“Point of View”: A life worth living

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Categories: News
Tags: Diocesan News, Featured
Steve Costantino’s life was a study in contradictions. Born with birth defects that often claimed children at a young age, he lived a relatively long, yet challenging, but unquestionably full life.

Doctors told his parents that young Steve should take it easy, but he was an active, “rough and tumble child.” He endured physical setbacks but was strong in spirit.

And while he could never father a child in life, in death he may give life to “thousands of babies,” thanks to a song that he wrote, but credited to the Divine Creator.

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Stephen J. Costantino was born on October 24, 1958, the third child of Barbara and Roger Costantino of Crafton Heights. When the doctor gently handed the newborn to his mother, he took care to cover his protruding abdominal area as to not upset her. Something was wrong.

Doctors set to work to save little Steve's life. He had two badly deformed kidneys, a ureter (the tube connecting the kidneys to the bladder) that was about nine times longer than normal, and he had almost no stomach muscles.

Steve underwent seven major surgeries before the age of three, with more later, according to his youngest brother, Bob Costantino. Life would not be easy, but it was also never boring in a family that grew to nine children.

Steve's sister Maria White described her big brother as “high energy, always on the go.”

“He had a love for people,” she said. “In spite of all his health issues, he was happy to be alive. He cherished life. He was a gift to us.”
He was a born salesman—that was Steve’s profession for many years—but his avocation was music. He learned how to play guitar, keyboards and drums, and wrote about 30 songs. Throughout his life he used his musical talents playing in various bands and at church venues.

One day in 1990, his mother was approached by a pregnant co-worker, whose prenatal test pointed to an abnormality. Should she keep the baby?

Barbara Costantino told her about Steve, and the woman decided not to have an abortion.

Soon after, Steve saw a videotaped sonogram of his sister’s expected child. Then it hit him.

“As I watched the little baby on the video, I suddenly realized that today, if it were me in the womb, I could be a candidate for abortion,” he told The Pittsburgh Catholic in 1995. “Although my parents would never consider something like that, this suddenly burdened me immensely because, even with all my problems, I would rather be here, alive.”

Steve’s emotions burst forth. He went home, sat down at the piano, and the words and melody began to flow:

_In the early days of my early life_
_I’m in the womb and crying out_
_“Please. Momma let me stay here!”_

_Let me have a chance to sing my song with you,_
_And I’ll show you what the Lord has made and_
_Make you proud that He’s given me to you._

Steve said he finished the song in 15 minutes, but knew he didn’t write it. “I just held the pen,” he said. “God wrote it.”

Steve and a good friend, Ken Seretti, formed a production company and released the song under the title, “Point of View: the Pro-Life Anthem,” with parts of the proceeds going to groups that backed alternatives to abortion.

A supporter once came up to him, asked for his autograph, and said he might not be a dad, but because of the song, “you’re going to father thousands of babies.”

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Fast forward about 30 years, to Saint Philip Church in Crafton, on a cold February day, 2021. After suffering, scrapping, and singing his way through 62 years, Steve Costantino’s remarkable earthly life was over.

“All of us can say with confidence that Steve was this Faithful Servant,” brother John Costantino said in his eulogy, as Steve’s wife Michelle, family and friends listened. “His grace to us, his gift, (was) constantly engaging us, poking us, not allowing us to be isolated or be passive. He forced and taught us that we needed to have a zest for life, a robust and vibrant relationship with the world around us.”

Steve is gone physically, but his sacred song is not silenced, its purpose more vital today than ever. That’s why Maria reached out to Oscar-winning composer and producer Tom Bajoras, who re-recorded the song and is hoping to get it published and into streaming services.
Steve's siblings are convinced his pro-life message will live on and help save the unborn.

“Absolutely,” said Bob Costantino. “We all believe in the power of the song. Steve is now more powerful in heaven, and God’s grace will help to see it so.”

Steve Costantino, growing up as a “rough and tumble kid.”
The Crossroads Foundations in Pittsburgh is helping more promising young people like Bryce Matthews get a quality Catholic high school education while preparing them for success in college, and in life.

Matthews, a rising senior at Central Catholic High School, mentored freshmen last year and completed an internship this summer.

“Crossroads has made a major difference for me,” he said. “They've given me the tools and reassurance I need in applying for college, internships and jobs.”

Matthews made the comments during an interview with Father Tom Burke on Catholic Education Plus, airing Sunday, Aug. 1 at 6:30 a.m. on KDKA Radio. It will be available later online at: https://www.audacy.com/kdkaradio/podcasts/catholic-education-plus-20662.

“Summer internships are always a great experience,” said executive director Esther Mellinger Stief, who joined Matthews on the program. “Students are assigned a project and learn about a field.”

Crossroads provides professional mentoring, with volunteers meeting with young scholars to talk about their careers. Coaches also work one-on-one with seniors on the college admissions process, which Stief says can be daunting. This summer, more than a dozen high school students are taking college courses at CCAC, including Matthews.

Crossroads Foundation began in 1988 with 11 students. Today, 155 scholars are enrolled in six Catholic high schools in the diocese, and the organization is connected with over 650 alumni. Many have gone on to become attorneys, doctors, pharmacists and teachers.
Acceptance into the program is based on family income, a student's potential, and obstacles that might interfere with a student's academic pursuits. Significant risk factors include poverty, neighborhoods with poorly performing public schools, and personal circumstances.

“Our best recruiters are our parents,” Stief said. “They bring other parents to Crossroads, and help set our scholars up for success.”

When the pandemic struck, Crossroads did an emergency funding drive for their families and distributed gift cards.

“We realized if their immediate needs weren’t met, nothing else mattered,” Stief said.

Matthews is following in the footsteps of his brother Isaiah, who attends Waynesburg University. Bryce Matthews is also looking at colleges in the area, and hopes to study software development. He appreciate the opportunities he has at Central Catholic, thanks to Crossroads.

“It's been very enlightening,” he said. “I've learned a lot, including about myself.”

You can find out more about opportunities through the Crossroads Foundation here: www.Crossroads.org.

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**Crossroads Foundation Facts**

- **100% graduate** from high school
- **96% enroll** in college
- **72% earn** a college degree
- Most are **first-generation college students**
Pilgrimages return

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Catholics with a pent-up desire to travel abroad can renew their faith while doing so, as they sail across the Sea of Galilee, celebrate the 102nd birthday of St. John Paul II in his hometown or attend the famous Oberammergau Passion play.

The Pittsburgh Catholic is sponsoring three pilgrimages in 2022: The Holy Land with auxiliary Bishop William Waltersheid, Jan. 14-24; Poland with Bishop Waltersheid May 12-20; and Oberammergau and the hometown of Blessed Francis Seelos with Bishop David Zubik, Sept. 18-27. Click on the links or call Marianna Pisano at Unitours, Inc., 1-800-777-7432.

“The world is opening up again and we should celebrate that in a way that honors Jesus and the saints, especially in the Holy Land,” said Belinda Held, the pilgrimage organizer who has worked with The Pittsburgh Catholic for many years.

Oberammergau, performed every 10 years since 1634 to thank God for delivering the village from a plague, was delayed for a year due to COVID.

“Many of us prayed that we would get through this pandemic,” Held said. Witnessing the play “is a way to thank God for saving us.”

The pandemic also forced rescheduling of the Poland pilgrimage, with the happy result that Pittsburgh pilgrims will visit St. John Paul’s birthplace on his birthday.

Bishop Zubik and Bishop Waltersheid offer spiritual guidance throughout their pilgrimages and celebrate Mass daily. On the Holy Land pilgrimage, married couples will have an opportunity to renew their wedding vows in Saint Catherine's Church in Bethlehem.
Cana, where Jesus worked his first miracle during a wedding celebration.

In addition to places where St. John Paul lived, highlights of the Poland pilgrimage include the Shrine of the Black Madonna, the grave of St. Faustina Kowalska and the monastery of St. Maximilian Kolbe, who gave his life in 1941 to save another prisoner from execution in Auschwitz. Pilgrims will tour Auschwitz itself, and pray to make “never again” a reality.

Pilgrims will also pray at the shrine of a more recent martyr, Blessed Jerzy Popieluszko, a priest and social justice advocate who spent time in Pittsburgh before returning to Poland, where he was murdered in 1984.

In the Holy Land, pilgrims will sail across the Sea of Galilee and see the “Jesus boat,” a first century fishing craft that archaeologists recovered from the waters where St. Peter cast his nets. In addition to historic churches at the traditional sites of Jesus’ life in Bethlehem, Nazareth and Jerusalem, pilgrims will visit the excavation of a third century synagogue in Capernaum, which was likely built on the same site as the synagogue where Jesus preached.

After walking the route on which Jesus is said to have carried His cross to Calvary, pilgrims will visit Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum. Pilgrims can book a three-day extension in Jordan, where they will have an opportunity to renew their baptismal promises by the Jordan River.

The Oberammergau pilgrimage traverses three countries: the Czech Republic, Austria and Germany. Beginning in Prague, pilgrims travel the Danube Valley, visiting important churches, shrines, monasteries and historical sites. These include Fussen, Germany, home to Blessed Francis Seelos, who became a parish priest in Pittsburgh. The grand finale is Oberammergau, followed by a visit to the shrine at Altotting, where a 7th century image of the Blessed Mother is associated with miraculous healing.

“Going on pilgrimage bring so much joy to people. It feeds their soul, renews their faith. It’s something you remember your whole life, something that changes you. People are hungry for that kind of experience,” Held said

“On these pilgrimages, people have the opportunity to experience places that they have only read about in the Bible or heard about in Sunday school. We are praying and celebrating Mass in the places where Jesus and the saints lived and walked.”
Local volunteers building homes and hope

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They left in the rain, sometimes worked in the rain, came home in rain, but they brought sunshine into many lives with what they accomplished in Appalachia.

A mission team of 109 young people and adults from Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish and Saint Joan of Arc Parish built two homes complete with electric and plumbing, five porches, a handicap ramp and an addition.

Father Dan Sweeney, pastor of Saint Thomas the Apostle, described what the missions mean to everyone. “I wish you could share the feelings and emotions of the homeowners and the members of our group,” he said. “What we do for the people lifts them up, gives them that extra push they need. But the real spiritual benefit is what the work does for us. It changes the volunteers,” Father Sweeney said. “Parents ask, ‘What did you do to my child? They are so much more appreciative of what they have now.’”

Father Sweeney has led missions for 39 years, including last year’s “Camp Corona” when the volunteers couldn’t go to Kentucky because of the pandemic. Instead, teenagers camped out in tents in the parking lot of Saint Agnes church in West Mifflin, put a new roof on the social hall and built a ramp.

Volunteers from St. Thomas the Apostle Parish unload supplies at a mission site in Kentucky.
Volunteers from **Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish** spent the week of June 19-26 at Saint Vincent's Mission in David, Kentucky, completing work projects at a school. In addition to putting a new floor in the school café, they also jacked up a house and put new supports and new flooring, built two decks, installed a kitchen and bathroom in another, and fitted new support beams under one home.

“This year's group included two high school students and 25 college students,” said coordinator Katie Dorman. “The parish has been engaged with Project Hope for four decades. Families recognize us when we return, and we invite them to a picnic to celebrate.”

The Piarist School in Hagerhill, Kentucky, hosted volunteers from **Saints John and Paul and other Beaver Valley parishes** for the week of July 11-17. “We had 34 people, including 12 adults,” said Karen Walker, pastoral minister. “Father Jay Donahue, our Parish Administrator, participated as well as two staff members. We had parishioners from across our grouping.”

“We painted school classrooms, sorted through items donated to their Outreach Program, installed shelves and built steps into their new consignment shop located on the school property,” Walker said. “We also did some repair work on residents’ houses. While we were staying in cabins located in Jenny Wiley State Park we did some work to upgrade those, as well.”

The parish found out about the need in June of 2019 when the principal visited as part of the Missionary Co-op Appeal. He invited them to send a group down to help with the school’s Outreach Program. After a year’s delay, “we were excited to go this year,” Walker said.
Seven educators at Catholic schools in the Diocese of Pittsburgh have received the 2021 Golden Apple Award:

- Darci Smith- teacher, Archangel Gabriel Catholic School
- Mallory Gurney- teacher, Blessed Francis Seelos Academy
- JoLynn Clouse- principal, Saint Wendelin School
- Robert Childs- associate principal, Serra Catholic High School
- Meloni DiPietro-Gunthoerl- teacher, Seton LaSalle High School
- Emily Janocha- teacher, John F. Kennedy Catholic School
- Lisa Radzanowski- teacher, Ave Maria Academy

The award recognizes their excellent performance in the classroom, church and community. Each educator will receive a monetary prize, thanks to the generosity of the Donahue Family Foundation.

The Pittsburgh Catholic is featuring a Golden Apple honoree each week until the start of school.
Golden Apple Award Winner: Darci Smith

School/position: Archangel Gabriel School, teacher

Quote: “Teaching is not a job, but a calling.”

Darci Smith remembers how she felt when she would spot the prestigious Golden Apple award in a classroom.

“Whenever I saw a Golden Apple on a teacher’s desk, I would think, wow, that says a lot about that teacher. I always wanted to be like them,” she said.

“To receive this honor after more than 21 years in education is just so overwhelming. I put my heart and soul into my students and classroom.”

The middle school teacher at Archangel Gabriel Catholic School in Robinson is one of seven educators recognized this year for excellence in the classroom, church and community.

Parents and fellow teachers were astonished when Smith took the initiative to find the funds to buy 102 iPads for 6th, 7th and 8th graders. She reached out to every strong supporter of Catholic education she knew, and within two months had raised nearly $50,000.

“When I approached her about her efforts,” parent Nicole Croford wrote in her nominating letter, “she simply stated, ‘I prayed for the Holy Spirit to work through me, and all the credit goes to God.’”

“As current PTG President,” wrote Leslie Williams, “I’ve had the pleasure of working with Mrs. Smith as she created outreach projects. She is a shining example of a teacher who is most certainly ‘Lighting the Way’ for her students.”
“Darci expects the best from her students because she expects the best from herself,” wrote principal Cathy Militzer. “She is a faith-filled role model and excellent teacher.”

Born and raised in McDonald, PA, Smith earned a Bachelor of Psychology from Bethany College, then a Masters in Education from Duquesne University. She began her teaching career at Saint Agatha School in Bridgeville. After a move to Georgia, she returned to the Pittsburgh area to teach at Saint Joseph School, then Holy Trinity, which became Archangel Gabriel following a merger.

Smith is a member of the school’s faith formation committee, and coordinates service projects to the Coraopolis Food Pantry, Merakey Allegheny Valley School and Jubilee Soup Kitchen. She also serves as middle school forensic moderator, Beaver Honor League coordinator, and organizes puppet shows, the annual eighth grade trip to Washington, D.C., and the eighth grade graduation.

“Teaching is not a job, but a calling where I am able to help my students with their academics while fostering their relationship with God and faith,” she said. “I watch them blossom into young, well-rounded adults rooted in their faith.”

Darci Smith with her eighth graders at the start of the school year.
Hace aproximadamente dos años, en un esfuerzo por llegar a la vibrante y creciente comunidad latina de la Diócesis de Pittsburgh, Jorge Vela, director del Apostolado Hispano, comenzó a escribir una columna mensual de espiritualidad en español.

Esperamos que también lo disfruten los hablantes nativos de inglés, incluidos los estudiantes de nuestras escuelas católicas que están aprendiendo el idioma español.

About two years ago, in an effort to reach the vibrant and growing Latino community in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, Jorge Vela, director of Hispanic Apostolate, began writing a monthly spirituality column in Spanish.

We hope that it also will be enjoyed by native speakers of English, including students in our Catholic schools who are learning the Spanish language. (English translation follows Spanish.)

La voz del mensajero

Una columna de Jorge Vela

Pero sobre todas las cosas, nunca te olvides de Dios

En días recientes estaba escuchando música y en una de las canciones salió esta frase" Pero sobre todas las cosas, nunca te olvides de Dios". Esta canción es de Manuel Mijares y Lucero y es ella quién repite esta frase unas cuatro o cinco veces a lo largo de la melodía.

Debo de confesarles que estas líneas nos pueden caer de maravilla en estos tiempos. Llevamos casi un año y medio con la pandemia del Covid-19, y este período nos ha cimbrado fuertemente en lo más profundo de
nuestro ser. En los comienzos de la pandemia, todo era nuevo y nos brindó una oportunidad maravillosa de
crecer en la convivencia familiar y también nos permitió volver la mirada a Dios Nuestro Señor para poner
nuestras penas y preocupaciones en su corazón amoroso y misericordioso.

Con el transcurso de los meses, la rutina y el estrés ha ido en aumento, así como la incertidumbre de lo que
estaba sucediendo. Posiblemente a muchos de nosotros, desde los meses de abril o mayo del año pasado, nos
ha tocado vivir en primera persona o en seres queridos cercanos la realidad de estar contagiados con el Covid.
Probablemente conocemos a alguien que ya haya partido a la Casa del Padre por este motivo. En algunos
casos, esta angustia ha mermado mucho nuestra relación familiar o incluso nuestra estabilidad emocional. La
incertidumbre a lo desconocido puede ser una cruz muy dura y con el paso de los días, semanas y meses, se
puede hacer más pesada.

Algo hermosísimo, de lo que todos hemos sido testigos, han sido innumerables muestras de caridad y sentido
de comunidad a todo lo largo de Pittsburgh y sus alrededores. Claramente se palpa la mano amorosa y
misericordiosa que sale al servicio de sus hermanos necesitados. Ejemplos hay miles que se podrían compartir,
pero creo que han estado al alcance y conocimiento de todos.

Y ahora, cuando un buen porcentaje de personas ya han recibido la vacuna y la gran mayoría ya estamos
volviendo a la normalidad, parece que el activismo y el acelerarnos al máximo, como queriendo recuperar este
año y medio, podemos olvidar todas las enseñanzas aprendidas y valoradas en este tiempo, y es aquí cuando
debemos cantar o vivir esta frase de la Canción: “pero sobre todas las cosas, nunca te olvides de Dios.

Quiero invitarles a volver siempre la mirada a Dios Nuestro Señor, y no solo cuando las dificultades surgen,
como ha sido en este tiempo de pandemia, sobretodo, al inicio. Nos olvidamos de Dios cuando dejamos de
reflexionar y las actividades llenan ese tiempo destinado al silencio, a la reflexión y a la autoevaluación de ver
nuestra vida en relación al plan de Dios, al igual que pasar un tiempo en familia. Este tiempo ha sido una
oportunidad magnífica para volverse más humanos, más cercanos a los demás, para comprenderlos,
apoyarlos y cuando ha sido necesario, salir al encuentro de la persona en necesidad. En definitiva, es el mejor
momento para jamás olvidarnos de Dios y renovar ese amor que nos lleve a conocerlo y amarlo más, y
compartir ese amor con cada uno de nuestros semejantes, sin importar la realidad de cada uno.

Y si lamentablemente, nos hemos olvidado de Dios, cada día tenemos la oportunidad de acercarnos a Él. Dios
nuestro Señor nos ama tanto, que, aunque nosotros no nos demos cuenta, Él está haciendo todo lo que parte
para acercarnos a su amor, pero respeta nuestra libertad, por lo que es indispensable que pongamos de
nuestra parte para acercarnos a su amor misericordioso.

Pero sobre todas las cosas, nunca te olvides de Dios.

The Voice of the Messenger

A monthly column by Jorge Vela

But above all else, never forget God

In recent days I was listening to music and in one of the songs this phrase came out “But above all things, never
forget God.” This song is by Manuel Mijares and Lucero and it is she who repeats this phrase about four or five
times throughout the melody.
I must confess that these lines can fall down wonderfully in these times. We have been with the Covid-19 pandemic for almost a year and a half, and this period has shaken us strongly in the depths of our being. At the beginning of the pandemic, everything was new and it gave us a wonderful opportunity to grow in family life and also allowed us to turn our gaze to God Our Lord to put our sorrows and concerns in his loving and merciful heart.

Over the months, the routine and stress has increased, as well as the uncertainty of what was happening. Possibly many of us, since the months of April or May of last year, have had to experience in the first person or in close loved ones the reality of being infected with Covid. We probably know someone who has already gone to the Father's House for this reason. In some cases, this anguish has greatly impaired our family relationship or even our emotional stability. The uncertainty of the unknown can be a very hard cross and with the passage of days, weeks and months, it can become heavier.

Something very beautiful, which we have all witnessed, has been countless displays of charity and a sense of community throughout Pittsburgh and its surroundings. The loving and merciful hand that goes out to serve his brothers in need is clearly palpable. There are thousands of examples that could be shared, but I think they have been within everyone's reach and knowledge.

And now, when a good percentage of people have already received the vaccine and the vast majority are already returning to normal, it seems that activism and accelerating to the maximum, as if wanting to recover this year and a half, we can forget all the lessons learned and valued at this time, and it is here when we must sing or live this phrase of the Song: “but above all things, never forget God.

I want to invite you to always look back at God Our Lord, and not only when difficulties arise, as it has been in this time of pandemic, especially at the beginning. We forget about God when we stop reflecting and activities fill that time dedicated to silence, reflection and self-evaluation of seeing our life in relation to God's plan, as well as spending time with the family. This time has been a magnificent opportunity to become more human, closer to others, to understand them, support them and when necessary, go out to meet the person in need. In short, it is the best time to never forget God and renew that love that leads us to know and love him more, and share that love with each of our fellow men, regardless of the reality of each one.

And if, unfortunately, we have forgotten God, every day we have the opportunity to get closer to Him. God our Lord loves us so much that, even if we don’t realize it, He is doing everything he can to get closer to His love, but respects our freedom, so it is essential that we do our part to draw closer to his merciful love.

But above all things, never forget God.