

THE CATHOLIC MIRROR

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We Sow God's Spirit by Cultivating Connections in Christ.

Season for prayer, fasting & almsgiving

By Anne Marie Cox
Staff Writer

Ash Wednesday, on March 5, kicks off the 40-day Lent season, a time for prayer, fasting, and almsgiving as we prepare for Jesus' death and resurrection.

It's a season focused on a conversion of heart that draws us closer to God.

Receiving ashes on Ash Wednesday is a tradition rooted in the Old Testament, when one wore ashes as a sign of repentance for sins and humility before God. Ashes are created through the burning of palms from last year's Palm Sunday.

Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving

Prayer during Lent can take many forms. One can spend time reading Scripture, attending Mass, in adoration, and praying devotions such as Stations of the Cross. Parishes are encouraged to expand the opportunities available for the sacrament of reconciliation during Lent, and some areas offer communal reconciliation services to the broader community.

On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, April 18, Catholics both fast and abstain from meat.

Fasting means those between the ages of 18 and 59 eat one full meal and two smaller meals that together are not equal to a full meal. (No snacking.) Exemptions include the ill, pregnant, and nursing mothers.

The norms for abstinence begin for those who are age 14 and older. Not only are Catholics called to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, but to consider abstaining from other things as a way of drawing closer to God.

"We are called not only to abstain from luxuries during Lent, but to a true inner conversion of heart as we seek to follow Christ's will more

Continued on page 5

Legacy of Faith

College founded by Mercy sisters lays groundwork for a strong future



Mercy College of Health Sciences launched a \$15 million capital campaign to prepare nurses for the future in healthcare.

Mercy College of Health Sciences in downtown Des Moines has launched a \$15 million capital campaign to build a new facility dedicated to nursing simulation and learning.

The new 24,000-square-foot facility will be named the Joyce E. Lillis School of Nursing, honoring the 47-year nurse who in retirement continues to give her time to the profession by serving on the college's board.

The new building will replace an unused building on Mercy College's downtown Des Moines campus

"We are committed to making Mercy College of Health Sciences a leader in health science education and establishing a premier school of choice for those seeking a career in healthcare," said school President Adreain Henry, OD, EdD, MBA. "Thanks to the generosity of Terry and Joyce Lillis, what was once an abandoned, condemned building on campus will become a beacon of faith for our downtown community and those who dream of a career in nursing."

Joyce and her husband, Terry, provided a lead gift of \$2.5 million to launch the campaign.

Lillis, who graduated in 1977 from the University of Iowa with a bachelor's degree in nursing, sees nursing as a blend of art, science, and faith.

"It's also very spiritual," she said.

As she began her nursing career at Kossuth County Hospital in Algona, she was committed to compassionate care, both medically and emotionally. Patients, she knew, put their faith in medical staff during difficult medical



Joyce Lillis graduated from the University of Iowa in 1977 with a bachelor's degree in nursing.

journeys.

In 1979, she served as a public health administrator with the Iowa County Public Health Agency in Williamsburg. She joined the staff of Mercy Medical Center and worked on earning a master's degree in nursing when her family moved to Des Moines. She served as the director of Mercy Home Care beginning in 1999, overseeing hundreds of healthcare professionals.

She retired in 2016, but continued to promote nursing education with her husband by establishing the Joyce E. Lillis Endowed Nursing Scholarship in 2016 that helps students seeking a nursing degree. She's also served on the college's board of directors, becoming board chair last year. She and Terry also became founding members of the college's 1899 Society, a charitable giving circle that provides equipment, advanced technology, and other resources to students.

"Joyce's career revolved around serving others with compassion and reverence," said Dr. Henry. "She has seen firsthand



Terry and Joyce Lillis, pictured here with Sister Jude Fitzpatrick, have been supporters of Mercy College of Health Sciences. A new building at Mercy College of Health Sciences will be named for Joyce.

the difference a good nurse can make in the positive outcomes for patients. She has been that nurse, and she has been responsible for ensuring those nurses are there to inspire faith for their patients."

Joyce continues to keep her hand in healthcare by volunteering at InnerVisions Healthcare Medical Clinic and Catholic Charities.

"I believe in nursing," she said. "I know there aren't enough nurses in this world, I know that they work very hard. They are the foundation for our healthcare today."

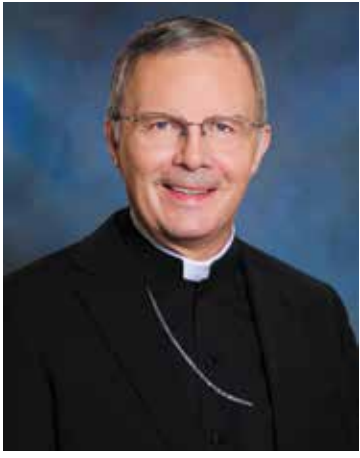
The Legacy of Faith capital campaign promises newly designed classrooms and simulation labs with modern patient care technology and hands-on experi-

ences that reflect what they will encounter once they graduate and practice in a healthcare environment.

It builds on a solid Catholic, accredited, nonprofit foundation, and lays the groundwork for the education of future healthcare professionals.

Mercy College of Health Sciences was founded 125 years ago by the Sisters of Mercy to staff Mercy Hospital, now called MercyOne Des Moines Medical Center. The college offers master's, bachelor's, and associate degrees, certificates, and continuing education courses.

To learn more, go to MCHS.edu/Campaign.



Bishop William Joensen

Before entering seminary, I and a few of my fellow students at the University of Iowa joined the Medical Historical Society. We were invited to take part in their annual banquet at a nice local restaurant on a Friday night during Lent. When it came to the main course, the servers brought plates with sizable ribeye steaks. A couple of my fellow Catholic students and I looked uneasily at each other; one of us asked if there might be an alternative fish or meatless entrée and were told “no.” So, after pausing for a few moments, we tucked into our steaks.

You might disagree with our decision as a flaunting of the serious Lenten discipline of Friday abstinence and a wonton form of disobedience to Jesus and to Church law, and you may be right. But for me, it was less a matter of craving for beefsteak and more a sense of not letting something so expensive and energy-intensive go to waste. A cow gave its life for human consumption, and it would have been a bloody shame to have it end up in the trash.

I’m prompted to recall that experience both because Lent is fast approaching (Ash Wednesday is March 5), and because of some remarks made last November at our annual fall bishops’ meeting by my colleague on the U.S. Bishops’ Domestic Justice and Human Development Committee, Ukrainian Greek Catholic Archbishop of Philadelphia Borys Gudziak. Recognizing that 2025 is both an ordinary Jubilee

Year for the Universal Church and the 10th anniversary of the release of Pope Francis’ encyclical letter, *Laudato Si’*, “On Care for Our Common Home,” Archbishop Gudziak called for a return to the Catholic tradition of Friday abstinence from meat not only during Lent, but throughout the entire year. He did not advocate for the bishops to pass a piece of disciplinary legislation that would bind the faithful (as the Catholic bishops of England and Wales did in 2011), but offered various spiritual and moral reasons why the practice of abstinence is even more relevant, fitting, and salutary in our contemporary context.

Even if I’m not yet perfectly observant, I find myself to be convicted and compelled to take up Archbishop Gudziak’s call with ever greater firmness of purpose. In “coming to my senses” in this way, I would be honoring the intent of U.S. bishops when they lifted the obligation of Friday abstinence following the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, when they urged that “the Catholic community will ordinarily continue to abstain from meat by free choice as formerly we did in obedience to Church law.”

I know people who continue to embrace rigorous fasting and abstinence on all Wednesdays and Fridays in accord with early Church custom, who subsist on bread and water and who take only one substantial meal those days. They are prophetic in the manner of Jesus and John the Baptist, who embraced radical periods of fasting as a form of solidarity and intercession for sinful humanity; they also seek to be spiritually strengthened against the forces who tempt us toward sloth and self-indulgence. The malicious deceivers tell us that we are the masters of our personal bodies and souls, and that we should redraw the lines of consumption and the balance of relationships among God, the human community, and nature in our favor.

In his death on the Cross, Jesus exposes the root causes of the ravages of poverty, hunger, war, and environmental corruption resulting from our enslavement to power, pleasure, and selfish pride. Abstinence from meat on Fridays in recognition of Christ’s Passion intensifies our identification with our Crucified Lord; it is a form of penance that fuels our will to

follow Jesus as his disciple by denying ourselves and taking up our own personal cross every day of the week (see Luke 9:23).

Abstinence intensifies our cooperation with Jesus in his mission of saving the world from itself. Forgoing meat on Fridays is a modest form of temperance that carries over into other aspects of this and other cardinal moral virtues, including chastity and fortitude. It calls us to look outside and upward beyond ourselves. In the words of Bishop Erik Varden, a Norwegian spiritual writer and Trappist monk, fasting from meat is a Eucharistically-flavored form of “lifting up our hearts,” recovering the beauty of embodied intimacy so woven into our universal call to holiness.

Abstinence helps us regain our bearings and stay the course on our common pilgrimage to heaven; it is an act of hope. Again, Varden: “The Church, surely, is called to provide the compass by which people of good will might orient themselves in times of confusion, not to run after the crowds like a puffing old spaniel striving to keep up with the hunt” (Chastity pp. 115-16).

Abstinence helps us to see

the world as it is, and not as our disordered appetites would fantasize it to be. In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis extols the Gospel-inspired Christian spirituality that is both contemplative and simple to the core. For, as our Holy Father Francis observes, when we “recognize that our body itself establishes us in a direct relationship with the environment and with other living beings,” we are able to “accept our own bodies as God’s gift and behold the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home” (LS n. 155).

This sort of grateful simplicity is not a ‘down-sizing’ of life. “On the contrary, it is a way of living life to the full.” For those “who have given up dipping here and there, always on the lookout for what they do not have,” are able to “experience what it means to appreciate each person and each thing.” Abstinence (partnered with fasting) helps us “shed unsatisfied needs,” freeing us to “cultivate other pleasures and find satisfaction in fraternal encounters, in service, in developing their gifts, in music and art, in contact with nature, in prayer” (LS n. 223).

Many parishes in our Diocese are justifiably proud of the fish fries they host during Fridays of Lent. While prompted in part by the discipline of Lenten abstinence that spurs us to look for meat alternatives, they are even more moments when we can find pleasure in the encounters we have with familiar friends and newly met neighbors. Abstinence is truly an occasion for embodied mutual presence! The act of preparing and serving the meal is a form of community builder among different generations that bears fruit in a deeper sense of connection and solidarity which transcends the ample fare that fills the plate. Ideally, the parish fish fry is not an insular affair that simply reinforces existing circles of relationships, or promotes a “carry-out” mentality that misses an opportunity to cultivate connections in Christ (though there are certainly worthy reasons to pick up food that we take to a homebound or vulnerable person wary of the weather or being in public, or to a single parent trying to keep track of the kids).

Some of you are aware that this past January, I joined retired Father Ray McHenry, some folks from St. Francis of Assisi Parish in West Des Moines and other Christian friends on a mission trip to South Africa’s Limpopo Province near the city of Mokopane. The trip was Father Ray’s 10th under the aegis of Blessman International Ministries, whose founding “godparents” are Dr. Jim and wife, Beth Blessman. Along with their team and various partners, including Caravan of Hope and Meals from the Heartland, they feed 50,000 children each day.

There are too many experiences to recount, but one afternoon experience at the Del Cramer school founded by the Blessmans springs to mind. The



Children in a poor, rural area of the Limpopo Province of South Africa get a hot meal after school at the Del Cramer Children’s Campus created by Blessman International, which was founded by former Des Moines MercyOne service provider, Dr. Jim Blessman and his wife, Beth.

New bishop named for Sioux City Diocese

Pope Francis on Feb. 12 named Father John Keehner, 59, of the Diocese of Youngstown, Ohio as the next bishop of the Diocese of Sioux City.

He will succeed the now retiring Bishop R. Walker Nickless, who has served the faithful in northwest Iowa for the last 19 years.

The Bishop-elect will be ordained a bishop and installed on May 1 at the Cathedral of the Epiphany in Sioux City.

“As a proud Iowa native, I can confidently affirm that Bishop-elect Keehner will be met with a community of clergy and laity that is welcoming and steadfast in faith,” said Dubuque Archbishop Thomas Zinkula. “As the metropolitan archbishop of the Province of Dubuque (state of Iowa),

it is a pleasure to welcome Father John to the Hawkeye State as he joins Bishop Dennis Walsh of Davenport as yet another esteemed spiritual father from the Buckeye State!”

Father Keehner was ordained a priest in 1993. He serves as the dean of Ashtabula County, Ohio and is the pastor of four parishes in the Diocese.

Bishop-elect Keehner was born Nov. 19, 1965, in Youngstown, Ohio. He pursued studies at the Pontifical College



Bishop-Elect John Keehner

Josephinum in Columbus, where he received a bachelor’s degree in English. He also studied at St. Mary’s of the West Seminary in Cincinnati where he received a master of divinity and a master of arts in biblical studies. Additionally, Bishop-elect Keehner received a licentiate in canon law from the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome.

In addition to serving as a pastor, he has served as judge, advocate, episcopal delegate, defender of the bond for his diocesan tribunal; vice-rector, administrator, and rector of St. Columba Cathedral in Youngstown, director of campus ministry at Youngstown State University,

Bishop-elect Keehner speaks English, Spanish, and some Italian.

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Divine Treasures: Both a ministry & a business

By Jennifer Willems
Contributing Writer

For some, Divine Treasures is a Catholic bookstore and gift shop, the only one serving the Des Moines area.

For some, Divine Treasures is a place to celebrate First Communion, confirmation and being received into the Catholic Church at Easter, as well as providing materials for the much-anticipated canonization of Blessed Carlo Acutis on April 27.

And for some, Divine Treasures is the place they found prayer, a listening ear, and hope after a death in the family or during a troubled relationship.

"I was hoping that it would be a Catholic oasis," said Lois Brookhart of the Basilica of St. John, who founded Divine Treasures with Susan Greenwood, also of the Basilica of St. John, in 1992. Ownership expanded to include Cindy Kodis of St. Augustin Parish, who joined them in 2010 and served as bookkeeper.

All three gave thanks for what has happened over the last 32 years during an open house marking their retirement and the store's new ownership on Jan. 25.

"God put it on my heart that we needed something like this, yet we never dreamed it would become what it became," Brookhart said. "And all the friends we've made over the years!"

Inheriting the valued ministry they started and the many loyal customers are Chris and Angela Oberreuter of St. John Parish in Adel, who bought the store on Jan. 1. Their management team includes Michelle Miyazaki of St. Francis of Assisi in West Des Moines, Sarah Hurm of the Basilica of St. John, and Dan Beneventi of Assumption Parish in Granger.

There's still a family connection – Miyazaki is Cindy's daughter and a longtime employee.

"We took up the call"

Divine Treasures opened with just 800 square feet in Franklin Plaza in the Beaverdale neighborhood of Des Moines. Now located at 5701 Hickman Road, the store has 5,000 square feet of books, rosaries, crucifixes, holy cards, saints t-shirts, statues and more.

Greenwood gave all the credit to God for the store.

"God told Blessed Mother about it. Lois, our partner, went to Medjugorje on a pilgrimage. Blessed Mother inspired Lois. Lois came back home, talk to me about it and inspired me. That was how it got started," Greenwood said.

Brookhart said it was only possible because of the seeds planted by Ila Daly, who ran Daly's Catholic Supply out of her family home in Urbandale. The business was getting more demanding and Daly was looking for someone to do something.

"So we took up the call," Brookhart said. "Medjugorje just kind of solidified it for us."

Last year, when it became time for Brookhart, Greenwood and Kodis to retire, God stepped in again.

Right person, the right time

Chris Oberreuter, a certified public accountant at a firm based in Adel, said he had been looking for a way to dive deeper into his faith for many years, but nothing really panned out. Until Angela mentioned that Divine Treasures was for sale, that is.

After connecting with Brookhart at the Christ Our Life conference in Des Moines last September, Oberreuter consciously turned it over to God and things started to fall into place. By the end of December, his questions were answered and he had the management team in place.

"Everything about this ministry has been when God's ready and what he wants to do,"



Photo by Jennifer Willems

Ownership of Divine Treasures book and gift store in Des Moines is changing from Cindy Kodis, Lois Brookhart, and Susan Greenwood to Chris and Angela Oberreuter, of St. John Parish in Adel.

Brookhart explained. "When (Chris) came up to me and said he was interested, I felt at peace about it from the very beginning. He would order books from me by email all the time. That's why I remembered his name."

And when she heard who the Oberreuters were bringing in as the management team, "I immediately knew that this was the right thing."

"A lot of people today are thanking us for keeping it going. People were concerned," Angela Oberreuter said.

Noting that the employees have made them feel like part of the family already, she said they are introducing her and Chris to people "who have been coming here forever," most of whom know by name.

Walking with people in important times

Michelle Miyazaki said Divine Treasures is so vital to the community because the store and its staff have walked with people throughout the best moments and worst moments of their lives.

Knowing their customers in a personal way allows them to stock holy cards and other supplies they anticipate people will want. Most importantly, it helps when people just need to talk, Miyazaki said.

"Just praying with people. Listening. Maybe there's a book, maybe there's something here that would help inspire them," Greenwood said. "Then you just turn it over to God. It all starts with him and then he uses you maybe as an instrument. It's really the Holy Spirit."

Beneventi summed it up by saying Divine Treasures is a ministry where commerce just happens to take place.

"It's amazing because some of the things bought in a Catholic bookstore can change people's lives, literally," he said. Among them are information and items about St. Peregrine, patron saint of those with cancer, which affects so many people, or gifts for First Communion, baptism or confirmation.

"These are all substantial life events," he said. "It ends up being more than just a transaction."

The blessings include Greenwood's husband, Randy, and Brookhart's husband, Jim, coming into the Catholic Church. "We said if it wasn't for anything but our husbands became Catholic, that was enough," Greenwood said.



Experience a Pilgrimage to France, Led by Bishop Joensen and Rev. Trevor Chicoine

Main tour departure is Wed., Aug. 27, 2025. We return on Sun., Sep. 7, 2025.
Optional Pre-Tour leaving Sun., Aug. 23 for Normandy and Mont Saint-Michel (+\$1,969)*



During our 9 nights in France, we will visit Paris, Lourdes, Lyon, Vichy, Paray-le-Monial, Ars-sur-Forman, Avignon, Arles, Aix-en-Provence, Marseille, and the Basilica of the Sacred Heart. This exciting program will include daily Mass at local churches and basilicas, a spiritual journey through the Basilique de Sacre-Coeur, dinner cruise along the Seine, tour the of the Roman ruins, and so much more! Participants should expect to walk during much of the tours as this tour will certainly help you get your daily steps in!



The trip price per person is tentatively \$6,559* and includes topnotch accommodations for 9 nights (based on double occupancy), breakfast and dinner daily, ground transportation within France, all gratuities, entry tickets to iconic monuments and sights, and expert guides provided by our travel partner. Trip insurance is not provided by the travel agency, but is strongly recommended.

*Estimated cost. Pricing will be finalized 6 months prior to departure (due to airfare).

witte Spiritual Journeys

Deadline for registration is April 15. With only a few spots left, this trip will be full soon. If you would like more information or a brochure, email Sue McEntee at smcentee@cfswia.org or call 515-393-5239. To guarantee your spot(s) for this trip, email Natalie Delph at natalied@wittetravel.com or call 616-957-8113.

Around the Diocese

Feb. 23 Sunday
Spaghetti & Meatball Dinner
CHURCHVILLE – Assumption Shrine Hall, 870 West St., northwest of Martinsdale, is the place for this all-you-can-eat spaghetti and meatball dinner. Serving 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Cost is \$10/Adults, \$5/Children 5-10 and carry out is available. There will also be a silent auction and raffle.

Feb. 24 Monday
A Catholic's Guide to Lent
DES MOINES - An evening with Bud Marr, a dean at Mercy College of Health Sciences and author of two books on St. John Henry Newman, and lay Dominican Andy Milam, the business manager at St. Joseph Church in Des Moines who is working on a master's degree in systemic theology. 7 p.m. in St. August Parish Hall.

Feb. 28 Friday
Mardi Gras
WAUKEE – St. Boniface Parish presents the 3rd annual Mardi Gras Mixer at 6 p.m. in the parish hall. Cost is \$20 per person for adults 21 and older. Enjoy food, drinks and dancing.

March 1 Saturday
Men's Conference
DES MOINES – FORGE, a new Des Moines apostolate, will host its first men's conference featuring Matt Birk, Father Boniface Hicks, Pete Burak, Dr. Leonard Sax, John Bishop, Ph.D., and more. FORGE aims to empower 1,200 Catholic men to fight for the Church's view of the family. Learn more about the conference at myforge.org/conference/

Scott Hahn Coming
WEST DES MOINES – Scott Hahn, Ph.D., and the St. Paul Center will be at St. Francis of Assisi Parish. Free and open to the public. Mass is at 8 a.m., welcome and check-in at 8:45 a.m. Hahn will deliver talks at 9:05 and 10:50 a.m. Between his talks, a representative of the St. Paul Center will give a presentation. For more information, contact the parish at 515-223-4577 or pgro thus@saintfrancis-church.org.

Shamrocks & Shenanigans
DES MOINES – Join your fellow parishioners at 6 p.m. at Mainframe Studios for a night you won't forget at Catholic Charities' annual fundraiser. All proceeds benefit the vital programs and services of Catholic Charities. Tickets and information available at catholiccharitiesdm.org/shamrocks.

March 2 Sunday
Broken at the Border
DES MOINES – St. Catherine of Siena Student Center is presenting El Paso Bishop Mark Seitz for a discussion on immigration and the border at 2 p.m. at Sheslow Auditorium at Drake University. The free event is part of a dialogue series with the theme of faith in action for the common good.

Art of Accompaniment
WAUKEE – St. Boniface Parish is hosting "The Art of Accompaniment," a workshop for becoming a joyful disciple with Benedictine

Father Boniface Hicks and Kristin Molitor. Mass will be at 10:30 a.m. The workshop will be from 12:30-5 p.m. Details at stbonifacechurch.org/art-of-accompaniment. Register by Feb. 25.

March 8 Saturday
Catholic Woman's League
DES MOINES – Catholic Woman's League of Des Moines will hold a Mass of Remembrance for deceased members, especially those who passed last year, at 11 a.m. at Christ the King Parish. Everyone is welcome to attend. All ladies of the Diocese are invited to join us for a catered luncheon following Mass in the parish hall. Cost of the luncheon is \$20. Contact Carol Weyer, 515-975-6776 by March 5 to make luncheon reservations.

March 9 Sunday
Lenten Music Concert
DES MOINES – Steve Agrisano will be do a Lenten music concert at St. Theresa Church at 6 p.m.

March 16 Sunday
Irish Brunch
IMOGENE – St. Patrick Parish is hosting an Irish brunch from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. Cost is a freewill offering with proceeds going to youth attending the National Catholic Youth Conference.

March 16 Sunday
Chicken dinner
NORWALK – A fried chicken feast is being held at St. John the Apostle Parish, 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. with Staley's fried chicken. Cost: \$13/Adults, \$6/Children ages 6-12, and children 5 and under eat free. Balloon artist for the kids. A silent auction and 50/50 raffle will also be held. Tickets can be purchased in advance at the parish office. For more information contact Gary & Mary Haselton at (515)321-3873 or the parish office at (515) 981-4855.

March 20-22 Thurs.-Sat.
Spring Garage Sale
DES MOINES – Holy Trinity Parish, is hold its annual garage sale: March 20, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; March 21, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; March 22, 9 a.m.-Noon

March 28-30 Fri. – Sun.
Book Sale
DES MOINES – Christ the King is having a parish library book sale in the parish hall. Donation only. Friday 4:30- 7 p.m. (Stay for the fish fry) Saturday 9 a.m. – 7 p.m. Children's story hour at 10:30 a.m. Face painting at 1:30 p.m. Sunday 8 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. All proceeds go to our parish library.

March 16 Sunday
Rosary Rally
DES MOINES – Join fellow Iowans to pray a monthly rosary the 3rd Sunday of every month at 1:30 p.m. (rain or shine) at the Iowa State Capitol – west side steps. For more information contact Diana Balmaceda, 515-974-7691 or Jeff Pierick, 515-778-6087.

Fish fry dinners

The following is fish fry dinner information provided by parishes for all Fridays in Lent unless otherwise noted.

RURAL & WEST SIDE OF THE DIOCESE

AFTON, St. Edward
Dates: March 21, April 4, Afton Community Center, 2020 N. Douglas St. Times: 6-7:30 p.m.; Cost: Free-will donation

AUDUBON, St. Patrick
Date: March 7-11, Times: 5-7 p.m., Cost \$13.

AVOCA/WALNUT, St. Mary/St. Patrick
Date: March 14 in the Avoca Legion Hall
Date: March 28 in the St. Mary Parish Hall, Avoca
Time for both events: 5:30-7 p.m.; Cost: \$15/adults, \$5/children ages 4-10; free/children under 4

CHARITON, Sacred Heart
Dates: March 7 – April 11, Times: 5:6:45 p.m. Cost: \$14/adults; \$6/children ages 6-12; free/children ages 5 and under; Alternate Menu: grilled cheese

CORNING, St. Patrick
Dates: March 28, April 11; Times 5:30-7 p.m.; Cost: Free will donation

COUNCIL BLUFFS, Corpus Christi
Dates: March 7 – April 11; Times: 4:30-7 p.m.; Cost: \$15/adults; \$7/children; Alternate Menu: Cheese pizza

CRESTON, Holy Spirit
Dates: March 14, 28 at St. Malachy

ALTOONA, Ss. John and Paul
Dates: March 7-April 11; Times: 4:30-7 p.m.; Cost: \$14/adults; \$6/children ages 6-12; free/children ages 5 and under; \$12/drive-thru
Alternate Menu: Mac & cheese, cheese pizza

ANKENY, Our Lady's Immaculate Heart
Dates: March 14, 28, April 11; Times: 5-7 p.m.; Cost: Free-will offering; Alternate Menu: Grilled cheese & tater tots

ANKENY, St. Luke the Evangelist
Dates: March 7, 21, April 4; Times: 4:30-7 p.m.; Cost: Free-will offering
Alternate Menu: Mac & cheese; Grilled cheese

CARLISLE, St. Elizabeth Seton
Dates: March 14, 28, April 11; Times: 5-7 p.m. (dine-in, carry-out or drive thru); Cost: Free-will offering – suggested \$15/adults; \$10/children; Alternate Menu: Mac & cheese

All Saints
Dates: March 7 – April 11; Times: 5-6:30 p.m.; Cost: \$11/adults; \$5/children ages 5-12; free/children under 5; Alternate Menu: Grilled cheese; macaroni & cheese

Basilica of St. John
Dates: March 7 – April 11
Times: 4:45-6:30 p.m.; Cost: \$12/adults (age 11 and above); \$5/children ages 4-10; free/children age 3 and under; \$50/family; Alternate Menu: Mac & Cheese

Christ the King
Dates: March 7 – April 11
Times: 5-7 p.m.; Cost: \$13/adults, \$5/children; Alternate Menu: Cheese pizza, Shrimp with French fries or mac & cheese

School, 403 W. Clark St.; Times: 5-6:30 p.m.; Cost: \$12

EARLING, St. Joseph
Dates: March 7, 21; Times: 5:30-7:30 p.m.; Cost: \$15/adults; \$10/children ages 3-10; free/ages 2 and under. Alternate Menu: Mac & cheese

GREENFIELD, St. John
Dates: April 11; Times: 5-7 p.m.; Cost: Free-will donation

HARLAN, St. Michael
Dates: March 7-April 11 – Dine in or drive thru; Times: 5:30 - 7 p.m.; Cost: \$15/adults; \$5/children ages 4-12; free/ages 3 and under
Alternate Menu: Fish tacos (dine in only), mac & cheese

INDIANOLA, St. Thomas Aquinas
Dates: March 7-April 11; Times: 5:30-7 p.m.; Cost: \$13/adults; \$6/ages 6-12; free/ages 5 & under; Take-outs are available.

LOGAN St. Anne
Dates: Feb. 28 – April 11; Times: 5-7 p.m. - Drive thru, Dine in or Take out; Cost: \$15/adults; \$7/ages 5-12

MASSENA, St. Patrick
Dates: March 14; Times: 5:30-7 p.m. Cost: Free-will donation; Alternate Menu: Mac & cheese, desserts

GRANGER, Assumption
Dates: March 7 – April 11; Times: 5:30 – 7:00 p.m. (dine in or drive-up); Cost: Free-will donation; Alternate Menu: cheese Pizza

NORWALK, St. John the Apostle
Dates: March 7-April 11; Times: 5:30 – 7 p.m.; Cost: \$13/adults; \$11/children ages 5-12; free/ages 4 and under; Alternate Menu: Cheese pizza

URBANDALE, St. Pius X
Dates: March 14, 28, April 11; Times: 5-6:30 p.m.; Cost: Free-will offering; Alternate Menu: Mac & cheese; cheese pizza
Soup Supper
Dates: March 7, 21, April 4; Times: 5-6:30 p.m.; Cost: Free-will offering
Alternate Menu: Grilled cheese

DES MOINES

Holy Trinity
Dates: March 7, 28, April 11
Times: 5:15-6:30 p.m.; Cost: \$12/adults; \$8/children ages 6-11; free/children age 5 and under; Alternate Menu: mac & cheese; fish tacos

St. Ambrose Cathedral
Dates: March 7 – April 11; Times: 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.; Cost: \$10/person

St. Joseph
Dates: March 7 – April 11
Times: 4:30–7:00 p.m. (dine in or carry out); Cost: \$13/adults; \$5/children's menu; \$40/family max
Alternate Menu: Cheese pizza; mac & cheese; dessert available

MISSOURI VALLEY, St. Patrick
Dates: March 7 – April 11; Times: 5-7 p.m.; Cost: \$15/adults; \$12/senior citizens; additional discount for kids; Alternate Menu: soup & salad

NEOLA, St. Patrick
Dates: March 7 – April 11; Times: 5-7 p.m.; Cost: \$15/adults; \$5/ages 5-10; free/ages 4 & under; Alternate Menu: Grilled cheese

PERRY, St. Patrick, (in the school gym, 1302 5th St.)
Dates: March 7 – April 11; Times: 5:30 – 7 p.m.; Cost: \$10/adults; \$5/ages 5-10; free/ages 4 & under; \$40 for a family with children; Alternate Menu: \$3 more for shrimp

RED OAK, St. Mary
Dates: March 7, 21, April 4; Times: 5-6:30 p.m.; Cost: \$15/adults; \$10/ages 5-11; free/under age 5; Alternate Menu: fish tacos

ST. MARYS, Immaculate Conception
Dates: March 14, 21, 28, April 5; Times: 5-7 p.m.; Cost: \$30/immediate family; \$12.50/adults; \$5/children under 12

WINTERSET, St. Joseph
Dates: March 7 – April 11; Times: 5:30 – 7 p.m.; Cost: Free will offering; Alternate Menu: Cheese pizza; Mac & cheese

WAUKEE, St. Boniface
Dates: March 7 – April 11; Times: 5-7 p.m.; Cost: \$12/adults; \$7/children ages 5-10; free/ages 4 and under; \$45 for immediate household
Alternate menu: Spaghetti, cheese pizza, desserts

WEST DES MOINES, Sacred Heart
Dates: March 7 – April 11; Times: 5:30-7 p.m.; Cost: \$14/adults (13 and older); \$7/children ages 5-12; free/children age 4 and under; \$45/family maximum; Alternate Menu: Cheese pizza; mac & cheese

WEST DES MOINES, St. Francis of Assisi,
Dates: March 7 – April 11; Times: 5:30-7:15 p.m.; Cost: \$15/adults; \$5/children ages 6-11; free-will offering/children age 5 and under; Alternate Menu: Cheese pizza, mac & cheese

St. Mary of Nazareth
Dates: March 7, 14, 28; April 4, 11; Times: 5-6:30 p.m.; Cost: \$13/adults; \$25/couple; \$7/children ages 12 and under; Alternate Menu: mac & cheese

St. Theresa
Dates: March 7 – April 11; Times: 5:30-7 p.m.; Cost: Free-will offering
Alternate Menu: Cheese pizza, mac & cheese, fish and shrimp tacos, desserts



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Lent starts March 5

faithfully,” according to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Almsgiving, or doing charitable acts, is a way to share not only financial resources, but to consider how we might share our time and talents.

Continued from page 1

Family-focused Activities

Just before he began his public ministry, Jesus spent 40 days in the desert. Why would he go there? He was drawn to prayer and fasting to prepare for a big life change, to retreat, to quiet himself, to listen. He allowed himself to encounter God and let his heart be focused, nourished, and shaped for his mission.

So, too, we are invited into the desert of Lent to retreat, to quiet ourselves, to listen to God, to encounter him, to repent.

A wide range of resources for individuals and families are available in English and Spanish at dmdiocese.org/living-lent to encourage us to lean into prayer, fasting, and charity during Lent. Remove the obstacles that stand in the way of growing closer to God.

The resources include a chart you can use to create a personal/family Lenten plan, key phrases and explanations, recipes for meatless soups, a list of feast days during Lent, activities for children, and more.

CRS Rice Bowl

During Lent, Catholics have an opportunity to share their financial resources with other Catholics to be the hands and feet of Jesus helping the poor through Catholic Relief Services. Giving to CRS Rice Bowl fosters local and global solidarity and offers a tangible way for the faithful to live out their faith through prayer, fasting, and charity.

This is the 50th anniversary of CRS Rice Bowl. We have 500 rice bowls for local distribution. To get some for your parish, school, or organization, contact John Huynh, D. Min., diocesan director of Social Justice, at jhuynh@dmdiocese.org or 515-237-5006.

Of the funds that are collected, 25 percent are kept locally and distributed to organizations that work in some direct capacity with hunger and/or food insecurity. The other 75 percent is sent to Catholic Relief Services for global aid. Last year, the Des Moines Diocese distributed six grants for local needs. The application process for this year is open until March 3. The application can be found at dmdiocese.org/news/2025-crs-rice-bowl-grant-applications-open.

Fish Fry Dinners

Many parishes and Knights of Columbus groups around the Diocese provide a meat-free meal on Fridays not only to nourish our bodies but to nourish our

Father Schmitz coming to Des Moines

By Ryan Johnson
Contributing Writer

“Hi, my name is Father Mike Schmitz.”

You may recognize this familiar introduction if you listen to podcasts. Father Mike Schmitz is the host of “The Bible in a Year” and “The Catechism in a Year” podcasts produced by Ascension. Both are wildly popular among Catholics and regularly rank near the top on the chart of religion and spirituality podcasts.

Here’s your opportunity to see Father Schmitz speak in Des Moines. He will give a talk on Wednesday, April 2 at the Community Choice Credit Union at 7 p.m. The event is titled “Encounter the Eucharist: An Evening with Fr. Mike Schmitz.”

Father Mike Schmitz is the director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry for the Diocese of Duluth. He is also the chap-

lain for the Newman Center at the University of Minnesota-Duluth. At the Newman Center, Father ministers to students by providing the sacraments and sharing his knowledge of the Catholic faith.

The event is a fundraiser and celebration for Iowa Catholic Radio Network, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary. Joe Teeling founded Iowa Catholic Radio in 2005 and has been a visionary for its growth.

Just recently, Iowa Catholic Radio added its ninth signal and now has the ability to reach more than 1 million individuals, even stretching into Minnesota and Missouri when the weather cooperates.

“Father Mike Schmitz is so well known and appreciated for his podcasts and the work he’s done for the Hallow app,” said Joe Teeling, chief mission officer at the network. “The evening will include Eucharistic adoration, sacred music and radio theater, plus Father Mike’s talk.”

Tickets on Sale Now

Tickets are on sale now and can be bought on the Iowa Events Center website. General admission tickets are \$100. The room will be set with theater seating to allow all attendees to easily see and hear Father Schmitz.

A limited number of exclusive VIP tickets are available for \$300 per person. These tickets enable guests to attend a reception starting at 5 p.m. and concluding at 6:30 p.m. Father Schmitz will be present to meet attendees. Refreshments and appetizers will be available, and attendees will have reserved seating in the front of the room.

Events like this and donations from listeners are critical to the continued success of Iowa Catholic Radio. The media company’s programming is listener supporter.

Recent additions to Iowa



Father Mike Schmitz

Catholic Radio Network include stations in Spencer and Mason City. The network offers live programming, sacred music and on-demand radio originals. The daily Mass is available via a production of Iowa Catholic Radio and St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in West Des Moines.

Knights support Catholic Charities



Knights of Columbus Council 13109 hosted a pancake breakfast at Ss. John & Paul Catholic Church in Altoona to benefit the Catholic Charities Food Pantry. Their donation of \$1,000 will go toward the purchase of turkeys for the 2025 Annual Giving Thanksgiving Event this fall. Pictured are council members Leon Stidfole and Pierre Robichaux with pantry staff.

Des Moines Catholic Worker House Fund

Do you have an upcoming Required Minimum Distribution from your IRA? Do you have a donor advised fund? The Des Moines Catholic Worker House Fund is a 501c(3) non-profit. Your donations would be used to support the hospitality ministry of the Des Moines Catholic Worker House by providing food and other necessities to the homeless population of Des Moines.

Donations can be sent to:

Des Moines Catholic Worker House Fund
P.O. Box 1386 Ankeny, Iowa 50021

Or go to our website to give online at:
<https://friendsofcatholicworker.com/>



Director of Business Management

St. Thomas Aquinas Church and Catholic Student Center at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa is looking for a Director of Business Management who is passionate about the transforming love and truth of Jesus Christ and his Church. As a steward of the physical, financial and personnel resources, the Director must embrace and incorporate this passion and the mission of Saint Thomas into the daily workplace. The Director will demonstrate good judgment and flexibility, with the ability to set priorities, work effectively with a wide range of people, and be responsive to the needs of the Pastor, the pastoral staff, and the parishioners of Saint Thomas Aquinas.

For more information visit staparish.net. To apply for the position send a resume and two letters of recommendation to: BMsearch@staparish.net. Please apply by March 21st.

Additional opportunities to grow in faith

March 1

Scott Hahn, Ph.D., will give two talks at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in West Des Moines. Mass is at 8 a.m., followed by the first talk. The second talk is at 10:50 a.m. Hahn is a former Protestant minister who converted to the Catholic faith in 1986. Since then, he has written numerous best-selling books about the Catholic faith. The event is free, does not require registration, and is open to families.

The **FORGE Men’s Conference** highlights eight nationally renowned speakers at the Embassy Suites in Des Moines. The conference runs 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The event includes Mass and reconciliation. Speakers include Super Bowl champion Matt Birk, New York Times best-selling author Leonard Sax, Benedictine Father Boniface Hicks, Bishop William Joensen, evangelist Damon Owens, FORGE founder John Bishop, Ph.D., and more.

March 2

Hear **El Paso Bishop Mark Seitz** share his perspective on immigration as the bishop of a diocese on the border. He’ll speak at 2 p.m. at Sheslow Auditorium at Drake University in a free and open-to-the-public presentation sponsored by St. Catherine Student Center.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

- Rev. Protas Okwalo - February 1
- Rev. Anthony Aiello - February 2
- Rev. John Acrea - February 6
- Msgr. Michael Hess - February 7
- Rev. Tim Fitzgerald - February 8
- Rev. Guthrie Dolan - February 9
- Msgr. Edward Hurley - February 11
- Rev. Zachary Kautzky - February 12
- Most Rev. Richard Pates - February 12
- Rev. Vernon Smith - February 19
- Rev. John Frost - February 21
- Rev. Daniel Kirby - February 21
- Rev. Albert Sherbo - February 21
- Rev. Emmanuel Offiong - February 23
- Rev. Christopher Hartshorn - February 26
- Rev. Joseph Pins - February 26
- Rev. Nick Smith - February 28

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New morning show host fits right in

By Anne Marie Cox
Staff Writer

Meet the new host of The Morning Show on Iowa Catholic Radio Network: Bo Bonner.

“I was born on Feb. 3, the Feast of St. Blaise, and I have not stopped talking ever since,” he joked.

Bonner took the microphone left by longtime host Jon Leonetti, when he left at the end of last year for other projects.

Bonner’s background makes him uniquely qualified for the role.

“I come from a long line, both in my family and as an Oklahoman, of a storytelling culture. I have always loved speaking to anyone,” he said.

In addition, he has some experience. Bonner has been cohost with his friend Bud Marr, Ph.D., of the show “The Uncommon

Good” on Iowa Catholic Radio for the last eight years.

While that’s a show of more in-depth analysis and The Morning Show follows a different format of news, sports, guests and more, Bonner balances the different demands.

“I feel blessed, to the great credit of Iowa Catholic Radio, in that a lot of businesses and jobs think of you as one way. (ICR) says Bo has these two skillsets, personalities, talents that are quite different. They encourage me to excel in both,” he said.

Prior to moving to the radio network, Bonner taught at a variety of higher education institutions.

He hopes his conversion to Catholicism in 2006 gives him a colorful take on the faith’s traditions and practices, returning the favor to many cradle Catholics that opened his eyes to the glory of the Church throughout the

years.

“I’ve been Catholic for 19 years. It’s endlessly fascinating and new,” he said. “Being able to come on and talk about splendor and wonder of the Church, being a convert really helps. I can always talk it up with my see-it-with-new-eyes hat. A childlike wonder goes a long way.”

Watching his five kids go through formation as they prepare for sacraments gives him a fresh perspective.

The transition has been smoothed by a great team with Elise Kerr at the news desk, Mark Amadeo covering sports, and Ayden Pugh and Deacon Tony Valdez at the computer controls.

“I love that it’s a team environment,” he said. “And, I’m grateful to share people’s morning with them. It’s a privilege to start the day with a recollect of who we are every morning, who God has made us every morning.”



Bo Bonner is the new host of The Morning Show at the Iowa Catholic Radio Network.

Iowa Catholic Radio Network signal expands north

By Dawn Prosser
Contributing Writer

As of Jan. 11, there are three Catholic radio station towers serving the faithful in the Diocese of Sioux City.

Iowa Catholic Radio Network launched KCSL 89.9 FM, licensed in Spencer. Trinity Catholic Radio 103.1 FM covers the Carroll area and Siouxland Catholic Radio has towers in Ponca, Nebraska and Storm Lake, covering a 50-mile radius from each site.

The new KCSL 89.9 FM will cover communities including Arnolds Park, Emmetsburg, Estherville, Graettinger, Hartley, Lake Park, Laurens, Milford, Okoboji, Paullina, Primghar, Sanborn, Spencer and Spirit Lake. The signal will also reach Jackson and Worthington, Minnesota in the Diocese of Winona-Rochester.

The parent company is St. Gabriel Communications, Inc., doing business as Iowa Catholic Radio Network. (This is a separate entity than Siouxland Catholic Radio-St. Gabriel Communications, LTD.,

based in Sioux City.)

During the Jan. 24 Catholic Morning Show, Matt Willkom, director of programming and network development, explained the call letters - KCSL were purposely selected - C to represent Catholic and Clay County, S to represent Spencer and SL for Spirit Lake.

Adding to their current coverage is part of the mission of Iowa Catholic Radio Network, the director said, noting the station will be on the air in the Mason City area in a few weeks.

“We have always had the

goal of becoming our name - Iowa Catholic Radio and not just Des Moines or Polk County Catholic Radio but really bringing Catholic radio to every part of Iowa that doesn’t already have Catholic radio,” he said, noting that many of the Des Moines area listeners spend time vacationing in the Iowa Great Lakes area and desired access to the network in northern Iowa.

The network has been able to expand by acquiring existing stations and partnering with low-power independently-owned

stations “that have said yes to broadcasting our programming,” in order to have access to the regional network’s resources.

“In the case of the Iowa Great Lakes region, we took advantage of an opportunity the FCC offered in 2021 to apply for a brand-new FM station,” Willkom said. “And 89.9 was one of those construction permits that we were granted as a result of that.”

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Catholic Schools Week celebrates faith, education



Students from Shelby County Catholic School in Harlan recorded radio ads on KNOD in celebration of Catholic Schools Week. Above is Aubrey Bruck recording her ad.



St. Augustin Catholic School in Des Moines kicked off Catholic Schools Week by praying a living rosary.



St. Malachy Catholic School in Creston celebrate Catholic Schools Week. Pictured are (front row l-r) Brandy, Lydia, Ava, Emery and Ali; (back row) Grayson, Sam and Gavin.

Blessed Acutis relic venerated at St. Pius X Church



A first-class relic of Blessed Carlos Acutis, who will be canonized April 27, was available for veneration at St. Pius X Church in April in mid-February. Blessed Acutis is known for his website documenting Eucharistic miracles.

CDA coordinates collection for veterans



Catholic Daughters in Council Bluffs collected nonperishable food items, toiletries, and financial donations for the Pottawattamie County Veterans Services pantry. The Catholic Daughters Court St. Anthony #330 collected from three Catholic parishes in Council Bluffs, and received two \$200 grants from Foresters International, a financial services provider, to purchase items for the pantry.

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Our diocesan mission of sowing God's spirit is rooted in three key aspects of our faith journey: *encounter, friendship, and communion*. These aspects orient everything we do together as the Body of Christ in central and southwest Iowa.

The pilgrimage of faith begins with an **encounter**. Like the apostles who met Jesus by the shores of Galilee, the woman at the well whom Jesus engages in conversation, and Mary Magdalene who comes upon the Risen Lord at the tomb, we are invited to encounter Christ in prayer, the sacraments, and one another in so many varied venues of our lives. Your support makes these sacred moments possible—through youth retreats, parish missions, and outreach to the vulnerable, such as families in crisis or those in prison.

These encounters cultivate **friendships** rooted in faith. Jesus calls us his friends, and through your support, we foster meaningful connections, for example: among young people discerning their vocations, families sharing their faith journeys, and those who serve and are served.

Ultimately, these relationships participate in **communion** where we share God's life and love. At the altar of the Eucharist, we experience the ultimate communion with Christ and his Church. Your support sustains the parishes, schools, and ministries that nurture this sacred bond, ensuring that our Church continues to thrive.

With this outreach, I boldly invite you to make a difference in our Diocese through your gift to the Annual Diocesan Appeal. Your generosity directly supports vital ministries—forming seminarians, serving the poor, providing youth faith formation, and so much more. Every contribution advances our local Church where God's love is encountered, shared, and celebrated.

Will you prayerfully consider making a gift today? Your support allows us to grow as a community of faith, sowing God's Spirit and revealing Christ's love to the portion of the Kingdom vineyard God has entrusted to us.

Thank you for your generosity. May God grace you and your family abundantly in moments of encounter, friendship, and communion during this Jubilee Year 2025, where we accompany one another as pilgrims of hope.

Faithfully in Christ,



Most Reverend William M. Joensen
Bishop of Des Moines



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Photo by Anne Marie Cox

Lori Chesser, president of Dentons Davis Brown law firm, shared the early history in Iowa of welcoming immigrants during a Feb. 2 panel discussion focused on the common good.

Panelists share Iowa's history of hospitality

By Anne Marie Cox
Staff Writer

A panel of immigration experts on Feb. 2 shared the history of immigration in Iowa, pathways to legal status, the refugee vetting process, the current situation for immigrants, and the organizations that serve them.

The discussion was part of a broader, three-part dialogue series created by St. Catherine of Siena Church and Student Center focusing on immigration. The second part will be March 2, when El Paso Bishop Mark Seitz comes to Des Moines for a public presentation at 2 p.m. at Sheslow Auditorium on the campus of Drake University. Bishop Seitz's diocese borders Chihuahua, Mexico. Having spent years walking with immigrants, working with Texas elected officials, and conversing with border agents, he will share his perspective on immigration.

On March 29 at 10 a.m. at St. Catherine in Des Moines, the dialogue series concludes with a workshop offering individuals and faith communities to learn about the specific needs of refugees and immigrants and consider making a commitment to provide for some of those needs.

Lori Chesser, president of Dentons Davis Brown law firm,

shared the early history of Iowa in welcoming immigrants, from the 1850s when the state resisted the Know-Nothing Party and welcomed newcomers to the 1870s, when the state Board of Immigrants was established to recruit people to Iowa. In the 1970s, the state again welcomed newcomers escaping war-torn areas in South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.

Yer Vang, legal director of immigration legal services for Catholic Charities in the Archdiocese of Dubuque, explained federal agencies that work with immigration and the rights that immigrants have.

Dema Abu-Assaf, an immigrant herself and the Refugee Services program manager with Catholic Charities in Des Moines, noted that refugees are a protected class of immigrants, having been vetted and approved for residence in the United States by the federal government. In Fiscal Year 2024, Catholic Charities resettled 374 refugees and protected clients. The agency was expecting to resettle 425 this fiscal year. However, the federal government suspended its refugee resettlement program last month. Catholic Charities had welcomed 121 individuals before the program paused.

To watch their presentations and those of the other panelists, go to stcatherinedrake.org/dialogue-series/

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March 1, 2025

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9:05 - 10:05 am
Presentation by Dr. Hahn

10:05 - 10:20 am
St. Paul Center Presentation

10:20 - 10:50 am
Break (Book Sales Available)


10:50 - 11:50 am
Presentation by Dr. Hahn

11:50 - 12:05 am
Raffle & Closing Remarks (Book Sales Available)



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National pause affects Catholic Charities

The national pause in accepting refugees into the resettlement program continues to have a direct impact on the lives of those served by Catholic Charities in the Des Moines Diocese.

Some of the ramifications of these actions are known and some are yet to be determined.

This pause will result in a significant reduction in the number of refugees Catholic Charities is able to serve. For example, Catholic Charities, Diocese of Des Moines, had planned to welcome 425 refugees over a 12-month period of time; however, due to the pause, they may only be able to serve the 121 who have been able to come through the program since October.

For more than 100 years, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Des Moines has been committed to transforming lives through service, guided by the core principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

They are able to do this humanitarian work through the generosity of donors, corporate partners, and other organizations, but also through vital partnerships with local, state, and federal agencies.


Here in the Diocese of Des Moines, Catholic Charities is one of a few refugee resettlement agencies that has worked in partnership with the state for many years to safely welcome refugees – individuals who have been forced to flee their homes due to violence, war or persecution, after a thorough vetting process by the government.

In recent years, Catholic Charities has extended its care and compassion for this population beyond the initial resettlement period through post-resettlement services.

Our Spring Fundraiser is **February 25-28th**. Tune into one of our 9 frequencies across the state, online or through the Iowa Catholic Radio App for special programming that proclaims Truth and provides hope.

Iowa Catholic Radio needs your help to meet our fundraiser goal. Your **\$50, \$100, \$500, or more** will help ensure people can tune in to ICR and connect to Jesus Christ.

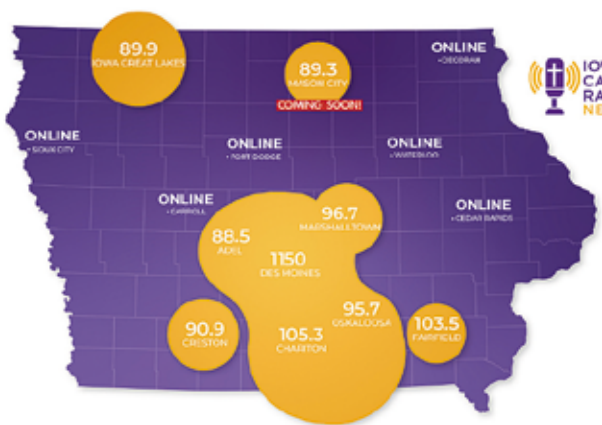
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Bishops advocate on migration, education, conscience rights and more



The bishops of Iowa visited the state Capitol Feb. 5 for the Iowa Catholic Conference legislative breakfast and meetings with legislative leadership.

Among the topics discussed were migration, education, black market abortion pills, and conscience rights for medical professionals.



Tom Chapman

the state Department of Education for funding. We're glad the bill also keeps the current program in place where there is good collaboration and a contract between community providers and the public school district.

HF 278 – Support

The bill requires parental authorization for minors to create accounts on social media platforms.

International aid stopped

All U.S. foreign aid is still under review, impacting our most vulnerable sisters and brothers around the world. According to Catholic Relief Services, the administration issued an exception for lifesaving humanitarian assistance, but organizations are currently not able to access money to implement lifesaving programs.

Please continue to email your members of Congress, asking them to engage with the administration to ensure these critical programs can operate during the review process and ensure organizations can access the necessary funds to deliver lifesaving work.

Tom Chapman is the executive director of the Iowa Catholic Conference, the official public policy voice of the bishops of Iowa.

Bills advancing

Intermittent bad weather hasn't stopped work at the state Capitol. Last week, several bills were advanced by a subcommittee last week with the support of the Iowa Catholic Conference:

- Both the Senate and House versions of the bill (HSB 139 and SF 220) providing needed conscience protections for medical professionals. Thanks to the Catholic Medical Association for putting us in touch with three medical students from Des Moines University, who did a great job of testifying.

- HSB 140, a bill with incentives to encourage people on probation to work and get more education so their time on probation can end sooner.

- HSB 141 allows victims of domestic violence or sexual violence to terminate a lease early if they provide landlords documentation of harm. This would reduce an economic barrier to seeking safety, so victims are not stuck with an abuser.

- SF 207, the Senate's version of the proposal requiring age verification for adult websites.

- SSB 1057, a joint resolution proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the State of Iowa which would allow a child to testify on video rather than face-to-face in court with the person accused of abusing them.

The House Education Com-

mittee passed HF 391, which requires schools to present a video to students that shows prenatal human development throughout every stage of pregnancy. A similar bill has already passed the Senate Education Committee with the support of the ICC.

The Senate Education Committee passed SF 288, which requires state universities to make reasonable accommodations to students who are pregnant or who have recently given birth.

Newly-introduced bills

HSB 145 – Support

The governor's preschool and child care bill would allow community providers such as Catholic preschools to apply directly to

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On Prayer

By Monica Pugh



There is no single way to pray but all prayer requires the will, or desire, to pray. When we pray we speak to God calling on the Holy Spirit for guidance asking everything in Jesus' name. Prayer asks us to surrender our whole heart to God because prayer comes from our hearts.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux says, "For me, prayer is a burst from my heart, it is a simple glance thrown toward heaven, a cry of thanksgiving and love in times of trial as well as in times of joy." St. Thérèse teaches us about prayer and reveals the deep hidden emotions of her heart and soul in this short sentence. She looks to heaven and hints at her words as she cries to God in times of joy and suffering. Her prayers use her mind, body, and soul to surrender her will to be in communion with God's will.

Surrendering our whole heart requires humility. In Romans 8:26 we read, "We do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. The foundation of prayer is humility as we are beggars before God. My prayers often begged God to do as I asked but not necessarily as a humble beggar seeking his will. I just wanted my prayers to be answered the way I thought was best for me. When I come in humility seeking his will, he shows me my trials are times of growth and can be filled with thanksgiving.

The Catholic dinner prayer, "Bless us, O Lord", is a prayer we all know and say in thanksgiving for our food. As someone begins the familiar words, we quickly join so we can eat or pause if we've already taken a bite. But a closer look shows us the prayer is full of humility by asking for God's blessings, giving praise, and expressing gratitude.

This prayer is found in a book dating back to the eighth century called the Gelasian Sacramentary linked to Pope Gelasius I. Praying before meals or asking for blessings over food was well documented in the Jewish faith and early Christian traditions. We ask God to bless the food and the people present for having received them giving praise to God through Jesus Christ. This prayer shows we depend on God for our lives and every gift given to us as we ask for his blessing on the food and people present. This prayer is acknowledgment of God's grace given through the cross. That is why we call it grace. But, I have often prayed it with speed and little humility.

As we say grace, think of St. Thérèse's words and humbly bow your head before you pray, "Bless us O Lord, and these thy gifts we are about to receive from thy bounty through Christ our Lord, Amen." Recite each word from your heart in surrender to God and hope for his blessings. Receive this beautiful gift of God's grace with humble posture and feel his mercy wash over you.

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We're on mission wherever we are

In mid-January, I flew halfway around the world for a life-changing adventure.

Several of us joined Father Ray McHenry on his 10th mission trip to South Africa with Urbandale-based Blessman International. Each time he goes, Father brings folks from St. Francis of Assisi Parish in West Des Moines and others with him to serve the poor.

The following are some thoughts from the dusty road in a poor area of the Limpopo Province.

There's a retreat center near Moko-pane, South Africa that had a Stations of the Cross path up a mountainside. The stations needed to be replaced. We spent three hours putting the new crosses made of railroad ties up on a small platform setting, screwing into the metal platform and cross, and bolting the cross in place. The crosses were heavy, it was a hot day, and we were tired.

We also felt fulfilled. There was something spiritually powerful about putting

Guest Column

By Anne Marie Cox



into place 14 symbols of the ultimate gift of love.

Our missionary group went to the only orphanage for babies 0-2 years old in the province.

I sat down by two boys, each one wanted a particular teething toy. A caregiver took one of the boys away and the other looked up at me. I carefully picked him up and put him on my knee, softly singing "You are my sunshine" just as I did for my own children.

Hugging and holding young children is critical to their development of a sense of safety and security. His little head got heavier and he rested it on my chest. The

teething toy fell and as I listened to the director of the orphanage share her story, the baby slept in my arms. Such a beautiful child.

There was a lot of love shared in that play yard.

May God's grace be upon each of the children and caregivers at that orphanage and every childcare place. May they feel God's loving embrace through those who care for the littlest among us.

In came a grandma. She'd been sitting outside, shaded by a big tree in the front yard of this little country church. She spoke little English. Slowly, using a cane, she walked over to me and sat on the hard wooden bench. She wore threadbare clothing, a sweater over her top and a skirt.

I gave her a pair of eyeglass cheaters with no arms, asked her to put the pair up to her eyes, look at a sign on the wall, and see if she could read it. She shook her head. No. We tried another pair. Better but not good. We keep going until she got to a pair

that was pretty strong. She put them up to her face and the corners of her mouth spread into a big smile. In a universal language, I clapped and we laughed a little. Now she can see.

And now we can see. What we take for granted in America, a pair of glasses, can transform one's quality of life. You could say we gave away 130 pairs of glasses. Or, you could say we improved the quality of life for 130 impoverished people.

Off the beaten path, there's a small, 90-acre farm. You can see the chicken houses as you drive by and the goats welcome visitors with a "baaaah."

The fingerprints of generous Iowa companies are all over this farm as they help Dr. Jim "Doc" Blessman feed 50,000 children in South Africa.

It's just a start. "My goal is to feed 100,000 children!" he said.

The family owning Bike World in Des

Continued on pag 14

Vatican II renewed cooperation, appreciation of Christian traditions

Q. I know that Vatican II was an ecumenical council. I'm wondering what the goal of ecumenism is. Can you help me understand this?

A. I'LL TRY. IT'S A HARD word to pronounce, and it's not in our everyday conversation, is it?

The goal or purpose of ecumenism is to bring people together. There have been Twenty-one ecumenical councils in the history of the Church, beginning with the First Council of Nicaea (325), and ending with the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).

When Pope John XXIII convened Vatican II, he wanted to gather Church leaders from around the world to discuss the important issues of the day. Over four years, bishops and scholars prayed and studied those concerns, and they issued four constitutions, nine decrees and three declarations.

The four constitutions are: (1) the Dog-



Father John Ludwig

I've Been Wondering...

matic Constitution on the Church; (2) the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation; (3) the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy; and (4) the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

In addition to the bishops present, there were also observers from religious congregations and other religions. The goal of such gatherings is to search for the best ways to live the faith of the gospel and to share insights and procedures that address the needs of the age.

Pope Francis often calls for us to be "synodal" – to listen to and share with one another how we can best follow the Lord.

On the local level we see that same kind of sharing with the formation of diocesan synods and councils and parish councils. It's a way of sharing the love of God and the work of the Church. One especially significant blessing of the council was the renewed cooperation and appreciation of the many Christian denominations.

Q. When do you call for a priest for the sacrament of the sick?

A. YES, WHEN? WELL, IT USED to be that when sick people saw the priest coming, they thought to themselves, "I'm a goner!"

We needn't wait until someone is practically drawing his or her last breath. To be seriously ill doesn't necessarily mean to be on death's doorstep.

Before the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the sacrament of the sick (then referred to as extreme unction) was conferred ONLY ONCE in a person's lifetime.

In fact, that's why some referred to the sacrament as the "Last Rites." The faithful may now be anointed more than just one time. Many parishes celebrate the anointing of the sick at weekend Masses at different times throughout the year. When in doubt, make the request to your pastor.

Father John Ludwig is a retired priest of the Diocese of Des Moines. Questions can be sent to him at communications@dmdiocese.org or c/o Communications Office, 601 Grand Ave., Des Moines, IA 50309.

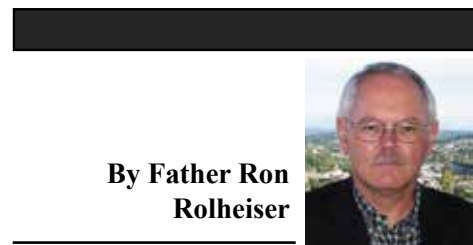
Our restless selves

During the last years of his life, Thomas Merton lived in a hermitage outside a monastery, hoping to find more solitude in his life. But solitude is an illusive thing and he found it was forever escaping him.

Then one morning he sensed that for a moment he had found it. However, what he experienced was a surprise to him. Solitude, it turns out, is not some altered state of consciousness or some heightened sense of God and the transcendent in our lives. Solitude, as he experienced it, was simply being peacefully inside your own skin, gratefully aware of and peacefully breathing in the immense richness inside your own life. Solitude consists in sleeping in intimacy with your own experience, at peace there, aware of its riches and wonder.

But that's not easy. It's rare. Rarely do we find ourselves at peace with the present moment inside us. Why? Because that's the way we are built. We are overcharged for this world. When God put us into this world, as the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes tells us, God put "timelessness" into our hearts and because of that we don't make easy peace with our lives.

We read this, for example, in the famous passage about the rhythm of the seasons in the Book of Ecclesiastes. There is a time and a season for everything, we are told: A time to be born, and a time to



By Father Ron Rolheiser

die; a time to plant, and a time to gather in what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal ... and so the text goes on. Then, after listing this natural rhythm of time and the seasons, the author ends with these words: God has made everything suitable for its own time but has put timelessness into the human heart so that human beings are out of sync with the rhythms of the seasons from beginning to end.

The Hebrew word used here to express "timelessness" is Olam, a word suggesting "eternity" and "transcendence". Some English translations put it this way: God has put a sense of past and future into our hearts. Perhaps that captures it best in terms of how we generally experience this in our lives. We know from experience how difficult it is to be at peace inside the present moment because the past and the future won't leave us alone. They are forever coloring the present.

The past haunts us with half-forgotten lullabies and melodies that trigger mem-

ories about love found and lost, about wounds that have never healed, and with inchoate feelings of nostalgia, regret, and wanting to cling to something that once was. The past is forever sowing restlessness into the present moment.

And the future? It impales itself into the present as well, looming as promise and threat, forever demanding our attention, forever sowing anxiety into our lives, and forever stripping us of the capacity to simply rest inside the present.

The present is forever colored by obsessions, heartaches, headaches, and anxieties that have little to do with people we are actually sitting with at table.

Philosophers and poets have given various names to this. Plato called it "a madness that comes from the gods"; Hindu poets have called it "a nostalgia for the infinite"; Shakespeare speaks of "immortal longings", and Augustine, in perhaps the most famous naming of them all, called it an incurable restlessness that God has put into the human heart to keep it from finding a home in something less than the infinite and eternal – "You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

And so, it's rare to be peacefully present to our own lives, restful inside of our own skins. But this "torment", as T.S. El-

iot, once named it, has a God-given intentionality, a divine purpose.

Henri Nouwen, in a remarkable passage both names the struggle and its purpose: "Our life is a short time in expectation, a time in which sadness and joy kiss each other at every moment. There is a quality of sadness that pervades all the moments of our life. It seems that there is no such thing as a clear-cut pure joy, but that even in the most happy moments of our existence we sense a tinge of sadness. In every satisfaction, there is an awareness of limitations. In every success, there is the fear of jealousy. Behind every smile, there is a tear. In every embrace, there is loneliness. In every friendship, distance. And in all forms of light, there is the knowledge of surrounding darkness. But this intimate experience in which every bit of life is touched by a bit of death can point us beyond the limits of our existence. It can do so by making us look forward in expectation to that day when our hearts will be filled with perfect joy, a joy that no one shall take away from us."

Our restless hearts keep us from falling asleep to the divine fire inside us.

Oblate Father Ron Rolheiser is a theologian, teacher, and award-winning author.

Pope hospitalized, therapy adjusted after tests

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- On his fourth day in Rome's Gemelli hospital, Pope Francis was without fever and devoted some time to work, the Vatican said.

"The Holy Father continues to be apyretic (without fever) and is continuing the prescribed therapy," the Vatican's evening bulletin said Feb. 17. "His clinical condition is stationary."

"This morning he received the Eucharist and then devoted himself to some work activities and reading texts," the bulletin said. An official said a staff member from the Vatican Secretariat of State, which coordinates much of the work of the Roman Curia, likely brought the texts to the pope.

"Pope Francis is touched by the many messages of affection and closeness that he continues to receive in these hours; in particular he wishes to address his thanks to those who are hospitalized at this time, for the affection and love they express through drawings and messages of good wishes; he prays for them and asks that they pray for him," the official bulletin said.

The Gemelli pediatric oncology and neurosurgery ward is located on the 10th floor of the hospital next to the suite of rooms reserved for the pope, his aides and his security.

Earlier Feb. 17 the Vatican had said test results that arrived that morning showed that the pope is suffering from a "polymicrobial

infection of the respiratory tract, which required a further modification of his therapy." Polymicrobial means multiple pathogens are involved. Doctors had also adjusted the pope's medication after tests Feb. 15.

"All the tests performed to date indicate a complex clinical picture that will require an appropriate hospital stay," said the bulletin Feb. 17. Matteo Bruni, director of the Vatican press office, declined to guess how long the pope would be hospitalized, but he announced that the pope's weekly general audience Feb. 19 was canceled.

The 88-year-old pope was admitted to the Gemelli hospital Feb. 14 after more than a week of suffering from bronchitis and difficulty breathing. He was diagnosed with a respiratory tract infection.

Bruni had told reporters earlier Feb. 17 that the pope slept well, woke up and had breakfast and was reading newspapers and continuing his therapy. He was in a good mood, he said.

The Vatican has not said what will happen with the Mass and the ordination of permanent deacons the pope was scheduled to preside over Feb. 23 as part of the Jubilee of Deacons. The Prefecture of the Papal Household, which organizes many of the pope's meetings, reportedly canceled appointments scheduled through Feb. 22.

Italian newspapers reported Feb. 17 that Pope Francis had



CNS photo/Pablo Esparza

Votive candles, including some bearing a photo of Pope Francis, are seen on the base of a statue of St. John Paul II outside Rome's Gemelli hospital Feb. 15.

an aide phone Holy Family Parish in Gaza his first two nights in the hospital to continue to check on the priests, religious and hundreds of families taking shelter there. The pope has been calling the parish every evening for months.

"The pope called us Friday and Saturday; he was in a good mood, his voice a little tired, but he wanted to know how we were," said an unnamed official at the parish who spoke to the Italian TGcom24 television station. "An aide handed him the phone and he was able to talk to us."

However, the official said, on Feb. 16 "he rested, and we knew

he wouldn't call."

Father Gabriel Romanelli, pastor of the parish, later told Vatican News, "We heard his voice. It is true, he is more tired. He himself said, 'I have to take care of myself.'"

Then on Feb. 16, "Pope Francis sent a written message to my cellphone," Father Romanelli told Vatican News. Parishioners

knew the pope would not call, but they did not expect the message, which thanked parishioners for their prayers and conveyed his blessing.

The pope, who underwent surgery in 1957 to remove part of one of his lungs after suffering a severe respiratory infection, has been susceptible to colds and bouts of bronchitis.

"Making It Personal With Bishop Joensen"
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Why wait for fish fry season?



Bishop William Joensen reads a book to students after they had a meal at the Del Cramer Children's Campus in South Africa.

Continued from page 2

after-school program that feeds upwards of 200 students had not received their shipment of wild game sourced from international tourist hunters who first flex their "license to kill" and then donate the meat to a number of area schools. And so the creative kitchen staff made due preparing a meal of chicken feet and "pap," a cornmeal polenta-type mixture that is a popular staple in South Africa. The children gladly feasted on their practically meatless meal served by our mission team, who were not exactly brimming with hunger to fix themselves a plate. But we were able to engage and laugh with them afterward as we served up stories inspired by faith in a God who takes on flesh in fellowship, worship, and fun.

It is children, such as the ones we encountered in South Africa,

who will no doubt spring to mind in the midst of my own Friday abstinence, in solidarity of spirit and hope that our world will be ever more united in our common desire to be at peace with one another, and that we all have a chance to flourish on a human scale and in personal holiness. I want to be grateful not only on Fridays, but every day, for the simplest of pleasures, for the food that nourishes our bodies, all the while obedient to the promptings of grace that restores the balance of life in everyone's favor.

On mission

Continued from page 12

Moines helped purchase the farm 10 years ago. Hy-Vee helped drill water wells. Hy-Line International recently gave the farm a second batch of about 1,600 chickens that are producing eggs for the impoverished. The Vermeer Corporation Foundation funded a hay baler. The Iowa Rotary supported an education campaign so local schools could learn how to manage a garden, then they received the tools to start one for their children.

Doc is a visionary with big goals. But as he prepares to celebrate his 80th birthday, he can't achieve those goals by himself. What I find most interesting is not just the impressive work he's done - and it's extensive by any measure - but how the Spirit has gifted him with the ability to bring good people together to do great things.

Doc says we're all called to mission (I'm sure I've heard something like that from Pope Francis). He encouraged us to be the hands and feet of Christ in our families, in our communities, and beyond if we can.

If you feel moved to go on a mission trip with Blessman International or support their work, go to BlessmanInternational.org. Doc and his family are the real deal. They're changing lives and we can help.

Time to Apply for CTO Tuition Grants

In the Diocese of Des Moines, Catholic Tuition Organization (CTO) tuition grants are applied first to tuition expenses. The first qualification for families to receive tuition assistance is income. Compare your income with the "maximum income" for your family size as shown in the chart below. If your household income is LESS THAN the amount shown, you meet the 2025 financial eligibility requirement for the CTO or funds available through the Diocesan Tuition Assistance (DTA) established with the Ignite Capital Campaign.



*Family Size	**CTO MAXIMUM Income	**DTA Income
2	\$ 84,600	\$ 84,601 - \$105,750
3	\$106,600	\$106,601 - \$133,250
4	\$128,600	\$128,601 - \$160,750
5	\$150,600	\$150,601 - \$188,250
6	\$172,600	\$172,601 - \$215,750
7	\$194,600	\$194,601 - \$243,250
8	\$216,600	\$216,601 - \$270,750

Add \$22,000 for each additional dependent

Add \$27,500 for each additional dependent

* Family size includes parent(s)/guardian(s) and total number of dependents plus others living in household
 ** Families/households are eligible for tuition assistance if their total income is at or below the above listed income levels as reported on Line 9 of federal income tax form

Applications will be accepted for all Catholic schools in the Diocese of Des Moines. For more information, contact CTO at 515-237-5010.



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¿Por qué Esperar la Temporada del Pescado Frito?

Antes de ingresar al seminario, me uní junto a otros compañeros en la Universidad de Iowa a la Asociación Histórica de Medicina. Se nos invitó a tomar parte en su banquete anual en un buen restaurante local un viernes en la noche durante Cuaresma. Cuando nos sirvieron el plato principal, los meseros trajeron los platos con enormes bistecs ribeye. Un par de compañeros míos católicos y yo nos volteamos a ver curiosamente unos a otros; uno de nosotros preguntó si tenían alguna alternativa de pescado o platillo sin carne y cuando nos dijeron que ‘no,’ devoramos nuestros bistecs.

Pueden estar en desacuerdo con nuestra decisión calificándola como una ofensa contra la serie disciplina cuaresmal de la abstinencia de carne los viernes y como un cúmulo de desobediencia contra Jesús y la ley de la Iglesia, y pueden tener razón. Pero para mí, era simplemente un asunto no tanto de antojo de carne de res sino más bien un sentido de no desperdiciar algo tan caro y que requirió tanto trabajo. Una vaca entregó su vida para consumo humano, y hubiera sido una gran vergüenza que terminara en la basura.

Me viene a la mente esta experiencia tanto porque se aproxima rápidamente la Cuaresma (el Miércoles de Ceniza es el 5 de marzo), y por algunos comentarios que hizo un colega mío en noviembre pasado en nuestra reunión anual de otoño de los obispos, en el Comité de Justicia Doméstica y Desarrollo Humano de los Obispos de los Estados Unidos, el Arzobispo de Filadelfia de la Iglesia Greco Católica Ucraniana, Borys Gudziak. Al reconocer que el 2025 es tanto un año de Jubileo ordinario para la Iglesia Universal y el 10mo aniversario de la publicación de la carta encíclica del Papa Francisco Laudato Si, “Sobre el Cuidado de la Casa Común,” el Arzobispo Gudziak llamó al regreso de la tradición católica de abstenernos de carne los viernes, pero no solamente durante la Cuaresma, sino que durante todo el año. Él no pidió a los obispos que aprobaran una nueva legislación disciplinaria

que obligara a los fieles (como lo hicieron los obispos católicos de Inglaterra y Gales en el 2011), pero ofreció razones tanto espirituales como morales del por qué la práctica de abstinencia es aún más relevante, apropiada y bienvenida en nuestro contexto actual.

Aunque aún no lo observo perfectamente, me encuentro convencido y obligado a responder al llamado del Arzobispo Gudziak con mayor firmeza y propósito. Al “encontrarle el sentido” de esta forma, estaría honrando el propósito de los obispos de los Estados Unidos cuando retiraron la obligación de abstinencia los viernes luego de la conclusión del Concilio Vaticano Segundo, cuando exhortaron que “la comunidad católica seguirá absteniéndose de carne ordinariamente por voluntad propia igual que lo hicimos anteriormente en obediencia a la ley de la iglesia.”

Conozco gente que sigue acogiendo rigurosos ayunos y abstinencia todos los miércoles y viernes, de acuerdo con costumbres de los primeros cristianos, quienes solamente consumen pan y agua y quienes toman solamente una comida completa en esos días. Ellos son profetas al estilo de Jesús y de Juan Bautista, quienes acogieron períodos de ayuno radical como un método de solidaridad e intercesión por una humanidad pecadora; también buscaban fortalecerse espiritualmente contra las fuerzas que nos tientan hacia la pereza y la autoindulgencia. Los malignos impostores nos dicen que somos los amos de nuestra persona, en cuerpo y alma, que debemos redefinir a nuestro favor las líneas de consumo y del equilibrio de la relación entre Dios, la comunidad humana y la naturaleza.

En su Muerte en la Cruz, Jesús expone las causas fundamentales de la devastación de la pobreza, hambre, guerra y corrupción ambiental que son resultado de nuestra esclavitud ante el poder, el placer y el orgullo. El abstenerse de carne los viernes reconociendo la pasión de Cristo intensifica nuestra identidad con nuestro Señor crucificado; es una forma

de penitencia que energiza nuestro deseo de seguir a Jesús como su discípulo negándonos a nosotros mismos y tomando nuestra cruz personal todos los días de la semana (ver Lucas 9:23).

La abstinencia cataliza nuestra cooperación con Jesús en su misión de salvar al mundo de sí mismo. El renunciar a la carne los viernes es una forma modesta de templanza que se impregna en otros aspectos y en otras virtudes morales cardinales, incluyendo la castidad y la fortaleza. Nos llama a echar una mirada hacia afuera y hacia arriba más allá de nosotros. En las palabras del Obispo Erik Varden, un autor espiritual noruego y monje Trapista, el abstenerse de carne es una forma con sabor eucarístico de “levantemos el corazón,” que recupera la belleza de la intimidad corporal que está tejida profundamente a nuestro llamado universal a la santidad.

La abstinencia nos ayuda a recuperar el sentido y mantener el rumbo en nuestro peregrinar comunitario hacia el cielo; es un acto de esperanza. De nuevo Varden: “La Iglesia, seguramente, está llamada a ofrecer la brújula por medio de la cual la gente de buena voluntad para que se puedan orientar en tiempos de confusión, para no correr siguiendo a las multitudes como un viejo y jadeante perro que trata de mantenerse al ritmo de la cacería” (Castidad págs. 115-16).

La abstinencia nos ayuda a ver el mundo como es, no como la fantasía que esperan nuestros apetitos desordenados. En Laudato Si, el Papa Francisco alaba la espiritualidad cristiana inspirada en el Evangelio que es tanto contemplativa como simple en su centro. Porque, como lo dice el Santo Padre, cuando “reconocemos que nuestro propio cuerpo nos sitúa en una relación directa con el ambiente y con los demás seres vivientes,” podremos “aceptar nuestros propios cuerpos como don de Dios y aceptar el mundo entero como regalo del Padre y casa común” (LS n. 155).

Este estilo de simple gratitud no es una baja de intensidad de la vida. “sino todo lo contrario, es

una forma de vivir plenamente.” Porque son aquellos “los que dejan de picotear aquí y allá, buscando siempre lo que no tienen,” quienes pueden “experimentan lo que es valorar cada persona y cada cosa.” La abstinencia (junto con el ayuno) nos ayuda a “disminuir las necesidades insatisfechas” liberándonos para “desarrollar otros placeres y se encuentra satisfacción en los encuentros fraternos, en el servicio, en el despliegue de los carismas, en la música y el arte, en el contacto con la naturaleza, en la oración” (LS n. 223).

Muchas parroquias de nuestra Diócesis están justificadamente orgullosas de las cenas de pescado frita que auspician en los viernes de Cuaresma. Promovidas en parte por la disciplina de la abstinencia cuaresmal que nos lleva a buscar alternativas a la carne, se han convertido más en momentos en que podemos encontrar el placer de los encuentros que tenemos con amigos, familiares y nuevos vecinos. ¡La abstinencia es verdaderamente una ocasión de presencia mutua echa realidad! El hecho de preparar y servir las comidas es una forma de construir comunidad entre diferentes generaciones que da fruto a un sentido más profundo de conexión y de solidaridad que trascienden el precio que llena el plato. Idealmente, las cenas de pescado frito de las parroquias no es un asunto aislado que simplemente refuerza círculos de relaciones existentes, ni promueve una mentalidad de “para llevar” en donde se pierde la oportunidad de cultivar conexiones con Cristo (aunque hay ciertamente razones justificables para recoger comida para los confinados en casa o para personas vulnerables que evaden el clima o el estar entre multitudes, o alguna madre soltera tratando de mantener a los hijos en orden.)

Algunos de ustedes saben que este pasado mes de enero me uní al jubileo Padre Ray McHenry, algunos miembros de la parroquia de San Francisco de Asís en West Des Moines y otros amigos cristianos a un viaje de misión a la Provincia Limpopo en Sudáfrica, cerca de la ciudad de Mokopane.

Este viaje fue el décimo del Padre Ray bajo el auspicio de Ministerios Internacionales Blessman, cuyos “padrinos” fundadores son el Dr. Jim Blessman y su esposa Beth. Junto con su equipo y varios acompañantes, incluyendo la Caravana de Esperanza y Meals from the Heartland, alimentan a 50,000 niños diariamente.

Son demasiadas las experiencias para poder contarlas, pero me surge una experiencia una tarde en la escuela Del Cramer fundada por los Blessmans. El programa después de escuela que alimenta a más de 200 estudiantes no ha recibido su envío de caza silvestre que reciben de turistas cazadores internacionales quienes ejercen su “licencia para matar” y luego donan la carne a varias escuelas en el área. Entonces, el creativo personal de la cocina comenzó a preparar un platillo de patas de pollo y “pap,” un tipo de mezcla de polenta y fécula de maíz que es muy popular en Sudáfrica. Los niños devoraron con gusto en su comida sin carne que le sirvió nuestro equipo misionero, quienes no necesariamente estaban tan hambrientos como para preparar un plato para ellos mismos. Pero pudimos conectarnos y reír con ellos después al conversar en hermandad, alabanza y diversión sobre historias inspiradas por la fe en un Dios quien asume forma de carne.

Son niños como éstos que nos encontramos en Sudáfrica quienes sin duda me saltan a la mente en medio de mi abstinencia de los viernes, en solidaridad de espíritu y esperanza de que nuestro mundo vuelva a estar unido en nuestro deseo común de estar en paz los unos con los otros, y que tengamos todos la oportunidad de prosperar en una escala humana y en santidad personal. Quiero ser agradecido, no solamente los viernes, pero todos los días, del más simple de los placeres, la comida que nutre nuestros cuerpos, mientras nos mantenemos obedientes a los llamados a la gracia que restauran el equilibrio en la vida y en favor de todos.

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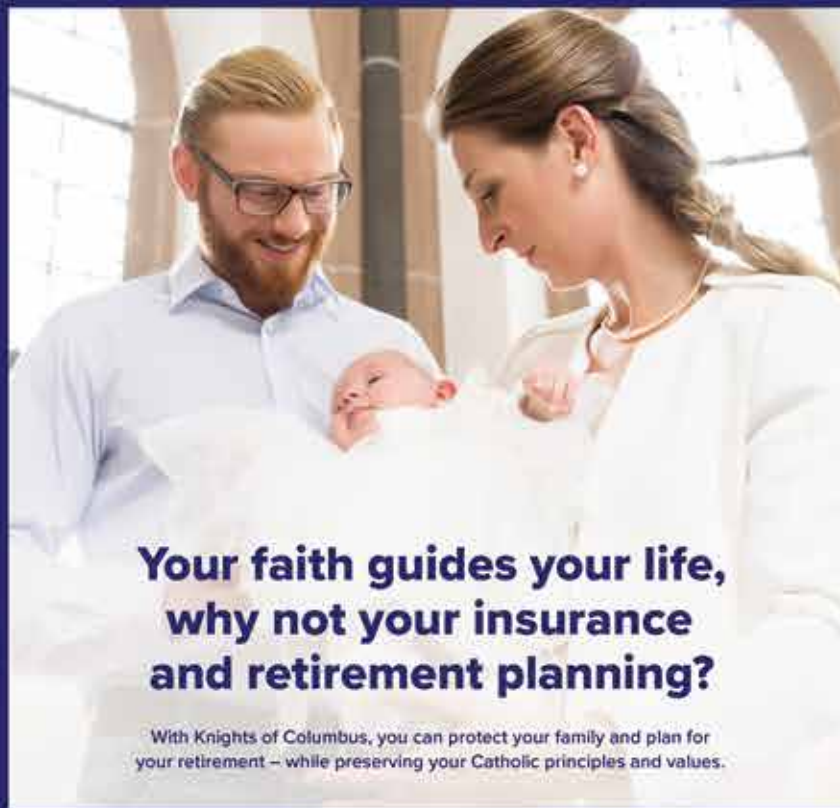


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