School mural depicts a life of love

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Students of Saint Benedict the Moor School have a new role model in Mabel Grammer. They were so inspired that they painted a large mural to celebrate her life of love and service.

On Wed. October 20, Bishop David Zubik dedicated and blessed the mural at the school, which is located in Pittsburgh's Hill District.

“I thought about Mother Teresa, who also reached out in love,” Bishop Zubik told the students. “She once wrote, ‘I am but a little pencil in God's hand writing a love letter to the world.’ That's exactly who Mabel Grammer was, loving one person at a time.”

A Black U.S. journalist and Catholic, Grammer led a campaign to find homes for mixed-race “brown babies” of German women and African-American soldiers who were born during the occupation years in Germany following World War II. Their mothers were shunned—denied work, housing and ration cards—and had to put their children in orphanages.

Grammer and her husband Oscar, an Army officer, adopted 12 of these babies, and she found homes for more than 500 others in the United States and Germany.

In telling the story, “we really focused on the aspects of what can we do in our own lives to imitate Ms. Mabel Grammer,” said Audrey Bowser, principal of Saint Benedict the Moor School. “While we may not be adopting orphan children, we can still make that difference in our lives and shine our light for all to see.”

Born in Arkansas around 1915, the granddaughter of slaves, Grammer moved to Pittsburgh to attend beauty school, achieving her ultimate goal of saving enough money to go to college. She wrote for the Baltimore Afro-
American newspaper, crusading for racial equality and economic opportunity.

In 1950, she married Oscar Grammer, a warrant officer with the U.S. Army stationed in Germany, and traveled to Lourdes and other shrines. She met with Catholic nuns who invited her to visit a local orphanage, and started what she called the Brown Baby Plan.

Pope Paul VI bestowed the Papal Humanitarian Award on the Grammers in 1968.

Mabel Grammer died in 2002.

The mural was painted by six students of Saint Benedict the Moor School, who are also part of ACH Clear Pathways, a nonprofit that provides enriching and new experiences to youth and families through visual and performing arts.

The young artists gave a presentation on Grammer's work and life, noting in one slide, "It doesn't matter where you start, it is how you finish. How will you make a difference in the life of others, too?"
Mabel Grammer with some of the children she helped to adopt. AP photo.
Very shortly, on November 2, we as the Church will mark All Souls Day. It offers us an opportunity to pray for our beloved who have died—our relatives, our friends, our late teachers, bosses, priests—as well as the countless nameless souls who are helped by our prayers. If they are still in purgatory, our prayers will help them on their last leg of the journey to heaven.

All Souls Day is also a tender opportunity to cherish our memories and thoughts about our loved ones who have passed.

Please indulge me in sharing such a heartfelt memory.

While still the Bishop of Green Bay, on Monday, January 16, 2006, at 5:03 a.m., in Room 942 of Saint Vincent Hospital in Green Bay, my dear mother crossed over the bridge from this life to eternal life. She died in my arms—a precious blessing indeed.

It was such a powerful experience that I felt a longing for a tangible reminder. I wanted something to represent that tender moment.

Six weeks after my mother’s death, I found it. While visiting my Green Bay seminarians in Rome, I found a pectoral cross in one of my favorite religious goods stores—a cross with a unique image that captured my heart.

Every bishop always wears a pectoral cross. It is worn over or near his heart as a sign that Jesus must be first in his heart and, in turn, that his heart seeks to be like the heart of Jesus. When dressed simply in a suit and clerical collar, a bishop wears the cross in the left inner pocket of his jacket, attached to a chain that goes...
diagonally across his chest from this right shoulder. When garbed for liturgical celebrations, he wears the pectoral cross in the center of his chest. In both cases, the cross remains close to his heart.

Back to my story. While in Rome in March of 2006, I found a pectoral cross with a medallion in its center bearing the image of our dear Blessed Mother cradling her dear, lifeless Son, Jesus, just having been taken down from the cross.

The cross stunned me. While I had reflected many times on the image of Our Lady cradling Our Savior after he was taken down from the cross, now I was struck with the reality of what her feelings were. As my mother gently breathed her last on that cold Wisconsin morning, I was able to cradle her. Just as Mary, the Mother, held her Son, Jesus, thus did I, David, the son, cradle my mom as she ended her earthly journey.

Each time that I celebrate Mass in our parishes, I wear that white cross with the image of Mary and her Son. That image marks a definitive moment in the history of salvation and brings me closer to our Blessed Mother and to my own mom.

Each time that I wear that cross with the image of Mary and Jesus, I think of why it was such a sacred privilege to cradle my mom as she breathed her last. Those final moments with her have a profound symmetry:

- She “cradled” me in her womb from conception until my birth;
- She “cradled” me as I first saw the light of day;
- She “cradled” me through hunger and discomfort when I was an infant;
- She “cradled” me as I earned the nicks and bruises of a youngster at play;
- She “cradled” me through my successes and failures as I began the rigors of elementary school;
- She “cradled” me with encouragement as I went on my first date as a high-schooler;
- She “cradled” me as I took a step of faith by entering the seminary;
- She “cradled” me through all my doubts and questions as I moved through formation as a seminarian;
- She “cradled” me—the first to do so—the day I was ordained a priest;
- And finally, she “cradled” me just eight hours before she died as I thanked her for all she had done for me and she promised to watch over me from above.

Yes, 5:03 a.m. will always have a special and tender meaning for me. This is not only because of the last embrace between a son and his mother. That experience awakened in me a deeper appreciation of what happened between another Son and His Mom on the hill of Calvary. And for that awareness, I shall be ever grateful.

Isn't that what it's all about? As we breathe throughout our lives and at our last, we don't go it alone. We are always in the tender embrace of our dear Savior and His Blessed Mother. That was a crucial lesson my mom taught me all throughout my life. I was blessed to have been able to return the favor over the years and at last at 5:03 a.m.

As we approach All Souls Day, in the midst of your busy schedules, don't forget your loved ones. Perhaps you can go to Mass on that day, or visit where they are buried. Whatever you are able to do, let your heart be made
tender by your memories.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord. And let Your perpetual light shine on them. Amen! Alleluia!

*Photo by Justin Merriman*
Three ways of renewal

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By Father Matthew Hawkins

Parochial vicar, St. Benedict the Moor Parish

The Church has embarked on three exciting initiatives that have tremendous potential of breathing new life into our parishes: the first is an effort to assess the Eucharistic coherence of our daily lives and the culture of our communities. The second is a greater commitment to evangelization, and the third is an effort to listen to the laity through the process of synodality. It may be tempting to think of these three great initiatives separately, but really, they reflect many facets of a process of renewal through which the Holy Spirit is leading us.

We should begin, as always, with the Eucharist. Many Catholics involved in catechesis are familiar with the disturbing surveys that report most Catholics no longer believe in “the real presence” of Christ. On the other hand, social media are awash with debates about which public figures should be denied the sacrament and whether “too many” private individuals are also receiving the sacrament unworthily. I am concerned about a much more basic and fundamental point: how can we promote a Eucharistic culture in our parishes? What are we doing to infuse our communities with a Eucharistic presence and sensibility?

The building that housed the seminary that I attended for formation for the priesthood, St. Mary’s in Baltimore, spanned an average city block. The chapel, housing the tabernacle, was at the center of that sprawling complex. It served as a reminder that no matter how busy we were with many demanding activities, the Eucharist was the center of everything. Our families, our parishes, our schools, our Bible studies, and our social action and social service organizations should have that same sensibility. The Eucharist also should be at the center of the life of our parishes. Every parish should assess what we can do to encourage this.
Next, we should consider our efforts in evangelization. Many Catholics are intimidated by the idea of evangelization because we think that it must be something that is slick and packaged and that we are being asked to “force our religion down other people’s throats.” But evangelization is a matter of being aware of our own story. What has been our journey through life and how have we encountered Christ along the way? Evangelization means that we should reflect enough on our personal journey of faith so that we can easily share it with our friends and relatives when they want to know how we find meaning in the midst of challenges. Evangelization means paying attention to our encounters with God and being willing to share our stories about these encounters. It means that other people will have a chance to know and understand us better and we will have a chance to know and understand them. Above all, it means that they will encounter Christ through us.

Lastly, we should respond to Pope Francis and Bishop Zubik’s call to synodality, which means traveling together on the journey of faith. It means dialogue within the Church and prayerfully listening to one another. It also means analysis and discernment. We should take time to share with one another the joys and frustrations of our journey. We embrace eternal truths in a world that is constantly changing, what implications does this have for living Eucharistically in the 21st century?

Our parishes will be renewed constantly so long as we are focused on these three things: the need to discover the Eucharist at the center of our daily activities, the ability to listen to one another as we express the joys and challenges of being a church, and the willingness to share the adventure of our faith and the story of our encounters with Christ. If we are open to this, the Holy Spirit will guide our endeavors.
Bishop David Zubik is asking the Holy Spirit to lead Catholics as they get ready to join in a global consultation the pope has convened to help him determine how the Church discerns its mission.

“Our Holy Father Pope Francis...has called for the entire Church to engage in the process of listening in preparation for the Synod of Bishops that will take place in 2023,” Bishop Zubik said in his homily during a special Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit celebrated October 17 at Saint Paul Cathedral. “We need to allow the Holy Spirit to guide us, to see and share what is in our hearts.

“We need to hang onto Jesus so that we can come to a deeper understanding of what it means to be Church,” he said.

Every Catholic—including those who have left the Church or those who feel marginalized—are invited to participate in the Synod, a word which translated from the Greek means “journeying together.” Three key concepts for the synod and its recommendations are communion, participation and mission.

“We will have the chance to listen to each other, learn from each other, and journey with each other,” Bishop Zubik said in his homily. “And so as we begin this process, and indeed as we embrace this task, the Holy Father has asked us to be open to the Spirit to find grace for timely help.”

The focus of the synod is how the Church discerns its mission, not on what it should teach.

Pope Francis and diocesan organizers plan to provide small group opportunities for Catholics to offer their thoughts, culminating in diocesan-wide gatherings next spring. All participation will be summed up in a 10-page document that every diocese will send to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The USCCB will then send a summary of all the diocesan documents to the Vatican.
The synod will culminate with a worldwide assembly of bishops in October 2023.

Text “Synod2021” to 84576 to receive updates on the Synod and learn how you can participate, or visit www.diopitt.org/journeying-together or your parish website.
The Diocese of Pittsburgh's communications and community relations department is hosting its third annual 30 Days of Gratitude Challenge, Nov. 1-30, help people focus on the blessings they have received from God.

“It’s been wonderful to see how the Challenge has grown,” said Theresa Sullivan, digital media strategist. “We have received an overwhelmingly positive response the past two years, and we want to reach even more this year.”

The challenge is offered online, across diocesan Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts and features daily posts and regular video reflections on gratitude.

New this year, people can register to receive text messages with a different focus each week:

Nov. 1-6: Gratitude and Prayer
Nov. 7-13: Gratitude in Action
Nov. 14-20: Gratitude in Relationships
Nov. 21-27: Gratitude for the Eucharist
Nov. 28-30: Gratitude Challenge Reflections

Nearly 500 people have already registered for the Gratitude Challenge.

Medical research shows that people who practice gratitude on a regular basis experience a positive impact on their own mental and physical health, and share those benefits with family, friends and co-workers.

The concept of gratitude is central to the Christian faith. The word “Eucharist” comes from the Greek for “thanksgiving.” Gratitude is a humble and happy response to what we receive. It recognizes the source of the
gift, which strengthens our relationship with God and with the people who bring blessings to our lives.

“Especially at a time when many are weary and struggling to accept new ‘normals,’ reflecting on the many blessings around us is important,” said Jennifer Antkowiak, executive director of communications and community relations. “Giving thanks helps us feel happier, more hopeful and helps us to open our hearts to Jesus.”

People who have taken part in previous Gratitude Challenges have expressed appreciation for how the messages and reflections helped them:

“Thank you for these words of peace!” Barbara said.

“Always gratitude first!” Carol responded to a social media post.

To receive Gratitude text messages people can text “Gratitude2021” to 84576.
Autumn Reset

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Catholic at Home

It made my heart so happy to host an online mini-retreat this past Wednesday evening. The purpose of the Autumn Reset was to develop an action plan that refreshes participants and inspires them to create a calm, fulfilling remainder of the year.

Nearly 200 people registered, which affirmed a need. They described feeling rundown, overwhelmed, even burned-out. That, of course, is not how any of us want to feel as we prepare to head into the joyful seasons of Thanksgiving, Advent and Christmas.

Adding to the tension, we are hearing messages urging us to “Shop Now!” because global supply chain issues and postal delays may strain our gift-giving and mailing.

It’s a good time of year to press the pause button and reset our focus. We need to hold tight to the things that matter the most.

We started our retreat with a prayer that called each of us to invite God into our mess. We talked about how we’re not wired to do that. If I invited you to my house, I’d make sure everything was straightened up, I would set out some flowers and snacks.

God doesn’t want us to wait until we think that things are “perfect” to invite Him into our homes and our hearts. He doesn’t mind a mess. In fact, He wants to help us “clean things up.”

If you’d like to do your own little “Autumn Reset,” start by simply asking yourself, “How do I feel right now?” Then, ask yourself, “What would help me feel better—healthier, happier, restored, energized?”
For example, if you feel tired, you probably need rest; and if you feel lonely, you probably need to reach out to a friend. If you feel stressed, then quiet time alone might be an effective self-care strategy.

But the most important thing is to start and end these reflections with prayer. Invite Jesus into the “little moments” of your day. Place your burdens on Him. Experience His comforting guidance, and the peace that comes with it.

Here’s the prayer we said in our Autumn Reset retreat. I hope it helps to refresh and inspire you.

_Dear God,_

_The struggles and demands feel intense some days. We sometimes feel exhausted and discouraged. There never seem to be enough hours in the day to get everything done, and that’s frustrating. Please help us to remember that You are near._

_Thank You for being our refuge and our strength. Help us to trust You more, to stop wasting so much time just spinning our wheels, distracted and worried. Please help us to first lift our eyes to You. Forgive us for the moments we haven’t come before You._

_Fill us with the power of Your Holy Spirit—with Your strength, Your peace, Your joy. Fill us with Your spiritual wisdom and the constant reminders of Your presence._

_We ask for Your healing over every part of our lives: physically, emotionally, spiritually, professionally, socially. We ask that you make us strong and resilient for the days ahead._

_Help us to realize that by taking care of ourselves, we are better able to reflect Your love and light to a world that so desperately needs Your hope._

_Amen._