

THE CATHOLIC MIRROR

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Sing, Choirs of Angels



Photo by Alexis Narmi/St. Albert Digital Media Club



As the world prepares for the birth of Jesus and the celebration of Christmas, children anticipate his coming with Advent concerts.

Above, second and third grade students from St. Albert Catholic School in Council Bluffs lift their voices during a Dec. 5 Advent concert.

At left, students from Dowling Catholic High School A Cappella Choir sing during a concert at St. Ambrose Cathedral on Dec. 6.

An 'apostle to the poor,' local missionary priest dies

By Anne Marie Cox
Staff Writer

When a young priest from Ghana, Father Clement Owusu, traveled to the United States in order to serve God's people, another missionary priest and Iowa native, Father Paul Koch, warmly welcomed him.

"Father Paul helped me to transition into a new environment," he said.

With tears streaming down his face, Father Owusu shared at Father Koch's Nov. 27 funeral that the retired priest had befriended him, shared books with him, and in a lovingly and grandfatherly way, helped him

settle into his new ministry in western Iowa.

"We grew fond of each other," said Father Owusu. "I stand here today to thank God for making you a channel of his grace and mercy in the lives of many people."

Father Paul Koch died Nov. 23 at age 86.

Born in the Shelby County town of Panama, from which many religious vocations came, Father Paul Koch followed his inspiration and big brother, the late Father Eugene Koch,



into religious life. He graduated from Loras College and St. Bernard's Major Seminary, both in Dubuque, and was ordained a priest in 1961.

He taught at Dowling High School in West Des Moines for two years before joining the St. James Society to work in Latin America in parishes without priests. He served in Peru and Bolivia, where he was a pastor of a parish with 35 missions.

"It was challenging and, of course, it was just fantastic," Father Koch recalled earlier this year.

At age 75, he returned to the Diocese of Des Moines to retire, but was asked to assist the Hispanic community in Council

Bluffs, where he served for five years. He later moved to Harlan, where he helped with Masses and celebrated Sunday Mass in Mondamin.

Earlier this year, he celebrated his 60th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood.

"I'm not famous for having founded anything or any big idea," he said. "I was just a simple parish priest who loved it dearly."

But the humble pastor will be remembered for more, said Father Owusu.

"He was honest and kind. Father Paul lived a life of modest poverty. He was a down-to-earth person who had a big heart for the poor. He was an

apostle to the poor," Father Owusu said of his friend.

Father Koch was devoted to the Mass.

"The sacrifice of the holy Mass was at the center of Father Paul's life as a priest," said Father Owusu. "Father Paul united his suffering with Christ in the sacrifice of the Mass and he drew lots of strength from the holy Mass."

Concluding the homily at Father Koch's Mass of Christian Burial, Father Owusu said to his friend: "I appreciated the wisdom you have passed on to me. May the angels of God joyfully lead you to the kingdom where there will be no pain. Rest well until we meet again."

St. Joseph has not left the building

Pope Francis concluded the Year of St. Joseph this month on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception in typically understated fashion. He made a private visit to the Good Samaritan Home in Rome, a community dedicated to supporting young people experiencing a crisis, substance abuse, or who simply have no place to lay their head. He encouraged them not to be afraid of their own misery: "Jesus likes reality as it is, undisguised; the Lord does not like people who cover their soul, their heart with makeup."

The Holy Father will not relegate St. Joseph to a back shelf of inert statues; he continues to teach about the role of Jesus' adoptive father in the mystery of salvation, locating his paternal place in the household of faith. Joseph shows us the unvarnished truth about who we are called to be: men and women who are not afraid to let their hearts and souls be exposed in our own vulnerability. In the process, we can become a source of refuge, protection, and encouragement for others. Joseph continues to be an example for men, in particular, of the call to offer steadfast presence to those within our own households. At the same time, men are to weave their own life narrative into God's unfolding story of redemption, drawing his people to himself.

Fabrice Hadjadj (to whom I am indebted for some of



By
Bishop
William
Joensen

my inspiration here), distinguishes St. Joseph's presence versus absence in the Christmas Season scriptural accounts. In Luke's Gospel, when the shepherds come to adore the Christ child, Joseph is present with Mary and the child in the manger (Luke 2:16). In Matthew's Epiphany, when the Magi come to adore and offer gifts to the newborn King of the Jews, Joseph is not mentioned; only Mary and baby Jesus are identified in what has become a "house" (Matthew 2:11). If Joseph is absent, surely it is not because he has gone off to the local watering hole to watch the donkey bowl match-ups, or because his pride has been wounded by the appearance of such noble guests. Why was Joseph absent: was he gathering more construction supplies to make the temporary lodging more habitable, or hunting for more food to supply their famished new friends?

Natural and spiritual fathers are called to make unassuming presence to their families and others looking for reassurance and support their default mode of

life. They take leave only to earn and gather the resources that will help others flourish, or to respond temporarily to another crisis or set of individuals who hold greater claim on their attention and skills. They do not seek to impose their wills on their spouses or children, but with daily integrity and consistency of life, with spare words that speak loudly, and with obvious affection and delight in simply "being with," they represent God as unflinching witnesses to the growth and development of their offspring and those entrusted to their care. They practice and are perfected in the art of accompaniment, which is to be the signature feature of the domestic and larger church family.

I recently interviewed for my radio show Kendall Geneser of Assumption Parish in Granger, Iowa. I commend to you his autobiographical account, *Grounded: A Different Kind of War*; that is to be available electronically through your favorite online bookseller on Jan. 1, and in print March 2 (Ash Wednesday). Kendall is very transparent and self-critical in detailing his career as a Navy fighter pilot who nobly chose to serve his country, but who at the same more pathetically elected in all the other opportunities afforded him to do anything but make his wife, Sherri, and sons Nick and Alex job one. He had no shortage of ego, even as he

describes himself as an average pilot. But he also acknowledges that his own will took precedence over God's will as he dreamt of glory and the next adrenalin rush.

Effectively, for much of his sons' upbringing, he was an absent dad who consigned his spouse to single-parent status. Only the "grounding" that came in being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis brought him back to his senses. Through the long road of treatment and further professional setbacks, he eventually discovered God's mercy and his true vocation to help guide his family to heaven.

Kendall poignantly describes how his son Nick benignly absolved him for his prolonged absences; nonetheless, despite the wisdom gained through weakness Kendall's past choices may have exacted a cost on his son's sense of God's paternity. Yet this same God is patient, and Kendall's now fervent faith and his renewed commitment to fatherhood will no doubt be a great source of grace for his family, parish, and larger community that might heal many wounds, even if it does not result in his own recovery from MS.

Kendall's story has been grafted into the narrative God has written with his one Word, his Son, who is revealed to us at Christmas. Kendall is now free to offer witness as God asks all earthly fathers and sons (and mothers

and daughters). He calls things by name, opens himself to conversion, suffers whatever it costs to be as present as possible to those whom God has entrusted to him. When good news is proclaimed and God's proposal is accepted as Mary and Joseph each did in their own personal way, then others can likewise locate their own stories within God's saving plan for all humanity.

The drama of birth, life, and death has countless connections that we only come to perceive in time, all of which take on new luster as a child is born in Bethlehem, is adored by shepherds and Magi, and eventually settles down for what appears to be a rather unremarkable life in the home of Nazareth. Jesus and Mary radiate holiness that attracts hearts and makes the angels sing. And through it all, there is the unheralded, resilient, and virtuously just man who would serve as husband, father, and protector of that Holy Family. But in order for him to do so, he had to do his job not only in the workshop, but by choosing to be present, day in, day out, and to be vulnerable enough to lend his voice to the story God was writing with their lives. St. Joseph's special year has concluded, but he remains present within and to God's house, Christ's Church. He has not left the building.

San José No ha Salido del Edificio

El Papa Francisco concluyó el Año de San José este mes en la Fiesta de la Inmaculada Concepción de una forma típicamente modesta. Hizo una visita privada al Hogar del Buen Samaritano en Roma, una comunidad dedicada a apoyar a los jóvenes que están

viviendo situación de crisis, de abuso de sustancias o que simplemente no tienen un lugar donde recostar su cabeza. Él los exhortó a que no tuvieran miedo de su propia miseria: "A Jesús le gusta la realidad tal y como es, sin máscaras; al Señor no le gusta la gente que cubre su alma y su corazón con maquillaje."

El Santo Padre no va a relegar a San José a la repisa trasera de estatuas inertes; él continúa enseñándonos sobre el papel del padre adoptivo de Jesús en el misterio de la salvación, colocando su lugar paternal en el hogar de la fe. José nos muestra la cruda realidad sobre lo que estamos llamados a ser: hombres y mujeres que no tenemos miedo de dejar que sus corazones y sus almas estén expuestos dentro de nuestra propia vulnerabilidad. En el proceso, podemos convertirnos en fuente de refugio, protección y ánimo para los demás. José sigue siendo un ejemplo para los hombres, en particular, por el llamado a ofrecer una constante presencia a aquellos en nuestros hogares. Al mismo tiempo, los hombres deben tejer su propia narrativa de vida en la revelación de la historia de redención de Dios, atrayendo a su pueblo hacia sí mismo.

Fabrice Hadjadj (a quien debo algo de mi inspiración aquí), distingue entre la presencia de San José contra la ausencia en los recuentos de las escrituras en la Temporada de Navidad. En el Evangelio de Lucas, cuando los pastores vienen a adorar al niño Cristo, José está presente con María y el niño en el pese-

bre (Lc. 2:16). En la Epifanía de Mateo, cuando los Magos vienen a adorar y a ofrecer regalos al recién nacido Rey de los Judíos, no se menciona a José; solamente a María y al niño Jesús a quienes se identifica en lo que se ha convertido en una "casa" (Mateo 2:11). Si José está ausente, seguramente no es porque se haya ido a la cantina del pueblo a ver el juego del Tazón de los Burros, o porque la apariencia de tan nobles invitados haya ofendido su orgullo. ¿Por qué estaba ausente José: estaba comprando más materiales de construcción para hacer más cómoda su habitación temporal o cazando para tener más comida que ofrecer a sus hambrientos nuevos amigos?

Los padres naturales y espirituales están llamados a tener una presencia modesta con sus familias y con los demás que buscan seguridad y apoyo en sus estilos de vidas. Ellos se ausentan solamente para ganarse y conseguir los recursos que ayudarán a los demás a mejorar, o respondiendo a otra crisis temporal o a un grupo de individuos que tienen mayor necesidad de su atención y habilidades. Ellos no buscan imponer sus deseos sobre sus esposas o hijos, pero por medio de una integridad diaria y consistencia de vida, con palabras extras que hablan fuertemente y con obvio gusto y afecto en simplemente "estar presente" ellos representan a Dios como incansables testigos del crecimiento y desarrollo de sus descendientes y de aquellos de quienes tiene bajo su cuidado. Ellos practican y perfeccionan el

arte del acompañamiento, el cual es la firma distintiva de la familia doméstica, así como de la familia de la iglesia en general.

Recientemente entrevisté en mi programa de radio a Kendall Geneser de la Parroquia de Asunción en Granger, Iowa. Les recomiendo su cuenta autobiográfica "Aterrizado: Un Tipo Diferente de Guerra" (*Grounded: A Different Kind of War*, por su nombre en inglés) que estará disponible de modo electrónico por medio de sus vendedores de libros en línea a partir del 1 de enero y saldrá impresa el 2 de marzo (Miércoles de Ceniza). Kendall es muy transparente y autocrítico al detallar su carrera como un piloto de combate de la Naval quien noblemente eligió servir a su país, pero quien al mismo tiempo de forma más patética decidió en todas las demás oportunidades que se le presentaron no hacer nada más que su principal trabajo fueran su esposa Sherri y sus hijos Nick y Alex. Su ego no era escaso, e incluso se describe a sí mismo como un piloto promedio. Pero también reconoce que su propia voluntad tenía precedencia sobre la voluntad de Dios y que soñaba con la gloria y la siguiente ración de adrenalina.

Efectivamente, por la mayoría de la crianza de sus hijos, él era el papá ausente que limitó a su esposa a una condición de madre soltera. Solamente el "aterrijaje" que le llegó luego de haber sido diagnosticado con esclerosis múltiple le pudo hacer recuperar los sentidos. En el largo camino de su tratamiento y varios desca-

labros profesionales, el descubrió eventualmente la misericordia de Dios y su verdadera vocación de poder ayudar en llevar a su familia al cielo.

Kendall describe específicamente como su hijo Nick le absolvió benignamente por sus prolongadas ausencias; sin embargo, a pesar de que la sabiduría que lograron por medio de la debilidad de las anteriores decisiones de Kendall pudiera haber tenido un costo sobre el sentido de su hijo respecto a la paternidad de Dios. Pero este mismo Dios es paciente, y la ferviente fe de Kendall, así como su compromiso renovado a la paternidad será sin duda una gran fuente de gracia para su familia, parroquia y la comunidad en general que podrá sanar muchas heridas, incluso si esto no resulta en su propia recuperación de la esclerosis múltiple.

La historia de Kendall se ha grabado en la narrativa que tiene escrita Dios en su Palabra, su Hijo, quien se nos revela en la Navidad. Kendall tiene ahora la libertad de ofrecer testimonio como Dios les pide a todos los padres e hijos terrenales (así como madres e hijas). Él llama las cosas por su nombre, se abre a sí mismo a la conversión, sufre sin importar el costo que tiene el estar presente tanto como sea posible con aquellos a quienes Dios le ha confiado. Cuando se proclama la buena nueva y la propuesta de Dios se acepta como lo hicieron María y José en su propia forma personal, entonces los demás pueden de la misma

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MIRROR

Bishop William Joensen
Publisher

wjoensen@dmdiocese.org

Anne Marie Cox
Editor

acox@dmdiocese.org

Kelly Mescher Collins
Staff Writer

kcollins@dmdiocese.org

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PHONE: (515)237-5046

EMAIL: mirror@dmdiocese.org

DIOCESAN WEBSITE:

www.dmdiocese.org

Alpha offers small-group, faith-sharing experience

By Anne Marie Cox
Staff Writer

Alpha is taking root and growing in and beyond St. Mary Parish in Avoca.

An international program, Alpha consists of a series of eleven gatherings that explore Christianity. Each two-hour session begins with a group meal, then a video focusing on questions of faith, followed by small group discussions.

Parishioners had organized three rounds of Alpha before the pandemic and one online after the pandemic began. Lon Schroeder feared the discussions and relationship building wouldn't be successful online.

He soon realized he misjudged the effectiveness of the program.

"When I finished a prayer session and saw the tears streaming down a guest's face, it became obvious to me that the Holy Spirit was right there in the computer. Oh my, how powerful!" he said.

He and his wife, Cath-

erine Tardieu Schroeder, had heard about Alpha from a friend in Omaha and investigated. They were excited to bring it back to their community.

Father Seth Owusu, their pastor, said there must be another way to evangelize and share the mission of Christ beyond the Mass.

"I welcomed Alpha with joy," he said. Alpha is simple, precise and tells the story of a man from the other side of the world who presented the True Way.

Schroeder said participants are finding community, healing and forgiveness through Alpha.

"I liked the fact that they presented it step by step so you just started slowly and went through the process," said parishioner Mary Lou Goettsch.

Alpha was open to the entire community and people from a variety of faiths participated.

Carmella and Charles Pigneri have participated four times. They don't mind seeing the same videos again and again.

"It never gets old and we learn something from it every



Photo by Anne Marie Cox

Parishioners at St. Mary Parish in Avoca have seen fruit from the seeds they've planted with Alpha: non-Catholics fostered rich discussions with parishioners; participants joined from Canada and Trinidad; one participant's cousin joined and has since returned to the faith and brought Alpha to her parish; and Alpha may be offered at a county jail for the incarcerated.

time," Carmella said. "People are very good about sharing. We enjoy the chance to see the people and visit and hear their stories. It just really warms your heart."

By going to Mass on Sunday morning and having Alpha on Sunday evenings, it feels like the whole day is focused on faith, said Charles.

"I like Alpha because it gives people an introduction to Christ and we can bring those who are struggling with their faith, those who don't have a faith, to Christ so that they can then develop a relationship with him," said Ann Koster.

Pat Martin participated in Alpha with his daughter and son-in-law.

"We shared a lot of different things. We seemed to get closer," he said.

Mary Pearson said it was rewarding to see the support participants shared with each other, and their openness in asking for prayers.

"It's a blessing to see that," she said.

Jon Poore, a detention supervisor at a county jail who is in charge of programming and training, participated in an Alpha series and then led one. Now, he's

working on making it available to the incarcerated.

There are already some faith-based programs established there and the videos include people who have been incarcerated and share their stories.

"I think there's a lot of value to it. You could start it in the jail and then you could go find it out in the community," Poore said. "We're going to plant the seed here, but we want it to grow out there. That's my big push for programming: What can we start here that they can find outside as well?"

Parish hopes to build invitational culture

Alpha is returning to St. Francis Parish in West Des Moines after a year's suspension due to the pandemic.

Beginning in January, anyone in the community can come to a series of small-group gatherings, where they'll have a meal, watch a video and discuss faith.

"It's kind of a big hug from Jesus," said Alison Zirbel, Alpha coordinator at St. Francis. "We felt this was something that offered head knowledge but a lot of heart, too. It's a good reminder and refresher about how much Jesus loves us."

It's hoped that the program helps build community at the state's largest Catholic parish.

"This is a big parish and there are lots of Masses. There are people who don't know each other," said Vivian Day, the parish's Adult Faith Formation director. "I think Alpha provides that opportunity for people to become friends."

Zirbel hopes Alpha helps her parish create an invitational culture where people are inviting each other to all kinds of activities.

"The ultimate goal would be through that invitational culture, we are missionary and we are reaching out and introducing people to Jesus who have not been introduced to him yet," she said.

Anyone interested in joining the program should email alpha@saintfrancischurch.org or call 515-440-1030.

On-ramp provides safe space for open, honest dialogue

Alpha is kind of like an on-ramp to learning more about Christianity.

"No matter where you are in your faith journey, you will learn something," said Amy Thorson, Alpha USA/Iowa Network director.

More than 100 churches of varying faith traditions are running Alpha in Iowa, and about a third of them are Catholic, she said. Some run the program for adults, while some use it for their youth.

Our Lady's Immaculate Heart Parish in Ankeny uses Alpha

for its ninth grade confirmation preparation, where it represents the basics of the Catholic faith "with an emphasis on heart knowledge that leads to head knowledge," said Tom Primmer, director of Faith Formation.

"This way, we 'propose' an invitation to a personal relationship with Jesus and his Church to the youth, rather than imposing or conferring the faith upon them," he said. "It is our hope that each individual youth takes ownership of her or his own relationship with Jesus as they understand and meet him in their daily lives."

Thorson hopes every parish tries Alpha.

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Retired farmer discovers a passion for making rosaries

Nearly 8,000 rosaries donated in multiple countries

By Kelly Mescher Collins
Staff Writer

Raised on a farm in Carroll County near Willey, hardly a day went by when Leon Kennebeck wasn't involved in helping his dad with the family farming operation.

"When I was a sophomore in high school, [my dad] got sick and I stayed home from high school and helped him farm after that," Kennebeck said on the Dec. 3 episode of Bishop William Joensen's weekly radio show.

But at about age 60, Kennebeck's hips began causing him problems.

"I couldn't get my work done," Leon said, despite help from his sons.

Leon and wife, Donna,

shifted gears, focusing on retirement. They moved to Lake Panorama and became members of St. Cecilia Parish in Panora. They spent their days enjoying the beauty of nature. Leon also took up fishing crappies, something he couldn't partake in before – they bite in the spring and fall when he was previously busy with planting and harvest.

But Leon was faced with a new reality in retirement.

"I had nothing physically to take up my time and developed anxiety," he said.

The doctor had given Leon pills for anxiety, but he didn't like taking them.

Donna suggested he start making rosaries to keep his hands and mind busy in a positive way.

Initially, Leon dismissed



Photos by Kelly Mescher Collins

It takes about 80 minutes for Leon Kennebeck to make a rosary. Most of them he donates to various places including the Dominus Trinitas retreat center that sits on land he used to farm in Carroll County. Hear his story on *Making it Personal* with Bishop Joensen at iowacatholicradio.com/personal.

the idea because he thought his

hands were too big for such work.

But Donna went ahead and ordered a rosary-making kit anyway, which included beads and pliers.

"And once I got started, I just can't quit," Leon admitted.

It wasn't easy at first. It took him nearly six hours to complete his first rosary. But eventually, he found his groove and nailed the technique. It now takes him just one hour and 20 minutes to complete one rosary. Each rosary has a miraculous medal attached and the centers feature the Divine Mercy image.

His rosaries have been donated to people living in Haiti, India, Ghana and the Holy Land. During his radio interview, Leon told Bishop Joensen he had made more than 7,700 rosaries to date.

"I have a calendar right on the side of my desk," Leon said. "When I finish, I'll mark it down. So from 2005 to now I have all those calendars and I can go back and [see dates of completion.]"

He donates almost all of his rosaries. He even created a special rosary – the purgatory rosary.

"It's made like an ordinary rosary with different colored beads," Leon said. "Think of a loved one who has died [when praying it.] You start off with the black beads and they get lighter in color. And when you get to the fifth mystery, there are no blemishes. With each mystery, the beads get lighter in color."

In addition to praying the rosary for friends and loved ones who have passed, he also prays a chaplet, reciting the Prayer of St. Gertrude on each bead for the souls in purgatory.



Leon and Donna Kennebeck

"Jesus [told St. Gertrude] he would release 1,000 souls every time you prayed that prayer," Leon said. "That's very powerful."

The purgatory rosary has gained interest.

"I had a request from a priest from Stockbridge, Massachusetts. He wanted 1,000 purgatory rosaries," Leon said. "I was able to get those made in 11 months. That's the most I've ever made in one year."

Though the Kennebecks have been living in the Diocese of Des Moines for nearly 18 years, they still frequently return to Carroll County. Leon helps his sons farm, and they stop in at the Catholic retreat center, Dominus Trinitas, located on 33 acres of land the Kennebecks donated to the Sisters of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity.

Leon donates his purgatory rosaries to the Dominus Trinitas retreat center, which they sell to raise money for the costs of expansion and upkeep.

"I let God pay me," Leon said. "I've never charged to make a single rosary. The only time I charge is if someone requests a certain kind of rosary, they pay for the parts."

Make the Choice. Get Vaccinated.



The Mississippi River Distilling Co. overlooks the mighty Mississippi River in the picturesque setting of Le Claire, Iowa. Like all Iowa bars and restaurants, the COVID pandemic hit the 11-year-old business hard. As owners Ryan and Garrett Burchett faced tough decisions along the way, they chose to put customers and staff first at every point. Their strategy helped the small business to manage through adversity and grow. Watch Ryan's full story on video as he shares why he chose to get vaccinated.

It's not too late to make a difference.

Find resources and Iowa video stories at iowacatholicconference.org/getvaccinated.

Family Faith

Live the Christmas season in your home with your family using a variety of activities.

For ideas, go to dmdiocese.org/christmas2021



Youth, chaperones give NCYC high marks



Youth from Sacred Heart Parish in Woodbine shared time with Bishop William Joensen.



Our Lady of the Holy Rosary parishioners sported their Blessed Gorgio Frassati hats upon arrival. The group took Blessed Frassati as its patron to prepare for the trip. The youth prayed to him for eight months of fellowship and fundraising to journey to NCYC.

Maria Haas, of Ss. John and Paul Parish in Altoona, chaperoned 14 teenagers at the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis in November, a fun experience given she first attended as a teen herself.

"It brought me to life seeing the teens so excited as the Holy Spirit sparked flames of love for Jesus in their hearts," she said "Since returning, the teens haven't stopped talking about how much they loved NCYC and are very eager for another opportunity to pilgrimage and grow in their faith."

Youth from across the Diocese of Des Moines made the trip to NCYC to worship, learn and grow in their relationship with God.

"I was going through the motions of being a good Catholic but NCYC has completely changed my perspective on my faith. I feel like I have a much deeper connection and better understanding of what it means to be

a Catholic and I'm so grateful for this opportunity," said one youth from Ss. John and Paul Parish.

Rossalyne Johansen, of Holy Rosary Parish in Glenwood, said she'd love to go again.

"I learned a lot from there and I definitely got closer to God and that came home with me," she said.

Her father, chaperone Eric Johansen, said 14 kids from their parish enjoyed the trip.

"It's a very unique, energizing experience," he said.

Since returning home, "I've definitely seen more of a commitment," he said.

Laura Hansen, of Sacred Heart Parish in Woodbine, enjoyed watching the youth she

chaperoned realize that "life isn't just about them. It's a bigger picture, being surrounded by that many Catholic individuals."

One of her students, John, said, "My heart felt ablaze during the songs. You could feel everyone's energy singing and dancing to songs for Jesus. Hearing the words and feeling the energy lit a fire in my heart. I hope to carry that fire throughout the next year."

Another student, Tally, said "I was anxious that I wouldn't connect with NCYC like I did in 2019. The feeling of peace I felt as I let go of everything except being there reassured me that I still have God looking out for me."

Christmas came early for the home of Catholic Youth Camp

By Anne Marie Cox
Staff Writer

The St. Thomas More Center – home of Catholic Youth Camp – received an early Christmas present.

Thanks to a \$30,000 gift, children going to the camp and retreat center will see an old playground be replaced with a new sand volleyball court, a large pergola and a seating area where they can gather for yard games, enjoy the shade or have small group discussions.

The donor, who wants to remain anonymous, wishes to see the community respond in kind

and is challenging STM to see their donation matched dollar for dollar by Dec. 31.

"Christmas came early this year," said STMC Executive Director Alex Kautzky. "This gift will transform the place where campers encounter adventure at CYC."

The joy that children will experience from the improvements at the activities center, soon to be called the St. Michael Archangel Wings of God Field, comes from grief suffered by the donor and the solace that the donor says St. Michael brought to their heart.

Several instances made them think St. Michael was at work in their lives.

A special needs brother named Michael who went to live with the donor during the pandemic prays fervently with a special devotion to St. Michael.

• An adult nephew who died around Thanksgiving two years ago carried the middle name of Michael.

• A 10-year-old nephew died in March 2020 after a three-year battle with cancer.

• A story in *The Catholic Mirror* and at Facebook.com/dm diocese about a pilgrimage walk from Christ the King Church in Des Moines to St. Thomas Aquinas Church in Indianola in honor of St. Michael "deeply moved" the donor.

"In the midst of this, we

"We were looking to fund a project that could help us express the memory of both nephews. They both loved Jesus."

- Anonymous Donor

were so very uplifted by the youth at St. Ambrose Cathedral" who went to Catholic Youth Camp last summer, said the

donor. "Many of the youth were from refugee families and their excitement from their experiences was infectious.

"Alex so kindly remembered the tragedy of our nephew's death at the same time we were looking to fund a project that could help us express the memory of both nephews. They both loved Jesus," said the donor.

Kautzky invites camp supporters to contribute at stmcenter.com/donate-1 and help it receive the matching funds for other improvements.

"It inspires us to know that those who enter STM will be covered in a shield of protection with this holy and special field with St. Michael the Archangel the protector," said the donor. "Our prayer is that it will be a place where many find great solace and joy."

FRIENDLY REMINDER

With Dec. 25 falling on a Saturday, there are two Mass obligations to satisfy on Christmas weekend: Christmas and Sunday. One Mass satisfies one obligation. The faithful will go to two Masses to fulfill the obligations.

Also, Jan. 1, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, is not a holy day of obligation. Questions? Go to dmdiocese.org/worship for details.



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maroons



Creating a will is one of the most impactful ways to support the people and causes that are most important to you. We hope you will consider Dowling Catholic High School as you think about your legacy.

To learn more about simple and tax smart ways to help DCHS continue to develop Leaders for Life, Centered on Christ long into the future, please contact Julie Bell, Advancement Director, at 515.222.1048 or visit our website:

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Around the Diocese

Jan. 15 Saturday Prayer Rally for Life

DES MOINES - Join Pulse Life Advocates (formerly Iowans for LIFE) on sidewalk outside Planned Parenthood, 1000 Army Post Road, Des Moines for Prayer Rally for Life and Liberty at 11 a.m. Speakers include pro-life advocates and community faith leaders. Please do not park in Planned Parenthood's parking lot.

Jan. 25 Tuesday Young Catholic Network

DES MOINES -- All young adults are invited to come to the next gathering of the Young Catholic Network in downtown Des Moines. You can look forward to networking, complimentary drinks and appetizers, and always a guest speaker with tremendous insight into living our Catholic faith in the professional world. For more information contact Justin White at 515-237-5098 or jwhite@dmdiocese.org.

Alpha is coming

WEST DES MOINES -- St. Francis of Assisi Parish in West Des Moines is beginning Alpha in January, open to anyone in the Des

Moines metro area. Coming together once a week for 12 weeks, people from every walk of life explore the big questions in a friendly, open and non-judgmental environment. Plenty of care goes into creating a comfortable and welcoming space, open to all. Each week includes a time to connect with others, hear a short talk on an element of the Christian faith and a chance for each person to share their own questions with the group. Alpha builds community and opens our doors to our neighbors. Alpha isn't so much a course, but an experience! For more information or to register call 515-440-1030.

Cathedral Holy Hours

All are welcome to join in an hour of Eucharistic adoration and evening prayer on Mondays from 5-6 p.m. Prayer will be livestreamed on the Diocesan Facebook page at [Facebook.com/dmdiocese](https://www.facebook.com/dmdiocese).

Adoration at St. Augustin

St. Augustin Parish is looking for people to help with adoration at its chapel. To assist at the perpetual adoration chapel, which is open to people of all parishes, contact Janis

Falk at janis@staugustin.org, or call the parish at 515-255-1175 to learn more or sign up.

Friends, Romans, Iowans

Be sure to check out the Diocesan young-adult focused podcast "Friends, Romans, Iowans." Currently in the second season, this podcast aims to connect the Diocese by hosting casual conversations with Catholic leaders from around southwest Iowa. Episodes can be found wherever you get your podcasts, or at our website at dmdiocese.org/fripod.

Center for Social Ministry Faith & Racial Equity: Exploring Power & Privilege

DES MOINES -- This online program starting at 3 p.m. on Feb. 6 guides you on a personal journey of exploring your attitudes, assumptions, and choices about racial equity. The group meets Sundays through March 27 from 3-5 p.m. with a retreat on Jan. 30. Facilitators are Jane Alderman and Dixie Webb. Cost is \$80. Register online at centerforsocialministry.org.

Happy anniversary



Parishioners of Immaculate Conception Church in St. Marys, Iowa celebrated their parish's 150+1 anniversary on Oct. 17 with Bishop William Joensen. In 1870, a deed was obtained and land secured for the construction of a small wooden Catholic church first named "The German Church." In 1899, the current church building was constructed across the street from the original worship site. In 1911, when the Diocese of Des Moines was established, the incorporation papers for the church referred to it as the Church of the Immaculate Conception.

CFM honors longtime music minister with gift to their parish



Members of the Christian Family Movement on Nov. 28 donated a portrait of St. Cecilia in memory of Marsha Sparks, organist at St. Joseph in Winterset for 45 years. They were joined for the dedication by members of the Spark family and choir members of St. Joseph. Marsha and her husband, Jim, were members of the first CFM group in the parish.

Our Lady of Guadalupe honored across the Diocese



Thousands of Hispanic Catholics celebrated Our Lady of Guadalupe in the days leading up to Dec. 12. At left, St. Ambrose Cathedral was filled with the faithful, who walked from Our Lady of the Americas Parish for the rosary and midnight Mass.

Photo by Anne Marie Cox

St. Albert athletic director honored

Longtime St. Albert Catholic School athletic director Ken Schreiber was named the 2022 High School Athletic Director of the Year for the state by the Iowa High School Athletic Directors Association.

He will be honored during the state wrestling tournament Feb. 19 and at the state athletic directors' convention in late March.

Schreiber graduated from St. Albert in 1974 and has served the Council Bluffs school since he began teaching there in 1987.



Ken Schreiber

Irish men's group offers gift for seminarians



Members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians are pictured with Bishop William Joensen as the Hibernians gifted \$750 to the Des Moines Diocese Seminarian Fund.

The Ancient Order of Hibernians is an Irish Catholic men's group established in Ireland to assist the clergy under attack from the church of England in the 1800s. The Polk County division was established in 1992. New members are welcome. From left to right are: John Langin, Shannon Maher, Bishop Joensen and Jim Duffy.

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Ignite! Campaign raises \$11 million during silent phase

Major portion raised so far for Catholic Schools Endowment

By Alejandro Morales
Contributing Writer

The “Ignite!” Campaign reached \$11 million this month, a fundraising milestone that gives the \$45 million effort great momentum ahead of its public roll-out in January.

Bishop William Joensen extends a warm thank you to those who have given generously in the early stages. “This level of support is inspiring to our entire diocesan family and discloses the resiliency and vitality of the Church in Southwest Iowa,” he said.

Campaign goals include \$25 million to create an endowment that will support families who need financial aid to send their children to Catholic schools, \$5 million for seminarian education, \$2 million for priest retirement, \$3.5 million for parish vibrancy and renewal, and \$7.5 million for parish share. Parish share funds will be returned directly to parishes for local projects.

A unique approach

Prior to moving forward with the “Ignite!” Campaign, the Diocese conducted a comprehensive campaign planning study. Over 1,200 clergy and laity provided feedback regarding the campaign goals and structure. The planning study revealed that the proposed Catholic Education Endowment is a high priority

for those who worship at parishes close to Catholic schools and a lower priority when distanced from a Catholic school.

Bishop Joensen and his campaign leadership team, which is comprised of lay and clergy leaders from every region in the Diocese, listened to this feedback and took these responses to discernment.

As a result, the campaign will feature “regionalized case statements” that allow for funds raised at each parish to be allocated to campaign initiatives based on parish proximity to a Catholic school. For example, 50% of funds raised at an urban parish with a school will go toward the Catholic Education Endowment versus 10% of the funds raised at a rural parish with no access to a school.

To make this possible, a large portion of the funds for the Catholic Schools Endowment needed to be raised during the silent phase. Thanks to the support galvanized around Catholic education over the last several months, over \$10 million of the \$11 million raised to date will go solely to the Catholic Schools Endowment.

“Jumpstarting the Catholic Schools Endowment in this way is a testament to the work of the Holy Spirit within our Diocese,” Bishop Joensen said. “We are blessed to have so many enterprising leaders who share in our mission to sow the seeds of faith, especially among our children.”

Bishop Joensen and the



campaign leadership have been working on the silent phase all of 2021. They will continue approaching more of the Diocese’s closest supporters through the rest of the year. Their focus remains on bolstering the funds going toward the Catholic Schools Endowment.

Parish phase to begin in January

The parish phase of the campaign will unfold throughout 2022 in three staggered “waves.” Thirteen parishes will begin preparations for the first wave in January. Parishes in waves one and two will begin preparations in April and July, respectively.

Pastors and leaders from nearly all 80 parishes attended in-person and virtual campaign orientation meetings in October and November. The meetings introduced how the campaign will be run at the parish level. The meetings also outlined the steps parishes will need to take ahead of their wave.

For additional information about the campaign, visit the campaign website: dmdiocese.org/ignite.

Diocese expresses gratitude

Bishop William Joensen is grateful to his entire campaign leadership team for their dedication, generosity, and partnership.

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Prayer Rally for Life & Liberty
Defending the Pre-born and Praying for God's Healing For Our Nation

Speakers include Pro-Life advocates and community faith leaders.
ALL FAITH TRADITIONS WELCOME!

Prior to the rally, people are encouraged to gather in their own faith communities for prayer and worship before coming together as the one family of God at 11am

Signs will be provided or you may bring your own.

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- 11:00am-12:00pm
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Dr. Josiah Fitzsimmons

God relies on us to help his saving work

As the Year of St. Joseph came to a close, I decided to reread portions of *To be a Father with Saint Joseph* by Fabrice Hadjadj.

In a reflection on the Holy Family's flight to Egypt, Fabrice points out that Joseph is "the only man who has the privilege of saving the Savior" and he asks what it means for Holy Family to be put in this perilous situation. Why did God choose to become vulnerable? Why does he rely on fallible human beings for his safety and wellbeing? Why does he not dispel all threats with his power and might?

As we approach the Feast of the Holy Innocents, I think it is worth pondering the mystery of God's choice to become

Marriage and Family Life

By Adam Storey



vulnerable, and to ponder our call to live as Christians in a hostile world.

As Fabrice points out, "If by some unfathomable design of the Lord, we find ourselves in these adverse times and places, it is because it is here, and not elsewhere, that we find our mission; here, and not elsewhere, that we have to deploy our fruitfulness."

The Incarnation is a beacon of hope in a dark world, it is a promise that God's Kingdom is on the way, and for those of us who know the story, it is the beginning of God's victory over death and sin. At the same time, the Incarnation is vulnerable, and silent, and easy to overlook.

This Christmas, I hope the vulnerability of the Incarnation can lead us all to reflect on our mission to be Christ's continued presence in the world today.

As God relied on St. Joseph, he relies on us and he empowers us to participate in his saving work.

Just as it was for St. Joseph, that work will often be perilous and hidden. We

often will not see the fruits of our labor. And yet, we can also be confident that just as God sustained St. Joseph, so too will he sustain us. This Christmas season let us reflect on our call to incarnate God's love, and peace, and healing in the world.

It is worth asking how God calls us to face a hostile world, and where God is sending us on mission. St. Joseph, pray for us!

Adam Storey is the diocesan director of Marriage & Family Life. He can be reached at astorey@dmdiocese.org or 515-237-5056.

A resolution for the new year

As we close the books on another year, it's time to take stock and reflect on where we've been and where we're going.

People often take up New Year's resolutions of exercising more, losing weight and eating healthier. Other goals include saving money and pursuing an aspiration.

Admittedly, those are things I also consider. But even more important to me are spiritual "resolutions." In addition to frequenting the sacraments, praying the rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet, what steps can I take to deepen my relationship with Jesus? How can I better serve God? What ways can I be a better witness to my Catholic faith and the joy and hope it brings?

As Scripture says, "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope." (1 Peter 3:15)

Change is not easy. Demanding, hectic schedules further complicate our ability to create lasting change. But as the old saying goes: If it truly matters, you'll make time.

In these final days of Advent leading up to Christmas, we're preparing our hearts for the arrival of Jesus. But each of us must also prepare our souls for the day of judgment – when God will account for all the good and bad. And while it may

Faith that Conquers

By Kelly Mescher Collins



sound morbid, I try to frequently assess my own life and how I can be a better Christian. Because no one is promised tomorrow. As written in Matthew 25:13: "Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

I'm drawn to messages Jesus gave St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, a French Roman Catholic nun and mystic. In 1674, Jesus asked her to make his Sacred Heart the symbol of his divine-human love. Jesus asked her to make up for the world's coldness and ingratitude through frequent, loving Holy Communion, especially on the first Friday of each month. He requested an hour's vigil of prayer every Thursday night in memory of his agony and isolation in Gethsemane. He also asked for a feast of reparation to be instituted – the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, celebrated in June.

Jesus promised numerous blessings to those who practice devotion to his Sacred Heart. This includes blessing places where the image of his Sacred Heart is exposed and venerated. Read all of his promises at welcomehisheart.com/12-promises.

I've also been drawn to messages our Blessed Mother gave St. Catherine Laboure in November 1830. She appeared to St. Catherine standing on a globe with dazzling rays of light streaming from her outstretched hands. Framing the apparition was an inscription: "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee."

Our Blessed Mother said: "Have a medal struck upon this model. Those who wear it will receive great graces, especially if they wear it around the neck. Those who repeat this prayer with devotion will be, in a special manner, under the protection of the Mother of God. Graces will be abundantly bestowed upon those who have confidence."

With approval of the Catholic Church, the first medals were made in 1832 and distributed in Paris. "Almost immediately, the blessings Mary promised showered down on those wearing her medal, and soon all of France was clamoring for what the people referred to as the Miraculous Medal," according to the Miraculous

Medal Shrine in Philadelphia.

Another idea for the new year is honoring the first Saturday of each month, a request the Virgin Mary made to the world through three shepherd children in Fatima, Portugal in 1917.

Our Lady told visionary Lucia: "Behold, my daughter, my heart encircled with thorns, with which ungrateful men pierce it at every moment by their blasphemies and ingratitude. Give me consolation... and make known on my behalf that I promise to assist at the hour of death, with the graces necessary for salvation, all who on the First Saturday of five consecutive months confess their sins, receive Holy Communion, recite five decades of the rosary, and keep me company for 15 minutes meditating on the mysteries of the rosary, with the purpose of making reparation to my Immaculate Heart."

These are just a few of the spiritual "resolutions" I hope to begin in the new year. Regardless of the spiritual exercises you choose for 2022, just make sure you do them with a sincere heart, full of love and trust, just as Jesus and Mary requested.

Kelly Mescher Collins is a multimedia journalist for the Diocese of Des Moines. She can be reached at kcollins@dmdiocese.org or 515-237-5054.

Adoption is the answer for unplanned children

Some people claim that it is unfair to bring a child into this world who would be unwanted, and that abortion is the answer.

Why would someone think that violent death (which is what abortion is) is preferable to an opportunity to live life to the fullest?

No, death isn't the answer. Adoption is the answer to abortion.

You undoubtedly know good people who have lived wonderful lives who were adopted.

Most quietly raised their family and contributed to their communities in ways that never made the news.

Some well-known adoptees have had a big impact, such as: the founder of Apple Computer, Steve Jobs; John Lennon of Beatles fame; and Bill Clinton, 42nd president of the United States.

Ironically, Clinton has been an advocate of abortion rights. However, his belief that abortion should be "safe, legal, and rare," is a far cry from his party's current position that abortion should be unregulated for the full nine months of pregnancy; that Catholic doctors, nurses, and hospitals be compelled to provide them; and that taxpayers should pay for them.

Perhaps the former president preferred rare abortions because he appreciated the value of adoption: "We must work

Guest Column

By Maggie DeWitte



tirelessly to make sure that every boy and girl in America who is up for adoption has a family waiting to reach him or her. This is a season of miracles, and perhaps there is no greater miracle than finding a loving home for a child who needs one."

For the record, Iowa has an excellent track record when it comes to adoption. According to the National Council for Adoptions: "In 2014, four states had Adoption Option Indexes three or more times higher than the national average: Utah (36.3), Arkansas (26.8), Montana (23.1), and Iowa (21.4). There were two to four adoptions for every 100 abortions plus births to unmarried women in these states. This suggests that in these states women may have more extensive counseling, services, and facilities to orient pregnant women towards adoption - among other factors."

But at the national level, some 36 couples wait in line for every available

infant child adoption, an especially tragic number in light of the millions of abortions that have taken place over the years in this country. Those children could have been adopted.

Two million couples want to adopt a child and provide a loving home.

And yet only 4% of women with an unplanned pregnancy place their children through adoption.

Interestingly, 61% of all children adopted by kindergarten were children of color, according to the Institute for Family Studies. In other words, familial love cuts

across racial barriers.

The next time someone claims that it is unfair to bring a child into the world that is unwanted, remind them that 2 million couples are on their knees praying for God to bring them a child.

Adoption is the answer to abortion.

Maggie DeWitte is the executive director of Pulse Life Advocates, formerly known as Iowans for LIFE.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

The rosary is a powerful prayer. The four sets of mysteries portray a meditative walk into Jesus' life. One way to concentrate while praying is to consider a virtue when picturing the Mystery. For the first Joyful Mystery, the Annunciation, reflects humility and great moral courage.

I heard about a different way to pray the rosary and thought I'd pass it on. Simply stated, read the passage in the Scriptures that relates to the Mystery. (Look those up in your Bible and mark

them before you start your rosary.) The reading will give you a clearer idea of what took place.

The first Joyful Mystery is the Annunciation. Read Luke 1:26-38. The Visitation, read Luke 1:39-56. The Nativity, read Luke 2: 6-20. The Presentation, read Luke 2: 22-39. The Finding in the Temple, read Luke 2: 41-51. Without too much difficulty a person can do the same thing with the other Mysteries.

Tony Humeston
St. Mary Parish, Albia

Food for those who wait

St. John the Baptist's life reflects so perfectly our advent: faith, expectation, patience, and longing for what is not yet visible while the world moves with mocking laughter. St. John spoke the truth to the head of the state and so he was arrested and imprisoned. It seems to serve him right. And God, too, leaves his prophet in the cell; it seems as though God has also sided with those who imprisoned the prophet.

But God's preacher is not a reed shaken by the wind. He believes despite everything that has happened to him. He has spent his life preparing the way for God. In the depths of his heart, John knows that God comes in his own time and does things in a very different manner than what humanity is used to: God wins by losing;

Food for the Journey

By John Huynh



He gives life by first dying; He does not give food but he becomes food so that we will never again be hungry.

Our whole life is one long Advent season for we still wait for the one who is to come. Only when Jesus comes again will we be proven right. The Church is the voice crying out from the wilderness

to our own generation. She cries out to us, announcing that there will be a coming, a final coming, where the radical and redemptive love of Christ will relieve many of our current sufferings.

And this love will come when God wills it; not when it suits us. We all must wait, even the Church. We must learn, St. John teaches us, to be patient in our own preparation for the Lord's coming. Until then the world laughs and we weep, like the baptist, in a dungeon of seemingly unanswered petitions, of our own frailty, of our longing for truth in a world full of falsehoods.

But just like the Baptist, we must come to God in prayer with faith, and a faith that is not shaken by the wind will re-

ceive a sufficient answer, "Go and tell John what you see...and blessed is he who takes no offense at me" (Lk 7:22). Truly, the sufficient answer in our time is the body and blood of the Lord which suits our needs! God has not abandoned us; He draws even nearer. And every day, we will send messengers from our own faithful prayers to him, and in our reception of the Eucharist, he responds: I am coming, blessed is he who takes no offense at me.

John Huynh is the director of the Faith Journey program and coordinates the Eucharistic Renewal initiative for the Diocese of Des Moines.

Human(Kind)

Guest Column

By Father Ron Rolheiser



I could never be a literary critic, not because I can't tell good literature from bad, but because I lack the hard edge. If I dislike a book, I hesitate to say so. Conversely, if I like a book, I tend to be more its cheerleader than its critical assessor. Be that as it may, I want to strongly endorse Ashlee Eiland's new book, *Human(Kind) – How Reclaiming Human Worth and Embracing Radical Kindness Will Bring Us Back Together*.

This is not some sentimental, feel good book on how we need to be kind to each other. It's more like a Sermon on the Mount for our time, or at least how we might work towards living the Sermon on the Mount. How do we remain soulful, warm, and human inside all the things that tend to unhealthily either inflate or embitter our hearts? Here's how she describes her book.

"This is my story – a story of a black woman who grew up in the South and who discovered some wholeness and some holes along the way. As I looked back over my life, there were moments I remembered so vividly. Upon reflection, they were vivid because they mattered. They marked me in both beautiful and painful ways. But as I sat with these moments and memories, I realized they mattered because they taught me to be kind to my own worthy self. Recalling them

helped me acknowledge the good gifts I've been given, the gifts I now hope to give to others, and enabled me to see the painful and hard moments as opportunities to be more fully human, to remind myself to receive grace where there's been grievance."

The book is a series of stories from her life, all of them told by a gifted storyteller and all of them written with an aesthetics that never sinks into sentimentality or self-pity. And they are stories both of being graced and being wounded. Eiland's life has been one of contrasts.

On the one hand, her life has been one of privilege – loving parents, the opportunity for a first-rate education, never economically desperate, and always with a supportive family and community around her. On the other hand, she has lived as a black woman inside a world of injustice and inequality. She has had to live as one who must forever be conscious of the color of her skin, who every time she walks into a room needs to look around

to see how many others like her are in the room. She also had to endure the ultimate racial slur being shouted in her face. And so, as she says, she has been deeply scarred both in beautiful and painful ways.

For example, one of her stories recounts an incident in which she went out to a restaurant with some Asian friends for a Korean specialty of pork dumplings. The evening went well and driving back from the restaurant and laughing with each other in the car, she felt a life-long weight lift from her. "For the first time, I didn't feel as if I had to qualify the conversation with a reminder to my friends – or to myself – of my actual race. ... Before that day, I felt I had to tiptoe out of one world into another. But that kind of posture, I realized, is laced with shame. It allows the 'not fully enough' narrative to run rampant, terrorizing what is oftentimes the best part about sharing our lives with one another."

We need her narrative. We live in a time of bitterness and division, when civil discourse and respect have broken down, where we demonize each other, where injustice, inequality, and racism still define us more than their opposites, and where kindness is often seen as a weakness. Moreover, there is an ever-intensifying hypersensitivity where even a well-intended word is a potential landmine. Paranoia has replaced

metanoia, bringing out the worst in us.

Ashlee Eiland gives us a formula for bringing out what is best in us. How do we react to injustice, offense, and demonization? For example, here is how she reacted after trying to be good to someone and being repaid for her effort by the ultimate racial taunt being hurled in her face: "Humiliated, I went about my day, doing as much good as I could for an afternoon ... but knowing that sometimes even doing good is not enough. Sometimes we just have to sit with what's hard and humiliating about the difficult work of unity and do our best not to let it kill us. Instead, we need to let it shape us in some other way that sobers us up and forces us to take off our rose-colored glasses, to admit that sometimes moving closer and trying to do good and closing the gaps between us and others doesn't work out the way we want. But maybe it's worth showing up anyway."

Lacking the critical edge, I'm not always sure of what constitutes "soul music", but I can still recognize "soul literature".

Oblate Father Ron Rolheiser is a theologian, teacher, and award-winning author. He can be contacted through his website ronrolheiser.com. Now on Facebook: facebook.com/ronrolheiser.



I've Been Wondering...

Father John Ludwig

Q. I've noticed that at the top of many crucifixes there are the letters INRI. Can you shed some light on that for me? - Larry, Urbandale

A. THE LETTERS INRI STAND for Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews – or in Latin Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum. It was ordered by Pontius Pilate to be placed above the cross of Jesus. It was also written in Greek and Hebrew, though most crucifixes today simply give us the Latin letters. Cf. Matthew 27:37.

Q. What's the deal with the Latin Mass? Didn't the Pope recently rescind permission for the Mass in Latin? - Bill, Atlantic, Iowa

A. WELL, THE MASS in the Roman Rite CAN be celebrated in all the vernacular languages as well as in Latin. Pope Francis didn't eliminate the Latin Mass. Rather he asked bishops to monitor their dioceses regarding The Roman Missal of 1962, what is sometimes referred to as the "Tri-

dentine" Mass.

The Missal of 1962 uses the old rite going back to the Council of Trent in the 1500s and updated in 1962. This Missal did not incorporate the Vatican II revisions of the Mass that most of us are familiar with. It is usually celebrated with the priest facing away from the people; the Canon (or Eucharistic Prayer) is prayed silently by the priest; the priest alone distributes Communion; there is little if any participation by the people; there are prayers at the foot of the altar; the priest does both readings (in a solemn high Mass the deacon proclaims the gospel); the 1962 Missal uses a one-year version of readings as opposed to the three-year lectionary that is in use today.

The revisions of the Second Vatican Council called for "full, conscious, and active participation" by everyone at Mass. We are expected to sing and answer with our responses. We have readers (or lectors) who proclaim the first and second readings. Most parishes have Communion Ministers in addition to the priest.

Liturgy questions on readers' minds

So, you see, the Holy Father didn't dismiss the Latin Mass if the priest uses the updated, Vatican II prayers and readings. He asked the bishops of the world to give permission sparingly for the use of the Missal of 1962. An individual priest can no longer, on his own, assume this permission. It must come directly from the diocesan bishop.

Q. I've noticed at Funeral Masses and some other Masses, the priest and deacon use incense. Is it mandatory? Also, what are the reasons for using it? - Name withheld

A. INCENSE GOES WAY BACK. It was used in the Temple at Jerusalem during the sacrifices that were offered on the Temple altar. The Psalms use the image of our prayers rising like incense to the Lord. It also served the practical purpose of deodorizing the smell from the slaughtered animals used for the sacrifices.

In the Catholic tradition, incense is used as a way to pay special respect to

the people and the objects that are used in the liturgies. Some Masses begin with the celebrant incensing the altar; some Masses use incense at the time of the proclamation of the gospel; some Masses use incense at the time that the gifts of bread and wine are prepared; during the Easter season, incense can be used to honor the Paschal Candle; and at funerals, incense is used to pay honor to the earthly remains of one of our brothers or sisters.

Some people love the smell of incense. Others do not. Some people may be allergic to the smoke and the scent. There are some brands of incense that are hypoallergenic. Priests and deacons should be sensitive to the people in the congregation and their needs.

Father John Ludwig is a retired priest of the Diocese of Des Moines. Do you have a question for him? Send it to communications@dmdiocese.org or mail it to The Catholic Mirror, Diocese of Des Moines, 601 Grand Ave., Des Moines, Iowa 50309.

Human dignity invites listening, accompaniment, unconditional love

By Anne Marie Cox
Staff Writer

We live in a culture that

can broaden our understanding of issues and yet be a source of myopia which reduces our view of one another and limits us, said Bishop William Joensen.

Our call then, he said, is to stretch ourselves to enter the mystery around us, “hopefully always accompanying each other, finding those with whom we feel a kindred spirit.”

Having accepted the invitation to speak to the First Friday Breakfast Club, a group for gay, bisexual and transgender men, Bishop Joensen referred to Pope Francis’ 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (*On Fraternity and Social Friendship*). In it, Pope Francis said no one should function as an isolated unit or “monad.” To bear the image of God means that we are inherently in relation to others. To be a person means to be part of a people.

“No one can experience the true beauty of life without relating to others, without having real faces to love,” Pope Francis wrote. “This is part of the mystery of authentic human existence.”

Recognizing the human dignity of each person is the basis of genuine community, Bishop Joensen said.

“What does the inalienability of human dignity entail?” he asked. There are two polar interpretations: the maximal version supports an individual’s claim that the state owes one everything. The minimal version upholds one’s “right” to be left alone, honoring subjective decisions that cannot be judged right or wrong by the community, even

if it means the termination of life.

A Christian view of the human person does not concur with either view. To participate in the common good means the community has a claim over us to offer ourselves and our gifts to others, rather than focusing on what is owed us. It also means that every decision we make impacts others, and so our sense of what it means to possess human dignity involves both rights and duties.

Recognizing human dignity and all that it entails requires conversion of heart, he said.

“Where does that begin? Dialogue, engagement, and listening to one another,” said Bishop Joensen. We must communicate a sense of unconditional acceptance and love in order for trust to be established that will make dialogue possible.

He shared that, as a digital “immigrant,” he’s been told that for young people who are digital “natives” sharing about themselves online, there has to be some form of story, a personal narrative that engages them.

“The subjective story carries its own ‘truth’ but at the same time we are called, then, to see if there’s something shared among us if there is to be genuine empathy, solidarity of spirit,” he said. “Is there something fundamentally human that we can identify with and see ourselves at

home with one another?” *Fratelli Tutti* speaks of a truth that transcends each of us as the ultimate source of fraternity.

In the brief question-and-answer period that followed his talk, one breakfast attendee resonated with the need for unconditional acceptance. Another asked if Bishop Joensen thought the Catholic Church would ever change its teaching on same-sex marriage. “The Church sees marriage as intimately tied to God’s plan for humanity’s salvation. Marriage implies a form of generativity that is essential. All persons are called to intimate friendship with God that endures beyond marriage in heaven. But, unlike some other Christian communities who have changed their teaching, the Catholic Church will always see marriage as something that occurs between a woman and a man.”

As Christmas nears, Bishop Joensen reflected upon how God “stepped into our world, our murkiness, the messiness that is here. He allowed himself to become vulnerable. Yes, he knew it all from his perspective as God, but now the human feelings and experience Jesus bears to us allows us to identify completely with God, which in the watches of a night half-spent, is a message of silent hope.”

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He can be reached
at 515-286-2024 or
Sam.Porter@polkcountyiowa.gov.



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Gospel Christmas Vigil: Matthew 1:18-25

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means “God is with us.”

When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus.



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Teaching by example: Pope focused 2021 on kinship

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- From a vaccination clinic in the atrium of the Vatican audience hall to a visit to the ancient Iraqi city of Ur and later to a refugee camp in Lesbos, Greece, Pope Francis demonstrated throughout 2021 what he means by seeing all people as brothers or sisters.

Pope Francis issued his social encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, on *Fraternity and Social Friendship*, in October 2020, then proceeded to explain and apply it in 2021 in meetings with migrants and refugees, in hosting religious leaders making a plea to governments to act on climate change and in setting out his vision for a synod process that listens to and relies on the prayers of all Catholics.

In March, with representatives of Muslim, Christian, Yazidi and other religious communities in Iraq, Pope Francis made a pilgrimage to Ur, an archaeological dig on a dusty desert plain about 10 miles from modern-day Nasiriyah.

There, at the birthplace of the patriarch Abraham, the first person to believe in the one God and father of all, the pope called all believers to demonstrate their faith by treating one another as

the brothers and sisters they are.

And meeting in Cyprus and in Greece with refugees and asylum-seekers, he called for individual action, national policies and international cooperation that would recognize each one of them as a member of the human family deserving of a helping hand.

Pope Francis' activities throughout the year were modified or impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

In a public service announcement in August, Pope Francis had said, "Being vaccinated with vaccines authorized by the competent authorities is an act of love. And contributing to ensure the majority of people are vaccinated is an act of love -- love for oneself, love for one's family and friends, love for all people."

A different health concern landed the pope in Rome's Gemelli hospital for 10 days in July for colon surgery. The Vatican said the pope scheduled his operation to treat "a symptomatic diverticular stenosis of the colon."

The pandemic restrictions played more havoc with the papal schedule, forcing either the postponement of big events or a limit on attendance. In 2021, Pope Francis celebrated no Masses for the canonization of new saints, and he held no consistory to create new cardinals.



CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Francis greets a child during an audience in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican Dec. 10, with delegations from Italy and Peru who donated the Christmas tree and Nativity scene displayed in St. Peter's Square.

Pope Francis did some traveling, visiting Iraq in March, Hungary and Slovakia in September and Cyprus and Greece in December, just two weeks before his 85th birthday Dec. 17.

He also hosted a visit by U.S. President Joe Biden in late

October.

Pope Francis promulgated two documents that made headlines around the world: *Traditionis Custodes* (Guardians of the Tradition), restoring limits on the celebration of the pre-Vatican II Mass; and the revision of the

Code of Canon Law's *Book VI: Penal Sanctions in the Church* particularly to incorporate changes made over the past 15 years to protect children, promote the investigation of allegations of clerical sexual abuse and punish offenders.

San José No ha Salido del Edificio

Continued from page 1

manera colocar sus propias historias dentro del plan de salvación de Dios para toda la humanidad.

El drama del nacimiento, vida y muerte tiene innumerables conexiones que solamente podemos percibir con el tiempo, y que todos éstos toman nueva forma con el nacimiento de un niño en Belén, quien es adorado por pastores y por Magos, y que eventualmente se establece en lo que parece ser una vida nada meramente ordinaria en el hogar de Nazaret. Jesús y María radian una santidad que atrae los corazones

y que hace cantar a los ángeles. Y en medio de todo esto, ahí está el hombre inesperado, resiliente y virtuosamente justo quien sirve como esposo, padre y protector de la Sagrada Familia. Pero para que él lograra eso, él tuvo que hacer su trabajo no solamente en el taller, pero tomando la decisión de estar presente, día tras día y teniendo la vulnerabilidad suficiente para prestar su voz a la historia que Dios estaba escribiendo en sus vidas. El año especial de San José ha concluido, pero él permanece presente dentro y en la casa de Dios, la Iglesia de Cristo. Él no ha salido del edificio.



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General Agent
Northeast Nebraska,
Southwest and
West Central Iowa
402-379-0180
neil.pfeifer@kofc.org



Mike Bormann
General Agent
563-689-6801
michael.bormann@kofc.org

