time. Socially-distanced families enjoyed the enactment on the annex lawn, hardly noticing the rain showers.

“God is still here for us,” said youth minister Andrea Wheeler. “Jesus saved us and continues to give us hope and light in the darkness.”
Like many principals, Ed Sharbaugh was struggling to fill classrooms and pay bills in the midst of a pandemic. Then a miracle happened.

An anonymous couple pledged $100,000 to support his school, Holy Spirit Academy in New Castle, if their donation was matched dollar-for-dollar. The initial response was so strong that the couple increased their gift to $125,000. So far, nearly $80,000 has come in from the community, with more promised.

In a short period of time, the last remaining Catholic school in Lawrence County stands to receive a quarter-million dollars for tuition assistance and operating costs.
“I had been feeling down,” Sharbaugh admitted. “We had lost significant support from cancelled fundraisers like the parish festival, Night at the Races, an annual dinner and various subsidies. Scholarship offers were lower.”

Now, he says, the phone is ringing and parents are enrolling their children, drawn by the financial assistance and small class sizes that allow the school to offer in-classroom instruction five days a week.

Father Joe McCarey, pastor of Holy Spirit Parish, is grateful for the positive impact the gift will have on working families.

“There are people who want to support kids getting a good education in Catholic schools,” Father McCaffrey said.

Catholic schools like Holy Spirit Academy set and meet high standards for student achievement. Teachers help develop each student's unique, God-given gifts and encourage them to serve others.

“As I said when I came here, the community has to want the school,” Father McCaffrey said. “This is their opportunity to respond.”

Sharbaugh, a veteran educator who is entering his second year as principal at Holy Spirit Academy, said students are prepared to learn in school or at home, with many receiving new Chromebook computers.

“We still have challenges, but now I’m enthused, confident and ready to go for the school year,” Sharbaugh said. “Like Father McCaffrey says, you’ve got to have faith.”
Committed to Catholic education

JULY 29, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Catholic Schools

Through changes and challenges, Lauren Little’s commitment to quality Catholic education has never wavered.

In 2017, when St. Mary of the Assumption School in Glenshaw merged with two other parish schools to form Blessed Trinity Academy, “it was a positive experience for us,” she recalled. “The whole family made friends. We can’t imagine our lives today without them.”

When the coronavirus pandemic struck last March, requiring students to learn online from home, Little said the teachers were “phenomenal.” Their dedication and creativity helped her daughter, Allison, and sons Connor and Collin, continue to grow in knowledge and faith.
“We would rather be in the classroom, but the kids didn’t miss a beat,” she said. “I was so impressed with our teachers.”

Little’s lifelong love of Catholic schools began with her days at Sacred Heart Elementary School in Pittsburgh, continuing at Oakland Catholic High School and then at St. Vincent College. She returned later to teach kindergarten at Sacred Heart, and last year served as a preschool aide at Blessed Trinity Academy.

“I couldn’t do my job without the strong support of parents like Lauren,” said principal Moira Regan Edmiston. “She says, ‘I’m with you, what can I do to help?’ It’s priceless.”

Edmiston sees the value of Catholic education in the kindness and caring that teachers and students show for others. “It’s at the core of our faith, to love one another,” she said. “I see it every day.”

Allison Little, who is about to enter seventh grade at Blessed Trinity Academy, loves the enrichment classes, especially cooking and learning how to make videos. Connor, entering fourth grade, enjoys art class and science experiments. Their brother Collin, who will be a first grader, likes reading and attending Mass with his 8th grade “Bulldog Buddy” mentor.

As the family gets ready for the upcoming school year, Lauren remains dedicated to Catholic education regardless of the teaching methods.

**Below:** The Little family, (front) Collin & Connor, (back) Allison, Lauren and Matthew
Take 5 with Father Adam Verona

JULY 20, 2020

Categories: Columns
Tags: Take 5 with Father

Father Adam Verona, with members of the Oakland Young Adults

1. How did God call you to the priesthood?
People ask me this question often and my answer is always the same: I have wanted to be a priest for my whole life, ever since I can remember. From the time I was a little boy, I have been fascinated with the figure of Christ and Catholicism. I believe that priesthood is a higher calling from Christ to follow him in a particular way.

2. What is the most meaningful aspect of your ministry?
The most meaningful part is the Eucharist, and in particular, the sacrifice of the Mass. It gives my whole life meaning. It’s the center of my life, on which everything else revolves. The highlight of my day is saying Mass.
3. What is the most challenging part of your ministry?
It’s feeling my own limitations. Priesthood is such a high calling. You feel so privileged to act in the person of Christ. It’s very humbling. You become a conduit to spirituality for people, and celebrate the most important moments of their lives with them. It’s a challenge when I feel unworthy of taking on this task. But that’s when I turn to trust in Christ. I am not doing this work alone; he is working through me.

4. What do you wish people knew about the priesthood?
I wish people knew how incredibly rewarding, satisfying, and fulfilling it is to be a priest. The priesthood is a life lived out in service to God’s people, but God is never outdone in generosity. As much as priests give, God gives more back. It may appear to be a countercultural life. Some people might not understand how such a life is fulfilling. I would advise a young man discerning the priesthood that there is no need to be afraid. God will always fulfill and satisfy your heart’s desire.

5. What is your hobby, or what do you like to do in your free time?
I’m a huge movie buff and a self-professed film geek. I enjoy analyzing films. My favorite film is Jurassic Park, but I enjoy films of all genres. I think that my love of film is rooted in my deep love of stories and of learning people’s stories, which I am blessed to do through the priesthood. I am also an avid runner. I run at least 30 miles a week.

When you’re ready to publish, give your post three to five tags that describe your blog’s focus — writing, photography, fiction, parenting, food, cars, movies, sports, whatever. These tags will help others who care about your topics find you in the Reader. Make sure one of the tags is “zerotohero,” so other new bloggers can find you, too.
Catholic schools are a family affair

JULY 20, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Catholic Schools

Beau Quattrone’s love for learning began in a Catholic school, where he later taught his three children. Today he shares that passion with his daughter Anna, who is following in his footsteps as she helps to promote Catholic education.

“I always tell students that no matter what, Jesus loves you and God will show you the way,” he said. “He has a path for each and every one of us.”

The elder Quattrone, principal of the new Holy Family Catholic School in Plum, grew up in Monongahela. He attended Transfiguration School, Ringgold High School, and then received a football scholarship to Virginia Military Institute. Later he earned a master’s in elementary education from California University of Pennsylvania, but went into the insurance business.
Years later, Quattrone was asked to apply for a position to teach science at his old grade school, now known as Madonna Catholic Regional School. Anna, in the seventh grade, was one of his first students.

“He was a great teacher,” she said. “We were challenged academically but set up for success.”

“Madonna Catholic also inspired me to grow in my faith. I had a good relationship with Jesus and I look back now and see how it developed.”

After graduating from Serra Catholic High School in 2014, Anna earned a bachelor’s degree in communications and Hispanic studies from Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Today she is the marketing coordinator in the Catholic Schools Office of the Archdiocese of Washington. Beau Quattrone became principal of St. John the Baptist School, which recently merged with St. Joseph in Verona to form Holy Family Catholic School.

Dad and daughter “talk shop”—discussing preparations for the upcoming school year, seeking to increase enrollment and finding new ways tell the story of Catholic education.

“My wife Jennifer and I couldn’t be any prouder of what Anna is doing,” Beau Quattrone said. “With her education, we knew she would make a good decision.”

“My parents sacrificed a lot to give me the gift of a Catholic education,” Anna said. “I’m happy that they are proud of my career choice.”
Young hearts beat for inner city

JULY 17, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Parish Life

Vagabond Missions began its inner city ministry to Pittsburgh youth five years ago with two missionaries in the city’s Garfield neighborhood. Today, thanks to strong support and prayers, 14 staffers serve at four mission sites, and Pittsburgh has become the organization’s national headquarters.

“We are expanding into the Hill District, learning the area and meeting people at St. Benedict the Moor Parish,” said Shannon Keating, the Pittsburgh area director who arrived in 2017 working as a missionary in Sharpsburg. Last year Vagabond Missions started serving Pittsburgh’s Allentown neighborhood.

The ministry will be featured on Sunday’s edition of the radio program Catholic Education Plus.
The young missionaries connect with teens who have experienced neglect, violence and a broken family life. Few have a relationship with God.

The missionaries build friendships with young people through school events, in city parks, on basketball courts, and other secular settings. Teens come to outreach nights in youth centers, to Bible studies, discipleship groups, and RCIA, which is called “Jesus Class.”

The youths have responded to Jesus by showing empathy to those even less fortunate than themselves. Teens in Sharpsburg have been writing notes of encouragement to homeless men in Bloomfield. They learned about the men from volunteer Nick Wytiaz, who recently entered St. Paul Seminary.

The pandemic has hardly slowed the missionaries. Their Meals & Hope virtual gala in early May raised much-needed funds while missionaries delivered more than 1,000 free meals to needy families.

“These are young hearts that are beating for the inner city,” Keating said.

The ministry also has mission sites in Steubenville, OH, Greenville, NC, and Wichita, KS. To learn more, visit VagabondMissions.com.

Catholic Education Plus airs Sunday morning at 6:30. A podcast will be available later at:

A Catholic understanding of “Black Lives Matter,” with Fr. Matthew Hawkins

JUNE 30, 2020

Categories: Columns
Tags: Guest Contributors

By Father Matthew Hawkins

It is a curious thing that the cry “Black Lives Matter” is met with so much opposition and misunderstanding outside of African American communities. This cry means many different things to different people, but it is grounded in reality and in a specific and concrete history and in contemporary social experiences. These should not be misinterpreted or misunderstood.

The cry, “Black Lives Matter” is not a new cry that suddenly emerged in the past 10 years. It is a cry that is at least 400 years old, and has spanned many different stages of American history.
If a person understands the history and circumstances that have given rise to this cry, then they will not misinterpret it, they will not feel threatened by it, and they will not feel excluded from it. Properly understood, “Black Lives Matter” is an expression of fundamental Catholic values of family, community, universality, life, and faith.

Some may ask, “Why talk about black lives? Why not talk about all lives?” But to say “Black Lives Matter” is to say that “All Lives Matter,” including the lives of Black Americans that have been treated historically, and even today, as being expendable, disposable, and of little value.

It is the tradition of the Catholic faith that we experience the universal within the particular, and we participate in the global through the local. What does this mean?

It means that human beings who are part of a universal body, live within a particular society, culture, and period of history. This is as true for African Americans as it is for any other social and ethnic group. As Americans, we have no problem recognizing the importance of passing on Irish-American culture in raising children and strengthening communities; nor do we find it difficult to value and pass on Italian-American culture and heritage, or German-American culture and heritage, or Polish-American culture and heritage. Why should it be any different when it comes to the life-sustaining role of the preservation and transmission of African American culture and heritage to future generations in order to have strong and healthy families and communities?

One example of this is the traditional role that African American spirituals have played in strengthening and nurturing us through times of adversity, including the brutality of slavery, the oppression of forced racial segregation, two great migrations that have torn African American families asunder, and the confinement of blacks to Northern urban ghettos.
The Spirituals, much like the blues, as musical art forms have enabled generations of African Americans to enter into the suffering of the human condition and therein, find solidarity with all of humanity. They have kept us sane in the midst of adversity. They have kept us whole. They have given us wisdom. And they have introduced us to the Gospel.

Moreover, the Spirituals have brought sacred scripture to life within the peculiarity of the African American experience. To turn our backs on our culture and our heritage would be to turn our backs on life itself. This is as true for us as it is for any other culture or ethnicity.

The cultural tradition of the African American experience embraces and emphasizes the life-giving value of disciplined individuals, strong families, and interdependent communities.

For Black American Catholics, it is through the particularity of our cultural heritage that we enter into the universality of the traditions of the Catholic Church and the universality of all of humanity. No one has any reason to feel threatened by this. No one has any reason to feel excluded.

“But why,” some might ask, “do you say that your lives matter? What do you mean by this?”

When we say that our lives matter we are expressing the quintessential message of the Gospel of Life. For centuries, African American lives have been treated as though they did not matter. They were treated as though they were cheap and expendable. This was true under the regime of chattel slavery; it was true during the mass lynching of blacks in the post-civil war south, and in riots in the north to prevent racial integration. It was true for 100 years after emancipation and it was
true when black soldiers were sent to the front lines of the battlefields to absorb
the brunt of the casualties in times of war.

It has also been true under more recent policies of mass incarceration and
disproportionate sentencing to capital punishment.

The cry that “Black Lives Matter” is a cry that comes from the Gospel of life and
from a rejection of the notion that human beings should be treated as though they
are mere objects that should be thrown away when their lives are no longer
deemed to be “useful.”

It is a rejection of the idea that human life is something that should be disposable
for social convenience.

We reject the notion that depopulation and termination of pregnancies are
acceptable means for combating poverty.

We reject the notion that the use of violence and military action without exhausting
efforts for peaceful resolution of conflicts should be the basis of foreign policy.

We reject the notion that the state execution of prisoners is an acceptable and
effective way to deter crime and to protect human life.

We reject the notion that withdrawing ordinary means of life-sustaining care is an
acceptable way to reduce the cost of health care.

Again and again, we respond to the culture of death by reasserting a culture of life.

We reject anything in our culture that cheapens human life and that desensitizes us
to human suffering. This includes gratuitous violence in entertainment, misogynist
treatment of women, and the plague of gunfire in our streets.

A Catholic understanding of the cry that “Black Lives Matter,” is a celebration of the value and dignity of human life from the point of conception until natural death.

Therefore, let no one misunderstand and misinterpret what we mean when we say “Black Lives Matter.” Let no one convince themselves that they should feel offended or excluded by a Catholic understanding of the term. This is a phrase that embraces and acknowledges the tradition and culture of African American communities for 400 years and that applies the timeless value of human life to the particularity of the African American experience today. It is a phrase that asserts the value of life that is too often missing in American popular culture.

Let this be a blessing to us, to our children, and to all of humanity. Black Lives Matter. Black Catholics Matter. All Human Life Matters. May God Bless You.
More than a century after a Catholic elementary school in New Castle first welcomed students and 70 years after it reopened, educators and faith leaders are ready for another new beginning.

St. Vitus School officially becomes Holy Spirit Academy on July 1. The school takes its name from the new Holy Spirit Parish serving Lawrence County.

“The value of Catholic education goes far beyond books and academics,” said Father Joseph McCaffrey, pastor. “It’s an experience of Catholic Christian community and faith in the context of family, and makes a huge impact on a young person’s life.”
Catholic schools help bring young people into a relationship with Jesus while preparing them for life, providing spiritual formation that encourages virtue. Gospel values promote respect, compassion and service.

“We start every day with morning prayer, which is a constant reminder to our students that God is in their lives, watching over them,” said principal Ed Sharbaugh. “We also provide service opportunities that teach responsibility to take care of our neighbor while building community.”

Top achievements of the past school year include an improved technology curriculum with students in third through eighth grades benefiting from Chromebooks, a STREAM program (science, technology, research, engineering, art, math) and the Google Classroom web service.

Sharbaugh said when the pandemic arrived, teachers were prepared for remote learning and the transition went well. Earlier in the school year, educators improved various aspects of student life, expanding the school band, adding golf, tennis and a chess club, as well as organizing new social events for families.

St. Vitus School first opened in 1908 with students taught by the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. The school closed in 1928 when the Franciscan sisters left for a new assignment. In 1950, St. Vitus School reopened in a new building, led by the Missionary Zelatrices of the Sacred Heart, later known as the Apostles of the Sacred Heart.

Today, with the help of donations earmarked for marketing, supporters are helping to increase enrollment, running radio ads, putting up billboards, contacting families in the parish faith formation program and advertising on social media. Many connect with the school through their Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/holy.spirit.academy.lc/
“We have a new school name and a fresh start,” Sharbaugh said. “Some new families have registered and we've received other inquiries.

“As our motto says, we are ‘taking flight, bold in the Spirit.’ I’m excited.”

*Below photo: Students gather after Mass at held at St. Vitus church, part of Holy Spirit Parish.*
On Sunday June 28, 2020 at 10 a.m., Bishop David A. Zubik will livestream a memorial Mass for all local Catholics who have died during the COVID-19 pandemic, many of whom did not have a funeral Mass due to the lockdown.

“Some of the deepest spiritual pain during this pandemic has been suffered by those who could not have a funeral Mass for their loved one. They have been on my heart and in my prayers. Our priests are now working with those families to schedule individual memorial Masses, but that will unfold over time,” Bishop Zubik said.
“This memorial Mass allows everyone who has grieved without a funeral to pray together for the souls of their loved ones and to receive comfort in God’s promises of mercy and salvation.”


A funeral Mass is a Eucharistic liturgy at which the body or cremated remains are present. A memorial Mass is held in the absence of remains. The Catholic funeral liturgy gathers the faithful to pray for those who have died and to recall the Christian hope of bodily resurrection and eternal life.

The idea for the diocesan memorial Mass came from the staff at the Catholic Cemeteries Association of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, which provides advance funeral planning, oversees diocesan cemeteries, consoles the grieving and arranges prayers for the dead.

At the height of the pandemic, families couldn’t even gather at the cemetery for a burial service. It was distressing to the cemeteries staff not to be able to be able to assist grieving people as the Church normally does, said Michael Sinnott, executive director of the Catholic Cemeteries Association.

“We haven’t really been able to give them what they need as far as emotional support. It’s been a very hard time,” Sinnott said.

Although people could not gather for services, they have been able to visit cemeteries individually. On Mothers’ Day and Memorial Day the Catholic Cemeteries Association surveyed visitors about how to serve best them during the pandemic.

The memorial Mass was the result.
“Once we explained to them this option to memorialize someone if we submitted their names, we got a huge response, almost 800 names,” Sinnott said.

“Praying for the deceased is part of our mission,” said Joe Huber, director of family service at the association and the person who first proposed the bishop’s Memorial Mass.

“The Mass is the keystone, the critical component when a Catholic dies,” he said. “People have missed it. They certainly understood under the circumstances, that it was necessary for the protection of them and for our people. But we’ve seen a lot of people wanting to have some kind of service.”

Limitations on size and gathering places remain for Catholic funerals and burials, as do social distancing requirements. Current directives for funerals are at https://diopitt.org/moving-forward-together and for burials at https://ccapgh.org/.
Deacon Jeffrey Craig's journey to the priesthood has given him a deep desire for sainthood, both for himself and for the people he will minister to as a priest. He will be ordained on June 27, 2020.

Faith formation has centered his life since he was young. He attended St. Alphonsus Grade School in Wexford and altar served at St. Alphonsus Church. The priests that he met there inspired him.

The thought of priesthood as his own vocation did not cross his mind until a dedicated theology teacher at Quigley Catholic High School opened his eyes to the possibility. Deacon Craig began attending school retreats. He grew in his love of the
Church and of service alongside fellow students who shared his beliefs.

This love of service prompted him to pursue a career in social work. In 2011, he studied psychology at Flagler College in Saint Augustine, Florida.

“I quickly realized that while I wanted to do social work, I wanted to do it in a faith-based, sacramental way,” Deacon Craig recalls.

This realization led him to the priesthood, and he entered St. Paul Seminary in the fall of 2012. As part of his priestly formation, he studied at the Pontifical North American College in Rome.

“My favorite part of that was being surrounded by the saints and witnessing the ways the saints lived their lives for God,” he said.

Before his exams, he would stop to say a quick prayer for guidance at the tomb of St. Catherine of Siena in the Santa Maria Sopra Minerva Basilica. Outside of Florence, he visited the tomb of St. Gemma Galgani, whose sole desire from an early age was union with Jesus and with her parents in heaven. He learned a lesson about following God’s will in Malta, where it is believed that St. Paul spread Christianity after he shipwrecked on its shores.

“It inspired me, because even though St. Paul didn’t mean to land in Malta, he still accomplished great things for God there. I may have plans that God wrecks because he has different plans for my life and for how he wants me to serve him,” Deacon Craig said.

Growing in friendship with these saints showed him that there is no one single way to become a saint. Saints come from all different backgrounds. Some are funny and
some are serious; some are rich and some are poor. But every person, no matter his or her walk of life, is called to be a saint, he said. Deacon Craig is excited to encourage people on their journey to sainthood through his priestly ministry.

As his ordination day approaches, Deacon Craig looks forward to celebrating the sacraments as a priest. The suspension of the sacraments amid the COVID-19 pandemic has renewed his appreciation for how much people depend on them. He is also deeply grateful to his family, friends, and mentors who have supported and prayed for him as he pursued the priesthood.

He encourages any man discerning a priestly vocation to spend time getting to know God, which leads to self-knowledge. Once a man knows who he is in the Lord, he can be open to go wherever God calls.

“I didn’t always know I wanted to be a priest, but when I came to realize it, I never looked back,” he said.
Holy Week 2020

April 4, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Parish Life

The thought of spending Holy Week at home is inconceivable for most Catholics. But as the coronavirus spread, the unthinkable is becoming reality.

Southwestern Pennsylvania isn’t alone in this. Public Masses have been suspended nationwide. Pope Francis hasn’t celebrated a public Mass for weeks and will livestream Holy Week Masses without a congregation.

So how do we make it a good and holy week?

“It is still an intensive time to pray and come together as a family,” said Father Howard Campbell, regional vicar of Vicariate 3. “There is a longing of the heart to receive Holy Communion, and the absence this week can intensify our longing.”
Father Campbell said all Catholics can make a **Spiritual Communion** to united with Jesus in the absence of the Eucharist. He encouraged them to read the Passion accounts in all four Gospels (Click here for *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, and *John*).

“Study the nuances in them. Do you see yourself in the crowd?” he asked. “With whom do you identify?”

Bishop David Zubik has encouraged everyone to discover ways that the Holy Spirit is working, despite social isolation and lockdown.

“This Holy Week will be unlike any other that I’ve ever celebrated and the same is true for you, too,” Bishop Zubik said, “but that doesn’t mean we don’t have the opportunity to really look for ways to connect with God and connect with each other.

“This pandemic has limited us, but it has not and *cannot* limit what God can do for us through the power of His love and Grace.”

Spiritual resources, including making an Act of Perfect Contrition, prayers, devotions, reflections and links to streamed Masses are available *here*.
Their dining room has turned into a classroom. Mornings are spent online, learning lessons about math, reading and vocabulary. And the family’s fervent faith is helping them through challenging times.

The Redd children, enrolled at Christ the Divine Teacher Catholic Academy in Aspinwall, are among 14,000 Catholic school students in the Diocese of Pittsburgh learning from home during the coronavirus pandemic. Schools will be closed at least until April 13. Everything is “homework” for now.

“So far it’s going well,” said their mother, Rainey. “The teachers have been helpful, and our principal, Mark Grgurich, records morning announcements with prayers and the Pledge of Allegiance to help them start the day like in school.”
Michelle Peduto, diocesan director of Catholic schools, said many students are using school-issued laptops and using web services like Google Classroom. Elementary teachers received additional training before starting online instruction on March 23. Some schools are using telephone call-ins.

“Teachers are having conversations with students and presenting material,” she said during an interview for Catholic Education Plus, airing Sunday on KDKA-AM. “Students submit their work with help from parents.”

The children adapt very quickly, according to Peduto, and thrive in a structure and routine that makes them feel safe and secure.

“Our teachers and parents are doing an amazing job,” she said. “There’s a learning curve with the technology, but we expect students to become more proficient and independent in the days ahead.”

The Redd family participates in Mass through online streaming.

“This crisis naturally draws us back to our belief in God,” Peduto said. “Everything we say or do, he is with us.”

Catholic Education Plus, hosted by Father Tom Burke, airs Sun. March 29, at 6:30 a.m. on KDKA-AM 1020. Podcasts are available at https://kdkaradio.radio.com/media/podcast/catholic-education-plus
Living our faith in trying times

MARCH 24, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Parish Life

The threat and reality of the coronavirus pandemic make it easy to be consumed by panic and fear. But this crisis can also be a time for people to grow closer to Jesus and serve those in need.

“God is clearing out space in our lives,” said Father Joseph McCarey, pastor of Holy Spirit Parish in the New Castle area. “We are at home more with our families, but what will we do with this time?”

“In the midst of worry, fear and a lack of control, where do our hearts turn to trust?” asked Father Adam Potter, parochial vicar of the parish grouping in Pittsburgh’s Oakland, Greenfield and Hazelwood neighborhoods.

“We need to listen to the doctors and take health precautions, but we also need to pray— putting our trust in the Father and calling on the Blessed Mother and the angels to protect us,” he said.

In an article entitled “A Faith Response to the Coronavirus,” Paul Canavese, director of The Pastoral Center in Alameda, CA, wrote that fear can alert people to dangers and keep them safe, but can also lead to selfish responses.

Canavese cautioned against hoarding food and sanitary and medical supplies, and urged Catholics to look after the weak, adopt a spirit of sacrifice, love our neighbor, and seek to live the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude.
Many people will have more time but less money and freedom in the coming weeks and months. Such changes may also have benefits, Father McCaffrey said.

“Do we store up treasures in heaven or on earth?” he asked. “Everything in this life is temporary. All our blessings are meant to be used for a higher purpose.”
Crisis provides opportunity for works of mercy

MARCH 24, 2020

Categories: News
Tags: Parish Life

Deacon Tom Berna is following Jesus’ call to feed the hungry as the need grows across the Pittsburgh region due to the coronavirus pandemic.

“We treat everyone as if they're Jesus Christ,” said Deacon Berna, who leads the Fishes & Loaves Cooperative Ministries at St. Stephen Parish in Pittsburgh’s Hazelwood neighborhood. Volunteers deliver Meals on Wheels and prepare takeout lunches at the pastoral center five days a week. They provide emergency food on Mondays and Thursdays.

“We can’t walk away from those who depend on this food,” Deacon Berna said.

Volunteers from Saints John & Paul Parish in Franklin Park prepare a meal for homeless veterans at Shepherd’s Heart in Pittsburgh. (file photo)
Free sandwiches will be handed out this Sat. March 28, 9 a.m.- noon at St. Basil church in Carrick, part of the Catholic Community of South Pittsburgh. The Ladies of Charity are providing ham and bologna to go with buns left from cancelled parish fish fries.

“We will have curbside pickup,” said Father Steve Kresak, “and we will deliver sandwiches to the porches of anyone in need, especially the elderly.”

St. Mary Magdalene Parish in Pittsburgh’s East End operates two food pantries—at St. James church in Wilkinsburg and Holy Rosary rectory in Homewood.

“We reply on our parishioners for food donations,” said Father Burke, the pastor. “But with our churches closed we are asking that canned goods and packaged items be dropped off at the St. James ministry center.”

St. Paul Cathedral’s food pantry, which normally is open on Tuesdays, is closed to help prevent spread of the virus. Coordinator Bev Rossiter said they are sending clients to Community Human Services Food Pantry at 370 Lawn Street in South Oakland and plan to reopen April 7.

Catholics across the region can help, Deacon Berna said.

“If you know an elderly neighbor, make sure they’ve got food, or offer to go shopping,” he said. “For people out of work, call the PA 211 hotline.”