The Pittsburgh Creche: a tradition continues

Categories: News
Tags: Diocesan News, Featured
The blessing of Pittsburgh Crèche is back in-person, and so are the visitors.

Bishop David Zubik was one of 10 members of the Christian Leaders Fellowship who led a prayer service at the crèche on Friday, Nov. 19.

Last year the blessing was held virtually due to the pandemic.

The Pittsburgh Crèche is the only authorized replica of the Nativity scene that Saint John Paul II commissioned for the Vatican. This is the 23rd year it’s been displayed in Pittsburgh, mostly at U.S. Steel Plaza.

“The crèche is so important because of the lesson that it teaches,” said Monsignor Ron Lengwin, who has shepherded the crèche project since the structure was built in 1999. “It teaches us how much God loves us, and that love is renewed every day for us.

“It’s still a mystery why God became man,” he said. “We know it was to save us from sin—that He was going to die for us, show us how we should live, and show us how important we are, how unique we are.”

Local labor unions volunteer their services in assembling the 30-ton structure, helping to train apprentice carpenters.

The crèche is an ecumenical effort by Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Christians to preserve the true meaning of Christmas. It stands as a reminder of God’s great love for all his creation.

The Christian Leaders Fellowship includes the local heads of 10 Christian traditions: Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh, Byzantine Catholic Archeparchy of Pittsburgh, Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh, Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh, Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Greek

https://youtube.com/watch?v=c8UwlzOdKpM
Orthodox Metropolis of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh Presbytery, Salvation Army of Western PA, United Church of Christ Penn West Conference, and United Methodist Conference of Western PA.

Below: a 3D Model of the Pittsburgh Creche

3D Creche credit: Kisker Productions.
One school, four bishops

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Categories: News
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With the appointment of Father Mark Eckman as an auxiliary bishop in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, four future bishops have graduated from Seton LaSalle Catholic High School and a predecessor school.

Earlier this year, 1980 Seton LaSalle alumnus David Bonnar, a priest of the diocese for 32 years, was ordained Bishop of Youngstown. Archbishop Bernard Hebda of Saint Paul-Minneapolis graduated from South Hills Catholic, which merged with Elizabeth Seton Catholic High School to form Seton LaSalle. And Bishop Donald Lippert, a Capuchin serving in Mendi, Papua New Guinea, also graduated from South Hills Catholic.

Seton LaSalle president Lisa Osterhaus and principal Lauren Martin, interviewed on the diocesan radio show Catholic Education Plus, said their students and faculty are proud of their bishop-alumni and 83 other graduates who have dedicated their lives to serving in religious communities.

“We offer an authentically Catholic education and our mission is to help prepare students for a life where they can realize heaven,” Martin told host Father Tom Burke. “We invite them to be a part of our ministry program and (participating) in Mass. They’re writing and leading our daily school prayer.”

Catholic Education Plus airs Sunday Nov. 21 at 6:30 a.m. on KDKA-AM. Following the broadcast the show will be available at: https://www.audacy.com/kdkaradio/podcasts/catholic-education-plus-20662

Martin said teachers and staff focus on demonstrating the school motto of “In Faith and Charity” by trying to be role models of Christ the Teacher. They work to build a faith community where students have opportunities to discuss their faith openly and perform acts of service.”
“It’s not just about service in the community, but sometimes within our own families that we’re living charitably as a way to realize their personal call to holiness,” Martin said.

Seton LaSalle is also one of six Catholic high schools in the diocese that partners with the Crossroads Foundation. The nonprofit provides promising youth who have limited options access to a quality Catholic high school education by nurturing their academic and personal growth so they are prepared to succeed in college and in life.

Martin and Osterhaus told Father Burke that Crossroads offers strong support and more inner-city youth continue to enroll and succeed.
From where I sit...

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Categories: Columns
Tags: Featured, Guest Contributors

...on Synodality

By Sister Mindy Welding, IHM

I've done a lot of sitting. I sit among the Sisters in my Congregation, wise elders and newer religious. I've sat for a very long time with youth and young adults, discerners. I sit with those seeking spiritual direction and retreatants. I sit among the religious women, men and priests in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. I've practice synodality for quite a while; I've been blessed with the tools and practice afforded me in my life.

Religious have grown in the way we assemble ourselves for dialogue, calling upon the Holy Spirit for guidance and for wisdom. We sit in silence listening to the movements of God among us as we practice contemplative dialogue; this dialogue asks us to listen deeply to one another without judgement and keeping at bay our own agenda and emotions. It is difficult work but when practiced it widens our lens to include others we may have never included or listened to before. It allows our heart to expand.

This is what Pope Francis is calling us to in this Synod of Synodality. In a world that seems to have shut out everyone but one's own wants, ignoring the common good for selfish, individualistic ideas we are being called to be counter-cultural. Francis is calling us to gather, faithful and those who have been feeling isolated or unheard. This is a movement toward truly listening – we, as Church, leadership and decision makers – to sit in a circle of one-ness. This synodality brings us together on equal footing.

A recent article in Commonweal Magazine spoke volumes to me about how we as Church can follow what religious communities have been practicing synodality (we don't always succeed, mind you. We are not perfect!) The writer of “Speak Boldly, Listen Carefully,” Austen Ivereigh, wrote in the October 21, 2021 issue:
“Along with obedience and authority, there are two elements that are important within these collaborative gatherings that are hoped for in the Synodal gatherings. The first is discernment.…”

Discernment is a deep listening to the Spirit among us paying attention to what is being said, paying attention to “the timid edges, to the unlikely places, to those outside.” (Ivereigh)

The second is “consultation and deliberation” which is “not separate from the life of prayer but intrinsic to it.” This calls for:

“Attentive listening to others, straining for the whispers of the Spirit even in the mouths of people we resent or disagree with. It calls for giving time to all in equal measure, for speaking honestly and boldly but not hammering others with our views, for sitting in peaceful, open silence so that we can hear what words do not always say…” (Ivereigh).

Synodality requires us to understand that we, as individuals, do not possess the whole truth, but that when we set aside our own emotions and agendas, our narrow channels of thinking will open wide and expand our hearts. It isn’t easy work. Are we willing to listen, deeply? Will we pray for the grace to do so and to pray that the Holy Spirit surround us and guide us? This is synodality at its best.

Invite one another to pray, listen deeply and engage.
In the last two years, Bill Mitchell and his wife Mary have lost two dozen relatives, friends and neighbors. The grief has been significant at times.

It's especially difficult at this time of the year, around the holidays.

"We are relying on our Catholic faith," Bill said.

A few months ago, as Mary sat down to write another sympathy card, Bill opened up his laptop and started to compose a poem about eternal life:

I AM still ME

I have passed into eternity, and the reality we shared is no longer mine.

But our souls were created immortal, and where I go there is no time.

Though I've gone away you did not lose me, so please don't grieve too much for me.

In my heart I am still with you, and please believe that I AM still ME.

When it is your time to come and join me, be assured I will greet you there.

We'll meet again someday in heaven, and together eternity we will share.

We will praise the Lord for our salvation, and we will worship Him for He is love.

God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, forever perfect in heaven above.

"The words just came to me," he said. "I read them to Mary, and we both cried, because it's true. How can you and all your thoughts and experiences cease to exist just because your body is no longer there? We have souls."
Bill immediately made copies of his poem, and by his estimate has handed out hundreds of copies to help people suffering from the loss of loved ones. Some churches and funeral homes are using it, and it has spread widely on social media.

“Several people began to cry when they read it and hugged and kissed me,” Bill said. “Many have said, ‘I’ve never thought about death that way! It’s so comforting.’”

“I feel that the Holy Spirit inspired me to write this poem, and it makes me feel good to help people.”

A 1965 graduate of Central Catholic High School and longtime member of Saint Mary Parish in Cecil, now part of Corpus Christi Parish, Bill believes the poem will not only provide consolation to those in mourning, but also help many people understand Catholic teaching that death is not final.

“It's also increased my faith tremendously,” he said. “I pray a lot more.”
On Monday, September 18, 1967, I began my college student career as a freshman enrolled in Duquesne University, a Catholic liberal arts college in Pittsburgh sponsored by the Spiritan Fathers. For anyone who has gone through the college experience, the first day of class is, to say the least, a daunting experience. I can well remember my anxieties of college: Would I be able to adjust? Could I match the academic challenge? Would I pass? Might I fail?

What made my first day of school even more memorable was my first class. ANCIENT GREEK! Not only did I find myself in a new environment, with new peers, surrounded by many new challenges—the first moments of the college classroom experience began with ANCIENT GREEK, for me a new language, with a different alphabet from a classic and far gone era.

To compound matters more, the professor began the class by informing us that she was a Rhodes Scholar (which I quickly learned meant that she was mighty bright)! She also let us know that she had never taught before (which I also quickly learned would make the year distinctly more so a challenge)!

For the next 36 weeks, Monday through Friday at 9:00 a.m., and many a late night study session, I met the rigors of memorizing, learning, writing, studying, translating a language I would never speak and quite honestly hoped I would never have to meet again once my freshman year was ended. Did my classmates and I wrestle with discouragement that academic year? You bet! But no less than Dr. O'Donnell, as I hoped she learned as much from us in her first year of teaching as we did from her. Those impressions of a “wet behind the ears” eighteen year old college freshman have given way to a far more realized wisdom.

Today, I can be genuinely grateful for all that I learned in my ANCIENT GREEK class. Not only did I learn a new language; more importantly I learned how to see the world differently. In learning to see the world differently, I
also came to understand “communicating” differently—how important it is to see things from lots of different sides. For to do so helps growth in wisdom, which, in the Biblical sense, means to grow in the mind of God.

One of the new benefits I derived from my study of ANCIENT GREEK was an appreciation of the subtleties contained in that language as compared with pragmatic English.

In thinking back on my Greek vocabulary, one word that quickly comes to mind is Εὐχαρίστειν, which means “to give thanks.” But far more than a perfunctory, quick, off-the-cuff “thank you” which you and I share and receive from each other countless times in our lives, the word “Εὐχαρίστειν” means much more. It means putting one's whole heart and soul in expressing thanks. No wonder that the Greek infinitive Εὐχαρίστειν is not only descriptive of our faith-filled word “EUCHARIST”; it also became the expression of Jesus Himself on the night before He died when He celebrated the Last Supper, the First Mass, the gift of Eucharist with His Apostles and for us.

What Jesus did on that first Holy Thursday was to teach us how to say “thanks” to God—not in the casual and mindless way we sometimes say that word in our busy and oftentimes distracted lives as Americans—but rather by putting our whole heart and soul in that word, “thanks,” to God.

Today, we are anticipating Thanksgiving weekend. For many it involves a long weekend, hopefully some free time, the chance to be with family and friends, not to mention the turkey, stuffing, and all the other traditions of history and family that make it a time so special for us; not only as Americans but more particularly as followers of Jesus.

Jesus continues to teach us through the Eucharist what it means “to give thanks” and how to do so from the “bottom of our hearts and souls.”

As you read this reflection, Thanksgiving Day is less than a week away with the promise for each of us for a few extra pounds on the scale. My prayer for you and me is that “Thanksgiving” be more than the fourth Thursday of the month of November.

Following on the example of Jesus Himself and with the help of Jesus Himself in the Eucharist, perhaps when we say the word “thanks” we can stop and think of how Jesus said it—with His whole heart and soul—and try to do the same.

Little did I imagine on that first day of “ANCIENT GREEK” class what an important lesson I would learn—one that would carry me through life and beyond!