Christmas art ‘extraordinary’ in many ways

Emily Haws, a seventh-grader at St. Brendan Catholic School in Ormond Beach, was named the winner of the Diocese of Orlando’s first Christmas card art contest. Bishop John Noonan announced the winner and three runners-up Nov. 25.

Emily’s winning entry, “In the Manger,” was created with India ink and watercolor, and depicted the baby Jesus in a manger reaching out to a nearby donkey. The artwork was used on the cover of Bishop Noonan’s 2014 Christmas card and the cover of the Florida Catholic.

Click on the ORLANDO DIOCESE above for more on this story.

Artwork created by Olivia Marie Pickering, an eighth-grader from St. Teresa Catholic School, Titusville.

Vatican invites farmworker to speak

Far from the orange groves and vegetable fields, a local farmworker stood before Pope Francis and people from around the world gathered for a three-day meeting in Rome Oct. 27-29, and spoke about her life as a migrant farmworker.

Elvire François addressed participants attending the World Meeting of Popular Movements called by Pope Francis and organized by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and the Pontifical Academy of Science.

Click on the PALM BEACH DIOCESE above for more on this story.

Elvire François of Fellsmere and Notre Dame Mission in Fort Pierce stands by her town’s community garden. She spoke in Rome to represent the face of today’s farmworker. (LINDA REEVES | FC)

Parishes honor patroness of the Americas

Across the Diocese of Venice, nearly every parish which has a Spanish-language Mass held some form of commemoration to Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Patroness of the Americas was honored with celebrations at St. Michael in Wachula, Holy Cross in Palmetto, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Naples, St. Leo in Bonita Springs, Our Lady of Guadalupe in Immokalee, Jesus the Worker in Fort Myers, St. Jude in Sarasota, and several others. Our Lady of Guadalupe is one of the most revered patronesses. Her feast day, Dec. 12.

Click on the VENICE DIOCESE above for more on this story.

A procession honoring Our Lady of Guadalupe takes place prior to a Mass at Pioneer Park in Zolfo Springs Dec. 7. (BOB REDDY | FC)

Parishes honor patroness of the Americas

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Click on the VENICE DIOCESE above for more on this story.

Elvire François of Fellsmere and Notre Dame Mission in Fort Pierce stands by her town’s community garden. She spoke in Rome to represent the face of today’s farmworker. (LINDA REEVES | FC)
As we come to the manger to welcome the Savior, may we glorify and praise God during this Christmas season and always.

Most Reverend John Noonan
Bishop of Orlando

‘In the Manger’ artwork created by Emily Haws, seventh grader, St. Brendan Catholic School, Ormond Beach.
Student Christmas art ‘extraordinary’ in many ways

LINDA CALDWELL
of the Florida Catholic staff

ORLANDO | Emily Haws, a seventh-grader at St. Brendan Catholic School in Ormond Beach, was named the winner of the Diocese of Orlando’s first Christmas card art contest. Bishop John Noonan announced the winner and three runners-up Nov. 25.

Emily’s winning entry, “In the Manger,” was created with India ink and watercolor, and depicted the baby Jesus in a manger reaching out to a nearby donkey. The artwork was used on the cover of Bishop Noonan’s 2014 Christmas card.

“All of the art submitted was extraordinary in its expression of faith. Ms. Haws’ art captures the starkness of the place of the birth of the Christ Child and the precious beauty of God’s wondrous gift of life bestowed upon us — Emmanuel, God with us,” said Carol Brinati, chancellor for administration, who served on the committee reviewing entries.

Bishop Noonan congratulated Emily, writing to her in a letter, “I have selected the beautiful image of the baby Jesus with a donkey in the stable for my Christmas card. You have depicted the Nativity season for the glory of God. I pray with gratitude for you and your family. May the Light of Christ illumine your heart this Advent season.”

The contest was open to students in grades six through 12, who attend a Catholic school or parish. Students were invited to create an original work of art using various art mediums. Art created by the entrants depicted the following Scripture passages:

- “She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger (Lk 2:7).
- “The angel said to them, “I proclaim to you good news of great joy” (Lk 2:10).
- “For today in the city of David, a Savior has been born” (Lk 2:11).
- You will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger (Lk 2:12).
- “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace” (Lk 2:14).

In all, 72 students representing 12 Catholic schools throughout the diocese showcased their talents. Claiming the runner-up spots were: Jack Denning, a seventh-grader at St. Mary Magdalen Catholic School in Altamonte Springs; Olivia Pickering, an eighth-grader from St. Teresa Catholic School in Titusville for her watercolor piece; and Veronica Szoke for her art created with ballpoint pen, colored pencils and paint.
PERSONAL REFLECTION
Called to serve those ‘living on the edge’

FATHER FRED RUSE
Special to the Florida Catholic

“In my view, one of the most common diseases... today is the loneliness... of those who have no connection with others.” — Pope Francis in his address to the European Parliament, Nov. 25, 2014.

With more than 30 years of experience reaching out to people living on the edge, I find that the loneliness Pope Francis refers to is a serious problem. This isolation affects more than just the individuals affected; it has far-reaching consequences for society as a whole.

We live in a world where the face of the poor and the marginalized often goes unrecognized. Yet, the Church teaches that everyone has an inherent dignity that should be respected and nurtured, no matter their circumstances.

Ministry helps Catholics find their way back home

LINDA CALDWELL
of the Florida Catholic staff

WILDWOOD | While on a recent trip to Fatima in Portugal, Shari Munro began to think about her faith. Born and raised Catholic, Munro drifted away from the Church as a young woman in the late 1960s. She wondered, “How does the Church see me now?” Her curiosity led her to St. Vincent de Paul Parish in the town of Wildwood.

“My whole goal is to let them know that they are loved by God and God is all knowing and all understanding and that you can get back in touch with the Lord,” Deacon Dan Pallo said. “We are inviting them back, telling them that they are welcomed and loved. They wouldn’t be here if they didn’t have that little feeling. The gift of the Holy Spirit is definitely within these people. They would not be here if weren’t for the Holy Spirit.”

This was among the most wonderful moments of his ministry as a deacon. Munro has been found the gift of the Holy Spirit. “It is a blessing to see that at work, and it actually happens quite a bit,” Deacon Pallo said.

As Munro prepared for her first class, she said she was eager to see where the journey would take her.

“In exploring other faiths, that old saying, ‘Once a Catholic, always a Catholic,’ popped in my mind,” she said. “It is so true. My faith is ingrained in me. This is where I want to be.”

These children from Orlando’s sister Diocese of San Juan de la Maguana in the Dominican Republic are among the people who are served by the educational and pastoral outreach of Diocese of Orlando missioners. (COURTESY)

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Florida Catholic

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YOUR ORLANDO COMMUNITY

The ”good news” for all of us is found in Zachariah’s song (Lk 1:69-76): “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God by which the daybreak from on high will visit us to shine on those who sit in darkness and death’s shadow, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

Father Fred Ruse is a priest of the Diocese of Orlando serving in the Dominican Republic.
Refugees experience first Christmas in US

TERESA PETERSON
Special to the Florida Catholic

ORLANDO | As 15-year-old Juan Rodriguez tries talk with teen who doesn’t speak English, the two discover a common interest — “soccer ball.” With a smile and a nod, the commonality forms a friendship.

Juan is part of the St. Isaac Jogues youth group that helped organize an early Christmas party for refugees who have recently arrived in Central Florida. The refugees are from Cuba, Haiti, Iraq and Colombia. They have left terrifying and tragic conditions to be here for an opportunity at a new life.

“It’s fun to see the smile on their faces,” Juan said. “It’s reminds us what Christmas is about — giving.”

In addition to giving up his Saturday morning to be at the party, and bringing a present to give to a child he has never met, he said he is giving the refugees “a warm welcome.” Juan said the experience of preparing for this event and attending is a way to live his faith.

“I’m very strong in my faith. I love my religion,” he said.

During the party, each child in attendance was called by name to receive a gift from Santa. From a newborn baby cradled in her mother’s arms to a teen taller than jolly old St. Nicholas, all the children were recognized and they all received a personalized gift and a message of love and acceptance.

The event was held at the headquarters for the Knights of Columbus Mrgr. Bishop Council 2112. The Knights prepared a breakfast of pancakes, pastries and scrambled eggs. Musicians from the St. Isaac Jogues youth group played Christmas carols and the mood was upbeat and joyful.

The Catholic Charities of Central Florida Office of Immigration and Refugee Services assists the Church in its mission of “welcoming the stranger” by providing various services targeted to the specific needs of the Central Florida immigrant community.

For more information visit www.cfjoc.org/refugee/home.
MELBOURNE | A cold, rainy day couldn’t stop more than 1,000 Brevard County Catholic school students from demonstrating their faith through community service Nov. 19. Students from nine schools joined together for a cooperative, countywide service day.

This event grew out of a school-wide project that began at Melbourne Central Catholic High School (MCC) four years ago. The concept was to have all the high school students go out into the community on the same school day and perform community service at a variety of locations, including senior citizen centers, food banks and homeless shelters.

“The idea was to help students look beyond themselves and see how they can impact the community as individuals and as a group,” said Daniel Ensell, MCC campus minister. “The day became such a success that the other Catholic schools in Brevard joined together this year.”

Nine Catholic schools participated in an extensive beach cleanup, including MCC’s freshman class along with middle school students from Ascension, Divine Mercy, St. Joseph, St. Teresa, St. Mary, Our Lady of Lourdes and Our Saviour, and every student at Holy Name of Jesus. Brevard County Catholic school students from nine schools joined together for a cooperative, countywide service day, which included the extensive beach cleanup.

The students enjoyed the opportunity of service while cleaning up the beach,” said Donna Witherspoon, principal of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School in Melbourne. “It was a memorable day for our students and I believe their experience will encourage them to become good stewards of the environment in the future.”

Aside from the beach cleanup, all MCC sophomores, juniors and seniors branched out to volunteer at 19 different locations, including Daily Bread, Genesis House, Children’s Home Society, senior centers and Catholic elementary schools, to perform many types of service.

All in all, the students contributed 3,450 hours of service in just one day. In addition, Brevard Catholic school students in kindergarten through fifth grade participated in a variety of environmentally focused projects at their respective schools, including recycling bottle caps to generate funding for wheelchairs for needy students, planting gardens, cleaning up trash from school and parish grounds, and water conservation projects.

“As members of the body of the Church, we are called to perform community service,” said Ensell. “Community service is so important because it gives our students exposure to the needs of the community and the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others.”

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Holy Name of Jesus Middle School students and teacher Mary MacDonald comb the beach for trash as part the Brevard County cleanup effort Nov. 19. More than 1,000 Brevard County Catholic school students from nine schools joined together for a cooperative, countywide service day, which included the extensive beach cleanup.

(PAM STIMPSON | FC)
Feast of the Holy Family is Dec. 28

LINDA CALDWELL
of the Florida Catholic staff

ORLANDO | Catholics throughout the world will honor the holiest of families — Jesus, Mary and Joseph — on Dec. 28, the feast of the Holy Family.

The feast celebrates the family life of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, who serve as a role model of all Christian families. It is observed the Sunday within the Octave of Christmas, that is, the Sunday between Christmas and the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God (New Year’s Day). In years that both celebrations fall on Sundays, the feast is observed Dec. 30.


In his Angelus on the feast of the Holy Family Dec. 29, 2013, Pope Francis reminded the faithful every Nativity scene shows Jesus together with his mother and St. Joseph in the grotto of Bethlehem.

“God wanted to be born into a human family. He wanted to have a mother and father like us,” Pope Francis said. “Today our gaze on the Holy Family lets us also be drawn into the simplicity of the life they led in Nazareth. It is an example that does our families great good, helping them increasingly to become communities of love and reconciliation, in which tenderness, mutual help, and mutual forgiveness is experienced.”

The Diocese of Orlando produced a video that encourages families to model their lives after the Holy Family. This is an excerpt from the video: “What kind of love does Jesus call us to witness? It is the kind of love God gives us freely and abundantly. It is the love that led Jesus Christ to the cross, and led Mary and Joseph to form a family despite the very real challenges they faced and the very real sacrifices they freely made out of love.”


Catholics thanked for their generosity, sacrifice

LINDA CALDWELL
of the Florida Catholic staff

ORLANDO | Because of the generosity of the faithful who contribute to the Archbishop’s Annual Appeal and Endowment Campaign, Prince of Peace Parish in Ormond Beach is able to serve more people living in poverty, facing hunger and homelessness. Donations enabled the parish to build a 6,000-square-foot facility for their social services ministry center and thrift shop, with all proceeds benefitting the parish outreach program.

Gretel Abad, parishioner and director of social services at Prince of Peace, thanked the benefactors at the annual Mass of Thanksgiving celebrat ed Nov. 15 by Bishop John Noonan at the Basilica of the National Shrine of Mary, Queen of the Universe in Orlando. Organized by the Catholic Foundation of Central Florida, the annual Mass of Thanksgiving is celebrated to honor those families who faithfully support Our Catholic Appeal and give to Alive in Christ.

Quoting from St. Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians, Abad said, “Whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he is decided in his heart, not reluctantly or out of compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (9:6-7).

“Thank you to all of you who cheerfully and generously donated to the Alive in Christ campaign,” Abad added.

Meghan Post, president of the Catholic Foundation of Central Florida echoed Abad’s gratitude. “I find this Mass particularly special because it gives me the opportunity to stand before you and say thank you for everything you do to share the love of Christ,” Post said to the congregation. “There is no question that you are indeed sharing Christ’s love in tremendous ways.”

Post said gifts made to Our Catholic Appeal this past year have allowed the diocese to support 35 men in formation for the priesthood and to strengthen its vocation discernment programs. In addition, 7 million pounds of food was given to hungry families through Catholic Charities of Central Florida.

She added parishioners embraced other stewardship opportunities as well throughout the year. Fourteen parishes and schools received a total of $1.2 million from estate plans, while a host of other families helped raise $1.7 million to support the construction of the new Catholic Campus Ministry Center at the University of Central Florida.

“I am eternally grateful to you for your help, for your generosity, for your sacrifice and for your gift,” she said. “I say thank you. I say gracias. I say merci beaucoup. But above all, I pray that God blesses you in your endeavors to serve and care for our brothers and sisters in need. So this day, as we come close to our Thanksgiving, I thank you and pray that the Lord will always bless you.”

Bishop John Noonan blesses the people as he leaves after the Mass of Thanksgiving. (FRANK WEBER | FC)
Married couples urged to be centered in Christ

Chris and Sarah Stratisch, from the Pope John Paul II Foundation for Life and Family, gave couples practical steps to incorporate more prayer into daily life. They emphasized that every moment is an opportunity for prayer and can be done by simply giving thanks for the safety return of a loved one. They discussed a three-step process that ranges metaphorically from getting your feet wet in prayer, to snorkeling and ultimately to scuba diving.

Getting your feet wet in prayer involves “doing something,” such as praying before meals. Snorkeling is taking it one step further in creating prayer routines as a couple and as a family. This involves encourag ing children to lead prayer through reciting a prayer or singing. Scuba diving involves “seeing with new eyes” in the ways in which you pray. This means that couples are striving to go further and deeper into prayer by celebrating the liturgical year in the home and through sacred art and décor.

The conference gave couples the opportunity to spend quality time in prayer with God and each other. Numerous marriage and familyministries were represented to inform and guide the participating attendees beyond the conference day.

Rachel Balman, 32, attended the conference with her husband, Jason, 33, and found the day enlightening. “The teachings on prayer from the doctors of the Church have always seemed out of grasp, but this talk helped me to understand that the prayer life of a saint is possible,” she said. 

Lauren Pearlman contributed to this article.

ORLANDO | At the “Together in Holiness” marriage conference, couples learned about the impor tance of daily prayer and praying for a spouse as a way to grow closer to God and to each other. Eighty-two couples gathered at the conference held for the first time in the diocese Nov. 15 at St. Mary Magdalen Parish in Altamonte Springs. The conference began with Mass celebrated by Father Charlie Mitchell, pastor.

Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers, who speaks nationally on marriage and family life, spoke on the importance of prayer to family life and marriage. He said the conference was a way to celebrate marriage, which is a blessing to our world.

The recently concluded Extraordinary Synod of Bishops touched on marriage and the need for the Church to recognize, honor and celebrate the kingdom of God’s presence as found in today’s families. This event certainly helped to do just that and we are blessed by the gift that married couples and their children bring to our parishes and society,” said Johnson.

During the event, the couples were invited to spend time in prayer and participate in the Sacrament of Penance, exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

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DIOCESAN EVENTS

Helpers Mass, rosary procession: Saturday, Jan. 3, 2015, 8 a.m., Annunciation Parish, 1020 Montgomery Road, Altamonte Springs. Pray for the unborn, healing for the mothers and fathers, and the conversion of staff and doctors. Mass begins at 8 a.m., followed by a rosary procession to a nearby abortion clinic. Contact Office of Advocacy and Justice, advocacyjustice@orlandodiocese.org.

March for Life: Saturday, Jan. 17, St. Augustine. Event features speakers, tours, information booths and music. Office of Advocacy and Justice chartered a bus. Pickup locations: Knights of Columbus 2112 Hall, 5727 Cornelia Ave., Orlando, 8 a.m.; St. Mary Magdalen, 861 Maitland Blvd., Altamonte Springs, 8:20 a.m.; Our Lady of the Lakes, 1310 Maximilian St., Deltona, 9:05 a.m. Cost: $25, adults; $15, youths; free for children under 12. Lunch is not included. 407-658-1818, ext. 2086; advocacyjustice@orlandodiocese.org.

Catholic Schools Week: Jan. 25-31. Theme: “Catholic Schools: Communities of Faith, Knowledge and Service.” Check with local schools for listing of activities and open house events.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Winter dance: Saturday, Jan. 31, 8-11 p.m., Church of Our Saviour gymnasium, 5301 N. Atlantic Ave., Cocoa Beach. Hosted by Single, Separated, Widowed and Divorced (SSWD) group. Music by “Visions.” BYOB. All singles and couples are welcome. Proceeds will benefit various charities. Tickets: $8, may be purchased at the parish office or at the dance. 321-868-7775, 321-783-4152 or 321-213-6629.

“Living Every Day With Passion and Purpose”: Saturday, Feb. 7, 9 a.m.-1:30 p.m., St. Vincent de Paul Parish, 5323 E. County Road 462, Wildwood. Catholic speaker and author Matthew Kelly will teach you how to identify God’s voice in your life and recognize the purpose for which you’ve been created. Cost: $39. 352-330-0220.

DIOCESAN EVENTS WITH BISHOP JOHN NOONAN

“Called by Name,” Dec. 19, 7 a.m.-Dec. 20, 9 a.m., San Pedro Spiritual Development Center, 2400 Dike Road, Winter Park. Young adult men over the age of 18 are invited to join Bishop John Noonan for a discernment retreat. Participants will hear inspiring talks and have time for prayer and fellowship, including a Friday night bonfire. Cost: $35, includes lodging and meals. For more information or to register, contact the Office of Vocations: Father Jorge Torres, jtorres@orlandodiocese.org or Darcey Dinh, ddinh@orlandodiocese.org.

Support Ministries/Peer Groups


Families with Incarcerated Loved Ones: • Third Saturdays, 8:45 a.m., St. Mary Magdalen Parish, Mother Teresa Room, 861 Maitland Ave., Altamonte Springs. 407-463-5780 or email jeancanatc@gmail.com.

Bereavement support groups: • Wednesdays, Sept. 29-Oct. 29, 10 a.m., St. Paul Parish Family Enrichment Center, Room 224, 1330 Sunshine Ave., Leesburg. Open to parishioners. Faith-sharing group provides comfort through prayer, Scripture, fellowship. To register, call Theresa Sheneman, 352-787-6210. • Mondays, Oct. 13-Nov. 17, 7:30 p.m., St. Margaret Mary Parish Family Life Center, 526 Park Ave. N., Winter Park. Six-week faith-based bereavement support group, with facilitator Sally Kopke of VITAS Innovative Hospice Care, will explore life after the death of a loved one. Different topic each week. To register, contact Sharon, 407-998-5660, sharon@stmarymargaretmary.org.

Blessed Trinity Parish, Building L, 5 S.E. 17th St., Ocala, multiple groups; and first Wednesdays, 7-9 p.m., Compassionate Friends, Ocala chapter, for bereaved families who have experienced the death of a child. Peggy McClaskey, 352-694-2978.

First Thursdays, 6:30-8 p.m., St. Stephen Parish Enrichment Center 1, Room 103, 575 Tuskawilla Road, Winter Springs. For anyone who has lost a loved one, spouse, parent, child or sibling. 407-699-5683.


Wednesdays, 7 p.m., Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, 201 University Blvd., Daytona Beach, Pat Beeman, 386-788-7128.

Declare your independence this WINTER!
Merry Christmas

May the wonder of Christmas enlighten our minds and hearts throughout the year to embrace the Person of Christ present among us. A Blessed Christmas and peace-filled New Year to all of you and your families.

Truly God is with us!
— Bishop Gerald M. Barbarito

Que el asombro de la Navidad ilumine nuestra mente y corazón durante todo el año para abrazar la persona de Cristo presente entre nosotros. Una bendita Navidad y un Año Nuevo lleno de paz para usted y su familia. Verdaderamente Dios está con nosotros.
— Obispo Gerald M. Barbarito

Se pou mèvey Nwel la klere l’espri nou ak Kè nou pendan tout ane a pou nou kenbe prezans Kris la nan mitan nou. Mwen swete nou yon fet Nwel beni ak lapè ranpli Nouvel Ane a pou nou tout ak tout fanmi nou.
Tout bon vre Bondye avek nou!
— Monseyné Gerald M. Barbarito
Never, maybe, when

As we grow through life our focus changes as our circumstances and years upon this earth do. When we are young, life is something that is taken for granted and seems not only to have no limit of possibilities, but no end as well. In fact, as young people we think that we are never going to die. During our middle years more things begin to happen to us which limit the possibilities before us, especially as our physical capabilities begin to diminish. During these years, passing from life someday begins to take on a more realistic possibility.

In our senior years, we are content with the direction our lives have taken as any other possibilities are completely out of the question and our physical capabilities are dramatically reduced. At this stage we move in our thinking that we are never going to do to the reality of “when.” Never, maybe and when is the change of perspective as our lives move forward.

As we celebrate Christmas, “never, maybe and when” is also before us in regard to the reality of Christ’s presence in our lives. Throughout the history of salvation, as we reflect upon it in the Old Testament, it seemed that the Messiah was never going to come. Hope was aroused as the prophets proclaimed this coming over and over again, but the reality of sin and turning away from God darkened the possibility of seeing God coming.

The reality is that God was present among us. The joy of Christmas is a special one. However, that joy is with us through the year. When all of the celebration of Christmas has passed and the decorations and lights are taken down, then do we really know the true meaning of Christmas. God will never leave us. God makes all things possible. God is present now. May our journey of life help us to realize this more and more and to look forward to the fullness of being with Christ in his kingdom.

A blessed Christmas to you and to all of your families. God is truly present among us!

BISHOP’S SCHEDULE

Dec. 20 — 4 p.m., Mass, Simbang Gabi, Filipino community, St. John Fisher Parish, West Palm Beach
Dec. 21 — 10:30 a.m., Mass, reception, St. Christopher Parish, Hobe Sound, 7 p.m., Dinner with seminarians and families, Cathedral of St. Ignatius Loyola, Palm Beach Gardens
Dec. 22 — 6 p.m., Mass, Palm Beach County Jail, West Palm Beach
Dec. 24 — 4 p.m., Mass, St. Franciscus Assisi Parish, Riviera Beach; 8 p.m., Mass, Christmas Vigil, Hispanic community, Cathedral of St. Ignatius Loyola; Midnight Mass, Cathedral of St. Ignatius Loyola
Dec. 23-24, Jan. 2-5, 2015 — Pastoral Center closed
Jan. 3 — 4:30 p.m., Mass, National Migration Day, Cathedral of St. Ignatius Loyola
Jan. 5-9 — Retreat for bishops of Regions V and X, St. Petersburg
Jan. 11 — 11 a.m., Mass, installation of Father Juan Cardenas as pastor, St. Mary Parish, Palm Beach Gardens.

SPECIAL DELIVERY TO FAMILY PROMISE

Kokie Dinna, executive director of Family Promise of South Palm Beach, meets with left, Jaimee Carre, Carly Hubiak and Dylan Ritz of St. Vincent Ferrer School in Delray Beach. The students delivered videos and books in November to the school as part of a school outreach. The Family Promise Day Center, located in the former convent on the grounds of St. Vincent Ferrer Parish, is dedicated to families and children who have lost their homes. The charity reaches out to people of all faiths with housing and employment to help get them back on their feet. (LINDA REEVES | FC)
Give thanks for farmworkers during holidays

LINDA REEVES
of the Florida Catholic staff

FELLSMERE | When giving thanks for holiday meals, everyone should take a moment to express gratitude for farmworkers, the hardworking sisters and brothers who toil in the fields and harvest the food for many tables, but may not have enough food to feed their own families.

“The issues have remained the same over the years,” said Minnie Garcia, a parishioner of Our Lady Queen of Peace in Delray Beach, who works at St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary in Boynton Beach. Garcia has kept a finger on the pulse of the farmworker community over the years. “They are still faced with low wages and (harsh) conditions in the fields.”

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, nearly 1.8 million people work in America’s fields, harvesting crops and raising livestock that wind up on tables. “There are nearly 300,000 farmworkers in Florida,” said Holly Baker of the Farmworker Association of Florida, a group dedicated to social, political, economical, workplace, health and environmental justice issues that impact farmworkers. “That is an estimated figure. A lot are undocumented. Some come and go. Some travel with seasonal crops. We have some who live here all year, and find other work (when there are no agriculture jobs).”

Agriculture is big business in Florida, even though farmland has been scooped up by development and the face of the farmworker that has changed. “There are no agriculture jobs.”

Elvire François of Fellsmere and Notre Dame Mission in Fort Pierce stands by her town’s community garden. She spoke in Rome to represent the face of today’s farmworker. (LINDA REEVES | FC)

Local farmworker attends meeting called by the pope

LINDA REEVES
of the Florida Catholic staff

FELLSMERE | Far from the orange groves and vegetable fields, a parishioner of Notre Dame Mission stood before Pope Francis and people from around the world gathered for a three-day meeting in Rome Oct. 27-29, and spoke about her life as a migrant farmworker.

Elvire François addressed participants attending the World Meeting of Popular Movements called by Pope Francis and organized by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and the Pontifical Academy of Science. The native of Haiti who now calls Fellsmere home shared her story as an immigrant, a farmworker and an advocate.

“My father wanted me to come to Florida,” she shared. “My father worked on the farms and my mother too. I came and worked on the farm during the day and in the packing houses. Now, I am not fit to do this, but I have to do it anyway. I do it for my three kids in school. I have to help. I do if for them.”

People representing grass-roots organizations serving the vulnerable and their rights to decent work, housing and land were invited to the meeting in Rome where rights that should be accessible to every person, but are increasingly out of reach for the great majority, were discussed. Decent work for the prosperity of families and people is a subject that weighs heavy on the heart of Pope Francis, who has discussed the issue on many occasions.

Elvire François of Fellsmere and Notre Dame Mission in Fort Pierce stands by her town’s community garden. She spoke in Rome to represent the face of today’s farmworker. (LINDA REEVES | FC)

IN THE WORDS OF THE POPE

Bishop Gerald M. Barbarito wrote about the World Meeting of Popular Movements called by Pope Francis in his Thanksgiving column in the Florida Catholic. Bishop Barbarito wrote: “Pope Francis, reiterating much of his apostolic exhortation ‘Evangelii Gaudium,’ emphasized that land, shelter and work are sacred rights and that we must strive to work against the structural causes of poverty and inequality and confront what he called an ‘empire of money.’

“The pope continually reminds us of the poor and hungry within our world and reminds us of our responsibility to reach out to them,” the bishop wrote. “As Americans, we know that the poor, hungry and homeless are among us in our very nation. While we can live somewhat comfortable lives and others even more so, there are those in the world and in our country who live not only less than comfortable lives, but miserable ones as well.”

François was selected out of the state’s 300,000 farmworkers to represent the state’s laborers and the face of the farmworker that has changed throughout history.

Holly Baker of the Farmworker Association of Florida headquartered in Apopka explained La Via Campesina — an international movement of peasants, farmworkers, small farmers and landless.
operators in the last decades and new communities are erected where crops once flourished. The state has 50,000 commercial farms on more than 9 million acres of land, and agriculture is second only to tourism in its economic impact.

The agriculture business continues to flourish with the need for more crop production for the growing population, but the industry is dependent on hardworking seasonal and migrant farmworkers, who work long hours in harsh conditions, often without steady salaries, paid vacation or sick leave.

The U.S. Department of Labor established the Fair Labor Standards Act that sets forth guidelines on minimum wage, overtime, recordkeeping and child labor standards. According to statistics, annual income for a farmworker varies, but the median pay in 2010 was about $10,000 to $12,500.

Working in long-sleeve shirts to avoid pesticides and in sun-baked fields. Earnings are based on the amount of crops gathered in a single day, not the number of hours worked.

Migrant farmworkers travel from state to state following the crop seasons to earn wages, leaving homes and loved ones behind for months at a time. They live in camps with no comforts, and many send money home to families. They head out to farms on buses, often not knowing what lies at the end of the road. Some are not paid for their work by ruthless employers who take advantage. Others are stranded far away from home or forced to work overtime without extra pay. Yolanda Gomez, who attends Mass at Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission in Fellsmere, is a community organizer and area coordinator for the Florida Farmworkers Association. Gomez works in the association’s Fellsmere office that serves the area’s 2,000 farmworker families.

She was 9 years old when she came to the United States from Mexico. She traveled with her family from farm to farm, following various crop seasons. She is familiar with the challenges faced by those working in the fields, who have little time with their families or to get involved in the community. Many are Catholic and attend Mass when they can.

“I left the farms 10 years ago,” she said about permanently settling in Fellsmere, working locally and getting involved. “Together we work for changes. I am happy to see the changes taking place.”

FARMWORKER: Fellsmere woman invited to speak in Rome about her personal experiences in the fields

Elvire François of Fellsmere and Notre Dame Mission in Fort Pierce, who was recently invited to Rome to represent today’s farmworker, plucks weeds. She grows vegetables for her family in a small plot of the community garden designed by the Farmworker Association of Florida. All of the food is grown without pesticides. The association established the garden to bring awareness to the harm of pesticides and as a way to educate people about how to organically grow food.

Yolanda Gomez, a community organizer and area coordinator for Florida Farmworkers Association and former migrant worker, provides educational seminars on the dangers of pesticides for the people of Fellsmere working in the fields. (PHOTOS BY LINDA REEVES | FO)

A bus travels down the road in Fellsmere with farmworkers on their way home after a day’s work. Buses are used to transport workers to and from the fields and farms.

GIVE THANKS
FROM 3

people — was invited to send a representative to attend the meeting in Rome.

“We selected Elvire because of her ability to represent well the issues of migrants and farmworkers here in Florida,” Baker said.

François’ parents came to America in 1980, following the dream of better life. She joined them in 1997. She is a wife, proud mother of five children and one 4-year-old grandchild, and a cousin of Father Ducasse François, pastor of St. Juliana in West Palm Beach.

Besides working and taking care of two teenage daughters still at home, she takes care of her aging and frail father, 93, and mother, 79, who live in Fort Pierce. Her parents look after her daughters, aged 16 and 18, when François and her husband are working. At the time of this interview, her husband was working in Virginia picking apples and sending money home.

Life is not the dream she thought it would be. She travels to the various farms around the country on a bus and lives in the camps equipped with the basics and creature comforts.

François works long hours under harsh conditions. She wears long-sleeved shirts to protect her from the strong sun, and tries to avoid harmful pesticides. Despite this she often develops a rash during orange-picking season from being exposed to copper liquid sprayed on the trees to fight fungal disease.

She tells horror stories of traveling to one camp in Michigan only to find out after she arrived that she would be sleeping in a tent. She was afraid to complain since the employer might not pay her wages, and she had no money to return home on her own, buy food or get a place to sleep along the way.

Over the years, François has learned from experience. Today, she works the same well-managed farms, knowing what to expect. During the year she picks blueberries and apples in New Jersey in the summers, and oranges in Florida during the season. She also works in a packing house in Vero Beach, earning minimum wages and enough money to rent and put food on the table.

The average day for her begins at 6 a.m. Once in the fields, she picks fruit, placing it in a large picking bag she totes around. The bag can weigh up to 65 pounds when full of oranges.

Pickers are paid by piece rate and productivity. The more fruit picked while climbing up and down on a ladder or stooping in a field, the more pay one earns. The work takes skill to balance on a ladder and lean on branches.

Despite the working conditions, François said she enjoys digging in the dirt and being in a garden, something she has done all her life. She also loves her faith and has a sense of obligation to family and the community. She volunteers with the Farmworkers Association in her little free time and helps with a community garden that is designed to promote organic farming and healthy food for families.

“She is such a good leader in our community,” said Yolanda Gomez, a former migrant worker herself who is now a community organizer and area coordinator for Florida Farmworkers Association.

“She is a good representative of the people in the community here in Fellsmere.”

François said she will never forget her trip to Rome. She has a framed photo to remind her of her meeting with Pope Francis, who shook her hand twice.

“Everything I saw was good there,” she said. “Everything was pretty. I was able to attend church every morning. I represented all the farmworkers of Florida. It was a big honor to represent the people. I carried them on my shoulders.”
Outreach ministry helps two parishes

LINDA REEVES of the Florida Catholic staff

BOYNTON BEACH | Marie Lahens was thankful to God and grateful to the religious sister and the volunteers who made a nice meal possible for her during the holidays, putting a tiny smile on her face.

A meal is something that she struggles to get every day, and joy is something that she has lacked. More than a year and a half ago her 26-year-old son was recently involved in a motorcycle accident and is recovering from multiple injuries.

"She came to me with the shirt on her back, and it smelled like smoke," said Franciscan Sister Mary Joan Millican, pastoral minister at St. Mark Parish in Boynton Beach, about her first meeting with Lahens, a resident of Riviera Beach, who turned to the parish for help when she had no place or no one to turn to.

Lahens, a native of Haiti, is now living in an apartment and trying to make ends meet. On Thanksgiving Day, she visited St. Mark to receive a dinner as part of a program the parish has organized on the holiday for more than 10 years. Volunteers of the parish help to distribute dinners to the poor and homebound.

"The Thanksgiving project was first established at St. Joan of Arc Parish in Boca Raton more than three decades ago by parishioners John and Karen Tringali. Today, they continue the ministry at St. Joan, but also make the ministry possible at St. Mark Parish by providing the meals for that parish to distribute," Tringali said that she and her husband could not provide the ministry without the "generosity" of the Saint Joan of Arc and St Mark communities.

"Throughout the 31 years, we have been deeply moved by the outpouring of support from so many parishioners who have given generously of their time, talent and treasure in preparing and distributing the meals," she said. "The ministry has truly been an example of a story from the New Testament. At times when there has been concern we might run short of food items and volunteers, parishioners have stepped up to fill the need, and in the end, we always have an abundance just like the story of Jesus with the loaves and fishes.

"I think that our hundreds of volunteers over the years would share with you that their reward comes in the giving," Tringali continued. "God has blessed us." ■

Community honors nun for service

LINDA REEVES of the Florida Catholic staff

BOYNTON BEACH | The Recreation and Parks Advisory Board of Boynton Beach selected Sister Loraine Ryan as the grand marshal of the city’s 4th annual holiday parade, which took place Dec. 6.

Thanksgiving meals are packaged and bagged for distribution to the needy and homebound on Thanksgiving Day as part of an annual outreach at St. Mark Parish in Boynton Beach.

Thanksgiving, My husband, John, and I began this ministry at St Joan of Arc after making a three-day religious retreat called a Cursillo. We had two motivating factors: ‘bloom- ing where we were planted’ and doing something that could include our five young children while also imparting to them a lesson of giving to others.

"For the first 15 years, we did the meal packaging and food distribution out of our home in Boca Raton. After we moved north to Ocean Ridge, we moved the operation to the kitchen of the social hall at St Joan with the blessing and encouragement of our then-pastor Msgr. John McMahon."

Tringali said that and her husband could not provide the ministry without the "generosity" of the Saint Joan of Arc and St Mark communities.

"Throughout the 31 years, we have been deeply moved by the outpouring of support from so many parishioners who have given generously of their time, talent and treasure in preparing and distributing the meals," she said. "The ministry has truly been an example of a story from the New Testament. At times when there has been concern we might run short of food items and volunteers, parishioners have stepped up to fill the need, and in the end, we always have an abundance just like the story of Jesus with the loaves and fishes."

As a Medical Missionary Sister and former community health nurse, "Sister Ryan has dedicated her life to the service of others," proclaimed an announcement on the city’s website.

Sister Ryan relocated to Boynton Beach in 1990 to take care of her elderly parents. She created the Women’s Circle, a ministry dedicated to helping poor and underserved women of the community. As the unpaid, executive director of the ministry, Sister Ryan has worked tirelessly for the past 14 years. The Women’s Circle serves more than 300 needy women and girls annually, helping them with English and job skills with the love of Christ and the help of volunteers.

She was instrumental in the establishment of the town’s Plan Approach to Community Health that later became the Genesis Community Health Center. Sister Ryan is involved in local affairs and has strong links with other local organizations such as the Community Caring Center and Bridges to Prosperity, which reach out to the poor. She has become over the years a well-respected community and Church leader, helping brothers and sisters who might otherwise lack support.

The city’s website publicly declared that Sister Ryan "continues to be a valuable asset to our community. It’s time to celebrate her contribution to our city by honoring her as grand marshal for the Boynton Beach holiday parade." ■
Take a sister to lunch

The Palm Beach Diocese Council of Catholic Women took religious to lunch Dec. 6 as part of its annual “Take a Sister to Lunch” event. The group has been hosting the event for the past 20 years “to give tribute for the selfless service and dedication religious have provided the diocese,” said council member JoAnne D’Angelo. This year, the women hosted the event at St. Matthew Parish in Lantana. Carmelites Father Michael Driscoll of St. Jude Parish in Boca Raton, Father Clemens Hammerschmitt, pastor of St. Matthew Parish, known for his cooking talents, prepared the luncheon food, which was served by council members of St. Matthew. There was also music, singing and games for the 40 religious sisters and council women attending.

Knights council receives award

The Knights of Columbus M.J. Benvenuti Council 8419 associated with St. Rita Parish in Wellington was given the St. Gregory the Great Award by Catholic Charities Birthline/Lifeline Ministry, which is dedicated to the unborn, mothers with babies and pre-life education. Bishop Gerald M. Barbarito, who presented the award to the council in November for its generous contributions to help purchase an ultrasound machine for Birthline/Lifeline. Council leaders including Grand Knight Paul Vowles, Mike Sullivan, Sean McDaniel, Manny Zapata and Paul Casanova were present to accept the award on behalf of the council.

Students collect presents for poor

Students at Pope John Paul II High School in Boca Raton donated an array of items to the Back to Basics Angel Program, which was established by the Palm Beach Diocese Council of Catholic Women. Faithful supporters of the project donate socks, underwear, sneakers and other basics for families in the community who are struggling to make ends meet. The angel program has grown over the years and inspired many organizations and individuals to get involved. Today, the program provides much-needed items to more than 5,000 youngsters in the local communities.

Boxes of joy bring happiness to poor

When the “A Box of Joy” project was complete and figures totaled, more than 1,500 boxes of small gift items were collected for poor children who might not otherwise have a gift at Christmas. In total, 12 schools around the Diocese of Palm Beach participated in the project designed by Cross Catholic Outreach, a nonprofit headquartered in Boca Raton since 2002 that serves the needy, brings awareness to the very poor in the world and gets others involved in outreach and service. Along with schools, one parish took part in the program. Volunteer diocesan employees also joined in the service project, collecting a total of 75 boxes for giving. The gift boxes will be distributed to children in poor areas of the Diocese of Santa Rosa de Lima in rural Guatemala. A Guatemalan priest was delighted and grateful to hear the news of the outreach to the children of his community. “The needy children in Santa Rosa will be delighted to receive their shoeboxes,” said Father Raul Monterroso. “It will make this Christmas one they will always remember.” He sent love and blessings to all who participated in the project.

School celebrates 70 years of service

Before Thanksgiving, students of Sacred Heart School in Lake Worth gathered on school grounds for a commemorative photo to mark the school’s 70-year anniversary. The school was established in 1944 under the leadership of Father James Cann, pastor of Sacred Heart Parish, working with dedicated and supportive parishioners. It opened with 56 students and within six years, enrollment increased to 250 youngsters. In the beginning, the Sisters of St. Joseph of St. Augustine ran the school. Over the past decades, Sacred Heart and its educators have touched many young lives and provided opportunities for learning and the solid foundations to meet the challenges of the world and become successful community leaders and professionals. The school organized an anniversary celebration Nov. 20, and during festivities school supporters were honored. “We lovingly call them our heroes,” said Principal Candace Tamposi.

Students receive high marks

After scoring high marks on standardized tests, 54 All Saints School students in Jupiter have qualified and earned the title of “scholar.” The tests were part of Duke University’s Talent Identification Program devoted to meeting the academic needs of high-achieving students. The 54 students are in grades four through seven and earned 95 percent or higher on assessment tests. The seventh-grade scholars are now invited to pursue an on-campus level testing experience and participate in taking college entrance examinations, the same tests designed for high school juniors and seniors preparing for college admission.

The annual televised Christmas Mass is scheduled

The annual televised Christmas Mass, produced from the Cathedral of St. Ignatius Loyola with special music and Bishop Gerald M. Barbarito as main celebrant, will air Dec. 25 on several networks. At 10 a.m., the Mass will be on ION Television Network, which airs the weekly televised Mass. The Christmas Day Mass will also air earlier, at 5 a.m., on Estrella TV West Palm Beach; 5 a.m. on CBS-12, and 6 a.m. on WPTV-Newschannel 5.

Starting Sunday, Jan. 4, 2015, the diocese’s weekly televised Sunday Mass will only air on Estrella TV, a sister station of WPBF-25. It will no longer air on ION TV. The Mass will continue to be broadcast in English and air at a new time — 9 a.m. Estrella TV West Palm Beach is on Comcast Channels 298 and 616; AT&T/Verizon Channel 3024; Hometown Cable Plus Channel 197; and Estrella’s over-the-air Channel 25.2. Estrella TV in Boca Raton is not available on DirecTV or Dish. For additional information, call 561-775-9529.
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**COMMUNITY EVENTS**

Christmas concert: Dec. 19, Dec. 20, 7 p.m., St. Peter Parish, 1701 Indian Creek Parkway, Jupiter. Combined parish choirs accompanied by orchestra of professional musicians and students from the Dreysfoos School of the Arts. Highlights: St. Peter children’s choir and bell choir, Christmas carol sing-along. Dr. Gonzalez Gonzalez, music director, will perform piano duets with his mother and fellow music director, Lola Gonzalez. Admission: $15, adults; $10, advanced purchase; $5, children under 12. 561-575-0837.

Prayer gathering and life chain: Jan. 18, 2 p.m., Roundabout 20th Street and 31st Avenue, Vero Beach. Prayer for the end of abortion near the 42nd anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the Supreme Court case that legalized abortion. 772-567-5129.


Minster study and discussion: Tuesdays 7-9 p.m., Holy Name of Jesus, Holy Family Room, 999 N. Military Trail, north of the Wellington Regional Medical Center, 10101 Forest Hill Blvd., Wellington. All invited to pray for the end of abortions. 561-784-0689.

**RETREATS/DAYS OF PRAYER**

Our Lady of Florida Spiritual Center: Retreat programs available for clergy, religious, men, women, married couples, singles and people in recovery programs. Season theme: “Blessed are you.” Reservations required except when stated. Location: 1300 U.S. Highway 1, North Palm Beach. 561-626-1300 or www.ourladyofflorida.org.

- Centering prayer: Wednesdays, 4:55 p.m., main chapel.
- Advent day of reflection: Dec. 20, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., led by retreat team. Concludes with Mass for the fourth Sunday of Advent. Cost: $30. Registration required.
- New Year’s Eve reflection and celebration: Dec. 31, 7 p.m., led by retreat team, followed by dinner and presentation. Sacrament of reconciliation, Mass and midnight celebration. Cost: $80 per person includes accommodations; $60 per person for evening event only. Reservations required.
- Charismatic retreat: Feb. 20-22, beginning 5 p.m., led by Carol Rizza of the retreat team and St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary. Cost: $210. Registration and deposit required.

**MEETINGS**

St. Peregrine ministry meetings, third Saturdays, 1 p.m., with program or special Mass for those suffering from cancer or who have died from cancer. Call for Mass times which vary. 561-737-3095.
With the great Solemnity of Christmas, the coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ into the world and into our lives is celebrated. Out of love, The Lord was made flesh and dwelt among us, bringing redemption and hope. Let us all welcome Christ eagerly, living faithfully the gift of salvation that Our Lord has given. May the grace and peace of Our Savior be with all this Christmas Season. Have a Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year!

+ Frank J. Dewane
Bishop of Venice in Florida
Parishes honor patroness of the Americas

BOB REDDY
of the Florida Catholic staff

WAUCHULA | Across the Diocese of Venice, nearly every Parish which has a Spanish-language Mass held some form of commemoration to Our Lady of Guadalupe with a Mass as the central component. The Parishes of the Americas was honored with celebrations at Parishes such as St. Michael in Wachula, Holy Cross in Palmetto, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Naples, St. Leo in Bonita Springs, Our Lady of Guadalupe in Immokalee, Jesus the Worker in Fort Myers, St. Jude in Sarasota, and several others.

Our Lady of Guadalupe is one of the most revered patronesses within the Catholic Faith, and this is particularly so in the Hispanic community. Her feast day, Dec. 12, is often described as all other holidays wrapped up into one. These typically involved prayer novenas, processions, overnight vigils and sunrise serenades to Our Lady with mariachi bands, as well as larger celebrations often held in the evening or on the weekend.

The feast commemorates the story of when the Virgin Mary appeared to Indian peasant St. Juan Diego in December 1531 near present-day Mexico City. Our Lady of Guadalupe’s appearance was a watershed moment in acceptance of the Hispanic people into the Catholic Church.

At many of the celebrations, young girls dressed as Our Lady, in a green cape emblazoned with gold stars, while young boys dressed as St. Juan Diego, complete with drawn-on mustache.

More than 2,000 people gathered for a Mass and celebration Dec. 7 at Pioneer Park in Zolfo Springs. The celebration was for the faithful of Hardee County, and included St. Michael Parish in Wauchula, Holy Child Chapel in Bowling Green and San Alfonso Chapel in Zolfo Springs.

The Mass in Hardee County began with a procession which included Aztec dancers and children dressed in period costumes, including one as Our Lady of Guadalupe and one as St. Juan Diego. One of the highlights of the entire celebration was when children dressed as angels crowned the statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe. A roar went up and everyone applauded with delight. The day continued with people enjoying assorted foods and music.

Father Juan Carlos Sack, Institute of the Incarnate Word, Pastor of St. Michael Parish, said during the Mass that the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe is more than just a day to party — it is a day to pray and reflect on the gifts given to the world by God through the Blessed Virgin Mary as Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe is a deeply religious experience, explained Father Eduardo Coll, Parochial Vicar of St. Leo Parish in Bonita Springs. “Today is an opportunity to take time out to celebrate your Faith while growing closer to the Blessed Virgin and through her, to Christ.”

The story of St. Juan Diego and Our Lady of Guadalupe dates to 1531. The Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to St. Juan Diego, a peasant farmer in Tepeyac, Mexico, and spoke to him in his own Aztec language. Mary sent him to the local bishop to ask that a church be built on Tepeyac Hill in what is now modern-day Mexico City, so she could be close to her people.

The bishop wanted proof of the Virgin’s vision, so St. Juan Diego returned with out-of-season roses in his work tilma, or cape, which bore the image of a life-size, dark-skinned imprint of the Virgin Mary. The tilma of St. Juan Diego is on display at the basilica on Tepeyac Hill in Mexico City and remains one of the most visited Catholic shrines in the world — second only to the Vatican.

At the time of this appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe, native Indians endured a brutal life under the control of the Spanish. Modern-day Mexicans embrace Our Lady of Guadalupe because Mary appeared to a simple peasant. Our Lady is esteemed as the champion of the poor and downtrodden. Many of her devotees pray to her for help during difficult times and to give thanks. In Mexico, the feast day is a national holiday.

Pope Francis said that when the image of the Virgin appeared on the tilma of Juan Diego, “it was the prophecy of an embrace: Mary’s embrace of all the peoples of the vast expanses of America — the peoples who already lived there, and those who were yet to come.”

The Holy Father said Mary’s embrace showed what America — North and South — is called to be: “a land where different peoples come together; a land prepared to accept human life at every stage, from the mother’s womb to old age; a land which welcomes immigrants, and the poor and the marginalized, in every age. A land of generosity.”

For the faithful in the Diocese of Venice, this message from the Holy Father resonates and reflects the deeper meaning behind the many celebrations.
## CHRISTMAS Mass Schedules

### ARCADIA
- **St. Paul**
  - 1206 E. Oak St.
  - 863-494-2611
- **CHRISTMAS EVE**
  - 7 p.m. (Spanish), 10 p.m.
  - **CHRISTMAS**
  - 9 a.m., noon (Spanish)

### AVE MARIA
- **Ave Maria Oratory**
  - 4955 Seton Way
  - 239-261-5555
- **CHRISTMAS EVE**
  - 5 p.m., midnight
  - **CHRISTMAS**
  - 10 a.m., 12:30 p.m.

### AVON PARK
- **Our Lady of Grace**
  - 595 E. Main St.
  - 863-653-1477
- **CHRISTMAS EVE**
  - 4 p.m., 5:30 p.m., 7 p.m. (Spanish)
  - **CHRISTMAS**
  - 8 a.m., 10:30 a.m.

### BOCA GRANDE
- **Our Lady of Mercy**
  - 240 Park Ave.
  - 941-964-2254
- **CHRISTMAS EVE**
  - 5 p.m., 10 p.m.
  - **CHRISTMAS**
  - 9 a.m., 10:30 a.m.

### BOKEELIA
- **Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal**
  - 12175 Stringfellow Road
  - 239-283-0456
- **CHRISTMAS EVE**
  - 3 p.m., 4:30 p.m.
  - **CHRISTMAS**
  - 9:30 a.m., 2 p.m. (Spanish)

### BONITA SPRINGS
- **St. Leo**
  - 28290 Beaumont Road
  - www.stleocatholicchurch.org
  - 239-992-0901
- **CHRISTMAS EVE**
  - 3:30 p.m., 5:30 p.m., 10 p.m.
  - **CHRISTMAS**
  - 7:30 a.m., 9:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 6:30 p.m. (Spanish)

### BOWLING GREEN
- **Holy Child**
  - 4315 Chester Ave.
  - 863-773-6889
- **CHRISTMAS**
  - 2 p.m. (Spanish)

### BRADENTON
- **Sacred Heart**
  - 1229 15th St. W.
  - www.sacredheartbradenton.com
  - 941-748-2221
- **CHRISTMAS EVE**
  - 4 p.m., 7:30 p.m. (Spanish), 10:30 p.m.
  - **CHRISTMAS**
  - 10 a.m.

- **Ss. Peter and Paul**
  - 2850 75th St. W.
  - www.sspeterandpaul.org
  - 941-795-1228
- **CHRISTMAS EVE**
  - 4:30 p.m., 7 p.m., 10 p.m.
  - **CHRISTMAS**
  - 7:30 a.m., 9:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m.

### CAPE CORAL
- **St. Andrew**
  - 2628 Del Prado Blvd. S.
  - www.standrewwcc.org
  - 239-574-4545
- **CHRISTMAS EVE**
  - 4 p.m., 6 p.m., 8 p.m. (Spanish), 11 p.m.
  - **CHRISTMAS**
  - 7:30 a.m., 9 a.m., 11 a.m.

### CAPE SLOPE
- **Our Lady of the Light**
  - 19680 Cypress View Dr.
  - www.ourladyofthelight.com
  - 239-267-7088
- **CHRISTMAS EVE**
  - 4 p.m., 6 p.m., 8 p.m.
  - **CHRISTMAS**
  - 8:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m.

### CLEWISTON
- **Santa Rosa de Lima**
  - 835 N. Mayoral St.
  - www.clewistonparish.org
  - 863-987-8585
- **CHRISTMAS EVE**
  - 7 p.m. (Spanish)
  - **CHRISTMAS**
  - 8 a.m. (Spanish)

### CLEWISTON cont’d.
- **St. Margaret**
  - 200 N. Deane Duff Ave.
  - 863-987-8585
- **CHRISTMAS EVE**
  - 8:30 p.m. (Spanish), 10:30 p.m.
  - **CHRISTMAS**
  - 10 a.m., noon (Spanish)

### ENGLEWOOD
- **St. Raphael**
  - 770 Kibron Ave.
  - www.straphaelonline.org
  - 941-474-9595
- **CHRISTMAS EVE**
  - 4 p.m., 6 p.m., 10:30 p.m.
  - **CHRISTMAS**
  - 7:30 a.m., 9 a.m., 11 a.m.

### EVERGLADES CITY
- **Holy Family**
  - 200 Duitana Ave.
  - 239-394-5101
- **CHRISTMAS**
  - 10:30 a.m.

### FORT MYERS
- **Jesus the Worker**
  - 881 Nona Ave.
  - 239-653-5333
  - **CHRISTMAS EVE**
  - 7 p.m.
- **Our Lady of Light**
  - 19680 Cypress View Drive
  - www.ourladyoflight.com
  - 239-267-7088
- **CHRISTMAS EVE**
  - 4 p.m., 6 p.m., 8 p.m.
- **CHRISTMAS**
  - 8:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m.

### FORT MYERS BEACH
- **Our Lady Queen of Heaven**
  - 355 S. Bridge St.
  - 863-675-0030
- **CHRISTMAS Eve**
  - 5 p.m., 7:30 p.m. (Spanish)
  - **CHRISTMAS**
  - 9 a.m., noon (Spanish)

### LAKE PLACID
- **St. James**
  - 3380 Placid View Drive
  - 863-463-3215
- **CHRISTMAS EVE**
  - 5:30 p.m., 9 p.m.
- **CHRISTMAS**
  - 8 a.m., 10 a.m.

### LEHIGH ACRES
- **St. Raphael**
  - 2514 Lee Blvd.
  - 239-309-1831
- **CHRISTMAS EVE**
  - 5 p.m., 10 p.m.
- **CHRISTMAS**
  - 8 a.m., 10 a.m., noon

### LAKESIDE RANCH
- **Our Lady of Lourdes**
  - 12965 State Road 70 E.
  - www.olourdesofl.com
  - 941-657-0328
- **CHRISTMAS EVE**
  - 4 p.m., 6:30 p.m., 10:30 p.m.
- **CHRISTMAS**
  - 9 a.m., 11 a.m.

### LABELLE
- **Holy Martyrs**
  - 4290 Crescent Ave. S.W.
  - 863-675-0030
- **CHRISTMAS EVE**
  - 5 p.m., 10 p.m. (Creole)
  - **CHRISTMAS**
  - 9 a.m., noon (Spanish)

### LAKESIDE RANCH
- **Our Lady of the Angels**
  - 12965 State Road 70 E.
  - www.olourdesofl.com
  - 941-657-0328
- **CHRISTMAS EVE**
  - 4 p.m., 6:30 p.m., 10:30 p.m.
  - **CHRISTMAS**
  - 9 a.m., 11 a.m.
CHRISTMAS MASS Schedules

LONGBOAT KEY
- St. Mary, Star of the Sea
  4280 Gulf of Mexico Drive
  941-385-1255
  CHRISTMAS EVE
  4 p.m., 9 p.m.
  CHRISTMAS
  8:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m.

MARCO ISLAND
- San Marco
  851 San Marco Road
  www.sanmarcocatholicchurch.com
  239-394-5180
  CHRISTMAS
  6 a.m., 7:30 a.m., 9 a.m.

NAPLES
- St. John the Evangelist
  625 11th Ave. N.
  www.saintjohntheevangelist.com
  239-566-8740
  CHRISTMAS EVE
  3 p.m., 5 p.m., 10 p.m.
  CHRISTMAS
  7 a.m., 9 a.m., 11:15 a.m., 1:15 p.m.
- St. Peter the Apostle
  5310 Battlesnake Hammock Road
  sipeterchurch.naples.net
  239-774-3337
  CHRISTMAS EVE
  3:30 p.m., 5:30 p.m., 9 p.m., midnight
  (Spanish)
  CHRISTMAS
  8 a.m., 10 a.m., noon, 2 p.m.
  (Spanish), 3:30 p.m. (Creole)
- St. William
  750 Seagate Drive
  www.stwilliamnaples.net
  239-261-4883
  CHRISTMAS
  2:45 p.m., 4:30 p.m., 6:15 p.m., 10 p.m.
  CHRISTMAS
  7 a.m., 9 a.m., 11 a.m.

NOCATEE
- Capilla Católica de San Juan Diego
  5247 S.W. Highway 17
  863-494-2611
  CHRISTMAS EVE
  6 p.m. (Spanish)

NORTH FORT MYERS
- St. Therese
  2015 S. Tamiami Trail
  239-567-2315
  CHRISTMAS
  4 p.m.
  CHRISTMAS EVE
  8:45 a.m., 10:30 a.m.

PALMETTO
- Holy Cross
  505 26th St. W.
  941-729-3881
  CHRISTMAS EVE
  4 p.m., 8 p.m. (Spanish)
  CHRISTMAS
  8 a.m., 10 a.m., 12:30 p.m. (Spanish)

PORT CHARLOTTE
- San Antonio
  24454 Rampart Blvd.
  www.sanantoniocatholicchurch.com
  941-624-3799
  CHRISTMAS EVE
  4 p.m., midnight
  CHRISTMAS
  8 a.m., 10:30 a.m., noon

PORT ST. LUCIE
- St. Mary of the Assumption
  7330 N.E. Tamiami Trail
  772-737-3405
  CHRISTMAS EVE
  4 p.m., 7 p.m., 9 p.m.

PUNTA GORDA
- Sacred Heart
  301 W. Charlotte Ave.
  www.sacredheartfl.org
  941-378-1703
  CHRISTMAS EVE
  8 a.m., 10:30 a.m.

SANIBEL
- Our Lady of Mount Carmel
  425 S. Tamiami Trail
  www.olmc-sanzap.org
  941-966-0807
  CHRISTMAS EVE
  3 p.m., 5 p.m., 8 p.m.
  CHRISTMAS
  7:30 a.m., 9 a.m., 10:30 a.m.

SARASOTA
- Christ the King
  1900 Meadowlawn St.
  www.christtheking-sarasota.org
  941-924-2777
  (ALL MASSES IN LATIN)
  CHRISTMAS EVE
  8:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m.
- Our Lady Queen of Martyrs
  6600 Pennsylvania Ave.
  941-755-1826
  CHRISTMAS EVE
  11 a.m., 1 p.m.
  CHRISTMAS
  7:30 a.m., 9 a.m., 11 a.m.

SEBRING
- St. Michael
  408 Heard Bridge Road
  863-385-0049
  CHRISTMAS EVE
  4 p.m., 9 p.m.

SOUTH FORT MYERS
- St. Joseph the Worker
  1800 N. U.S. Highway 27
  941-895-2858
  CHRISTMAS
  7 a.m., 9 a.m., 11 a.m.

ST. AUGUSTINE
- St. Agnes
  7775 Vanderbilt Beach Road
  www.stagnesnapples.org
  239-392-1949
  CHRISTMAS
  4 p.m., 7 p.m., midnight
  CHRISTMAS EVE
  7:30 a.m., 8:30 a.m. (Latin), 9 a.m., 11 a.m., 1 p.m. (Spanish), 5 p.m.
- St. Elizabeth Seton
  5225 Golden Gate Parkway
  www.saintelizabethseton.org
  239-455-3900
  CHRISTMAS EVE
  3 p.m., 4:30 p.m., 7 p.m., 9 p.m. (Spanish)
  CHRISTMAS
  9 a.m., 10:30 a.m.
- St. Finbarr
  13520 Tamiami Trail E.
  www.sfaindance.org
  239-417-2084
  CHRISTMAS EVE
  4:30 p.m.
  CHRISTMAS
  8 a.m., 10 a.m., 11:30 a.m. (Spanish)

TRENTON
- Our Lady of Lourdes
  3850 North Hwy. N.
  941-493-2931
  CHRISTMAS EVE
  7:30 a.m., 9 a.m., 11 a.m.

WAUCHULA
- St. Michael
  608 Heerd Bridge Road
  941-755-1826
  CHRISTMAS EVE
  8 p.m. (Creole), 10 p.m. (bilingual)
  CHRISTMAS
  8:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m. (Spanish)

ZOLFO SPRINGS
- San Alfonso
  3052 Schoolhouse Road
  941-772-4089
  CHRISTMAS
  10 a.m. (Spanish)
January collection to support regional Seminary

BOB REDDY of the Florida Catholic staff

VENICE | Established more than 50 years ago, St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary is jointly supported and owned by the seven arch/dioceses of Florida. The seminary has educated more than 500 alumni, and more than 300 are actively serving as priests throughout Florida.

Today, St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary is at an all-time high for enrollment with 81 young men studying for the priesthood, including men from the Diocese of Venice. Father Greg Caggianelli, a priest from the Diocese, serves on the faculty of the seminary.

St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary is located in Boynton Beach and was built in 1963. A $25 million Capital Campaign began in 2013 to include: renovation and expansion of the currently outdated buildings, including dormitory space; bringing the campus up to present standards; and taking steps to stabilize the financial future.

A collection held throughout the Diocese of Venice on the weekend of Jan. 10-11 will go directly toward the Diocesan portion of the $25 million goal needed to reach the goal of the campaign.

Bishop Frank J. Dewane, who currently serves as the chairman of the Board of Directors for the seminary, said it is vital for the Diocese of Venice to continue to support the seminary.

“The Diocese of Venice has been blessed to have so many people who have been generous in their support of our seminarians,” Bishop Dewane added. “This collection in January is vital as St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary is where most of our priests are formed and have been for more than 50 years. The seminary serves also for the future of the Church, full of hope and growth that will benefit generations for years to come.”

The modernization effort at the seminary has already begun with the recent completion of two new dormitories, St. John Paul II and St John XXIII Residence Halls. These structure were dedicated and blessed Dec. 7 by Florida’s bishops, including Bishop Dewane. These new dormitories include 76 seminarian rooms in two new wings — 38 rooms in each.

Renovation of the Field House is also completed and includes an exercise room, student kitchen, laundry facilities, Rathskeller, and community room.

Continued support of the St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary Capital Campaign is critical. The faithful are asked to support the special collection Jan. 10-11.

For more information about how to support St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary visit www.svdp.edu. To support the diocesan seminarians call 941-484-9543.

Cursillo movement encouraged to do more

BOB REDDY of the Florida Catholic staff

ARCADIA | Every Christian is called to be their faith by being an example to others as Christ called.

One group within the Diocese of Venice places an emphasis on this by encouraging the faithful to spread the love of Christ to others through their actions and words. The Cursillo Movement is a combined effort of lay and clergy to further the Church that started in the Diocese in 1986 and has been growing ever since.

In a show of support for the movement, Bishop Frank J. Dewane celebrated an Advent Mass for the combined English- and Spanish-speaking groups at St. Paul Parish in Arcadia Dec. 6. Several other priests from the Diocese joined the bishop for the Mass.

Encouraged by their response to a call to holiness, Bishop Dewane said members of Cursillo are examples of the faithful who don’t just say they live as Christ called, but do it each day.

“Words are easy, but what comes after is a commitment that must be shared with others,” he continued. “Be conscious about your actions and never be discouraged when others question you.

“In a time of great uncertainty about many things, everyone must have a certitude, in terms of effort, in following the example of Christ in their lives,” he said.

People who are interested in Cursillo typically first participate in a three-day course that uses the New Testament to instill the faithful with Catholic values by integrating these values in their lives and proclaiming them to others. Following the course, the faithful regularly gather as a community for support and encouragement on this new path in their lives.

Through the Cursillo Movement, the faithful have an encounter with Christ that encourages growth in grace and intensifies one’s ability to be a witness for Our Lord in the world. This strengthens faith, promotes personal holiness and assists Christians in discovering their personal vocation.

For more information about Cursillo in the Diocese of Venice, call 239-609-3922 or 239-823-8935.
Sacraments and other surprises in the Gospel of Mark

Editor's note: Concluding the introduction to the Gospel of Mark for the new liturgical year, this article will look at a few passages at a deeper level, highlighting the added meaning that St. Mark has carefully embedded in His Gospel.

**MATTHEW CAES**

Special to the Florida Catholic

VENICE | The Gospel of Mark, used for the liturgical year that began at the start of Advent, regularly uses a framing device to convey additional meaning without requiring additional words, just by using strategic placement of a text. The healing of Jairus’ daughter in Chapter 6 is interrupted in the middle by the story of the woman who touched Jesus’ clothes and was healed. The two are connected by the number 12: the woman was ill for 12 years and the girl who was raised from the dead was 12 years old.

By inserting the one story into the other, the connection of both is highlighted and connected. Twelve is a symbolic number for Israel, which was made up of 12 tribes. The illness of the woman and death of the girl are meant to be seen as a comment upon the spiritual situation of Israel at the time.

For example, the inability of doctors to heal the woman with a hemorrhage represents the inability of the religious leaders of the time (Pharisees and Sadducees) to give the grace that heals the soul. Only Jesus can do that. In a similar way, the soul without grace is more truly dead than the little girl, but the grace of God given in Baptism brings us back to supernatural life.

Another instance of framing also occurs in Chapter 6, where the sending out of the disciples and the return of the disciples serve as “bookends” to the death of John the Baptist. In this way, John the Baptist is shown to be a model disciple, bearing witness to the truth even to the point of martyrdom. This also shows what the cost of discipleship will be for the apostles.

In the first article, it was noted Jesus chastises his disciples for not understanding the meaning of the two miracles in Chapter 6. The primary focus of the criticism was on the numbers involved. The first miracle involved five loaves, 5,000 fed and 12 baskets left over. The second used seven loaves for 4,000 people and resulted in seven baskets left over.

What do all these numbers mean? To answer that, it is helpful to remember where the miracles took place. In the sixth chapter of Mark, the crowd has followed Jesus to a “deserted place” somewhere in the vicinity of the Sea of Galilee. This was Jewish territory, therefore the participants in the miracle were presumably all Jewish.

The number five (five loaves, 5,000 fed) in a Jewish context evokes the five “Books of Moses,” also called the Torah or Pentateuch. These are the first five books of the Bible and they were the most important books for anyone who considered themselves a member of the people of God. As mentioned above, 12 is the number of tribes that made up the united Kingdom of Israel under David and Solomon.

When one considers that the early Christians would have seen a miracle involving bread as symbolizing the Eucharist, an initial interpretation becomes clear: Jesus is symbolically showing that he will gather the 12 tribes of Israel and feed them with his own body in the Eucharist.

For a first-century Jewish audience, the gathering of the 12 tribes required a miracle just as much as changing bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus, because 10 of the tribes had been forcibly scattered among the Gentile nations more than 700 years before. The first miracle of the loaves promised further miracles.

In the eighth chapter of Mark, Jesus and the disciples are found east of the Jordan River, in the “district of the Decapolis,” which is a Gentile region. The symbolism of the numbers four (4,000 fed) and seven (loaves and baskets left over) is more universal than five and 12. Four signifies the whole world, a meaning it had in the first century and retains today. We still refer to something being scattered to “the four winds,” and the four major directions are the same today as in the first century: north, south, east and west.

Seven carries a number of related meanings, the two most important being the universality of creation (made in seven days) and the number of Gentile nations that once occupied the land of Canaan (see Dt 7:1). The note of universality sounded by these numbers, as well as the presumably Gentile composition of the recipients of this miracle, are a symbolic declaration that Gentiles will also receive the Eucharist in the restored Kingdom of God that Jesus proclaims.

This was already hinted at in Chapter 7 where Jesus initially rebuffs the (Gentile) Syrophoenician woman and refers to the miracles He performs as “bread” (some translations say “food” but the literal meaning is bread). Her response to Jesus, that “even the dogs (literally: puppies) under the table eat the children’s crumbs,” maintains the bread image and argues in the deliverance of her daughter as the woman had asked.

A number of commentators have noticed that St. Mark in chapter 10 presents Jesus’ prohibition of divorce as “bread” (some translations say “food” but the literal meaning is bread). Her response to Jesus, that “even the dogs (literally: puppies) under the table eat the children’s crumbs,” maintains the bread image and argues in the deliverance of her daughter as the woman had asked.

This brings to mind two related thoughts. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1652), quoting Vatican II, states that children are the “crowning glory” of marriage and marital love (see also Psalm 127). St. Mark would agree. Like-
HERITAGE DAY TELEVISION
Christmas Day Television Mass for the Homebound

The televised Christmas Mass for the Homebound with Bishop Frank Dewane as celebrant will air 10 a.m. Christmas Day. For viewers in the northern portions of the Diocese, the Mass airs on ION Television Network. In the southern portions of the Diocese, the Mass airs on WFTX-TV (FOX-4).

Please check your cable provider for channel listings. Leaflet missals are available upon request by calling 941-486-4714 or by writing: TV Mass, Diocese of Venice, 1000 Pinebrook Road, Venice, FL 34285. For more information, contact Gail Ardy at 941-486-4714 or email ardy@dioceseofvenice.org.

Annual Catholic Charities Christmas Appeal continues

The 13th annual Catholic Charities Christmas Appeal is underway and needs your support. The appeal takes place through January 2015. This year’s goal is to raise $525,000. The appeal is the largest annual fundraiser and critical to operating this social service organization. Gifts provide funding for the many Catholic Charities programs and services available throughout Southwest Florida.

Your generosity enables Catholic Charities to serve those seeking help all year long. To donate please mail a contribution to Catholic Charities, Diocese of Venice Inc., 5824 Bee Ridge Road, PMB 499, Sarasota, FL 34233-5065; or visit www.catholiccharitiesdev.org.

Human trafficking presentation

Jan. 20

A program on human trafficking and exploitation in the Sarasota area will be hosted Jan. 20, 2 p.m., by the Women’s Club of St. Patrick Parish, 7900 Bee Ridge Road, Sarasota. The speakers are Elizabeth Melendez Fisher, CEO of Selah Freedom; and Connie Rose, survivor of human trafficking and Director of Survivor Programming and Leadership. They will be speaking on the issues of human trafficking, sex exploitation, and the services that are provided by Selah Freedom. For more information, please contact Bea Idzi at 941-926-5896.

Marriage enrichment retreat

Join other couples for a weekend to review and strengthen your marriage in the richness and beauty of the Catholic Faith. The weekend of Jan. 9-11 at our Lady of Perpetual Help Retreat Center in Venice.

The Diocese of Venice Office of Family Life is offering couples a unique weekend with Jim and Mau- reen Otrema presenting a marriage enrichment program that provides spirituality and techniques for having a grace-filled marriage.

Call Angela at 941-484-9543 or register at www.dioceseofvenice.org/enrichment.

Bilingual counseling services available in Naples

Have you thought about making changes in your life for the New Year? Are you struggling with how to take steps toward a healthier, more balanced life? Could you use some help? Catholic Charities, Diocese of Venice Inc. in Collier County can help. Licensed and bilingual therapists are available to assist you. A bilingual psychologist who specializes in therapy for children also is available. Fees are based on a sliding scale and some insurance plans are accepted. Counseling services are by appointment only. Catholic Charities is located at 2220 Santa Barbara Blvd., Naples. For more information, please call 239-455-2655.

EnCourage meeting

The next meeting of EnCourage, an apostolate for parents and other relatives of those who have same-sex attraction, is Wednesday, Jan. 14, 7:15 p.m., at Resurrection Parish in Fort Myers. The meeting is an opportunity to share experiences in a confidential, faithful, and supportive environment. For more information, please contact the Office of Evangelization at evangelization@dioceseofvenice.org or call 941-484-9543.

Students donate books to needy children

A partnership between St. Joseph Catholic School in Bradenton and Samoset Elementary School brought over 1,100 books to waiting students’ hands. The student counsel officers and members of the National Junior Honor Society of St. Joseph Catholic School presented the books Dec. 8 in addition to delivering gifts to HOPE Family Services and Palmetto Migrant Preschool, and gift cards to Big Brothers and Big Sisters. During Advent, the St. Joseph students take an ornament off of the Jesse Tree with the name of an agency and gift requested, and then bring in gifts for the children who are served by the agencies. This is the second year that the school adopted Samoset Elementary for the book drive. It is an exciting event for both schools because the Samoset students look forward to receiving books and St. Joseph students look forward to this community service project.
Eighth-graders reflect on importance of Christ in their lives

NADIA SMITH
Special to the Florida Catholic

SARASOTA | Eighth-graders from five Northern Deanery Catholic schools attended a retreat that proved to be a day that inspired and was “a lot of fun.”

An 11-member traveling National Evangelization Team, known as NET, ran the retreat at St. Thomas More Parish in Sarasota Dec. 4. The retreat included testimonials, skits, songs and prayer, and ended with Mass. The team has been coming to the Diocese of Venice for the past four years and has inspired three local teens to apply to be NET team members this year.

At the retreat, students were taken into a deeper understanding of the importance of Christ in their life, which reflected the retreat’s theme, “Anchored in Hope.” Students from St. Joseph Catholic School in Bradenton, Epiphany Cathedral School in Venice, St. Martha and Dreams are Free Catholic schools in Sarasota participated.

“The NET team members put a lot of personality into the retreat,” said 13-year-old Claudia Hassler of Epiphany. “You can feel the excitement and energy when they talked and did their plays.”

Her classmate, Matthew Delapidro, 13, agreed and said the retreat “is good for you.”

“You find out stuff about yourself you didn’t know,” he said. “Because of that my relationship with God is stronger now.”

At the start of the retreat, NET co-leader Christy Serna of California spoke about her own relationship with Christ and how it in turn deepened her relationship with her father. "If we give Jesus Christ our sufferings, he can turn that suffering into something beautiful," Serna told the 120 students gathered. "Suffering doesn’t have the last word; Jesus does."

Franklin Valdez, 13, of St. Joseph Catholic School said the NET team members were authentic, relatable and “seemed like they could be good friends.” He appreciated the talks and skits because they helped him see Jesus in a different light — from someone far away to someone personal. “I understand now that Jesus is with you and can always guide you on the right path,” he said.

Throughout the day the students from the various schools also had the opportunity to mix and mingle, which was a highlight for many of them.

“It was great getting to know students from the different schools since we’ll all be going to high school next year,” said Mary Hurl, 14, from Incarnation Catholic School. “That’s why I liked the small groups because we got to meet new people.”

The retreat helped Mary and the other students think of ways they could deepen their relationship with Jesus. Mary started by signing the commitment card that the NET team members gave each student to prayerfully consider signing if they agreed to make the effort to put Christ first in their lives.

Aiden Bashein, 13, of Dreams Are Free Catholic School, was moved by the prayer time offered at the retreat. “It made me feel close to God during that time,” Aiden said, adding he hopes to start reading the Bible more as his way to get closer to God.

And for Billy Stager, 14, of St. Martha Catholic School, the retreat was not only fun, but allowed his relationship with Jesus to improve. “I learned how to pray better alone,” he said. “I would recommend this retreat because you learn more about your faith and it’s a really good time.”

NET will be back within the Diocese of Venice giving day retreats for seventh- and eighth-graders in February, and will also facilitate a weekend-long retreat for high school students at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Retreat Center in April.

For information about future NET retreats, contact George Smith at gsmith@dioceseofvenice.org.
NATION
Theologians decry racism
WASHINGTON | This year the "hope for a just peace" that is Ad- vent “must face the flagrant fail- ures of a nation still bound by sin, our bondage to and complicity in the violence of police deaths of Catholic theologians. “The killings of black men, women and children ... the killing of Jews, by white policemen, and the fail- ures of the grand jury processes to indict some of the police officers involved, brought to our attention not only problems in law enforce- ment, but also the deep injustice in our nation, our com- munities and even our churches,” they said. By midday Dec. 10, more than 310 theologians from all over the United States had signed on to the statement posted on the website www.catholicmoraltheology.com, which is a project of North Ameri- can Catholic moral theologians. The Dec. 8 statement was issued in response to, among other incidents, the decision by grand juries in Mis- sissippi and Missouri to not indict white police officers in the deaths of two African-American males — the shooting deaths of Laquan McDonald in Ferguson, Mo., and the choke- hold death of Eric Garner on Staten Island, N.Y. Garner’s final words, “I can’t breathe,” continue to be chanted across the streets by protesters around the country, the theologians noted. His words, along with “Jesus breathing on his disciples, telling them, ‘Peace be with you,’ given to disciples, then and now, the power and obligation to raise our voices” for a just peace, they said.

Religious leaders condemn torture
WASHINGTON | The chairman of the U.S. bishops’ Committee on International Justice and Peace said acts of torture outlined in a Senate Intelligence Committee report “viol- ated the God-given human dignity inherent in all people and were unequivocally wrong.” Bishop Oscar Cantu of Las Cruces, N.M., also called on President Barack Obama to strengthen the legal prohibitions against torture “to ensure that this never happens again.” The bishop joined several religious leaders who condemned the use of torture by the CIA after the Senate Intelligence Committee released a 500-page executive sum- mary of the Senate Select Commit- tee on Intelligence findings Dec. 9. The full 6,800-page report remains pro- vided by the Washington-based Na- tional Religious Campaign Against Torture after the report became public. The intelligence committee had been investigating the CIA’s treat- ment of detainees in the so-called war on terror almost six years ago. Committee members adopted the report in 2012 and agreed to release it in April, but Senate Democrats waited eight months to do so. The report says CIA interrogators have called on President Barack Obama “equivocally wrong.” Bishop Oscar in inherent in all people and were un- "The Church acknowledges the Continued on sance "and the very real prospect of extinc- tion. This is a concrete re- Continued on tion "and the very real prospect of extinc- tion. This is a concrete re- tion "and the very real prospect of extinc- tion. This is a concrete re- tion "and the very real prospect of extinc- tion. This is a concrete re- tion "and the very real prospect of extinc- tion. This is a concrete re- tion "and the very real prospect of extinc- tion. This is a concrete re- tion "and the very real prospect of extinc- tion. This is a concrete re- tion "and the very real prospect of extinc- tion. This is a concrete re- tion "and the very real prospect of extinc- tion. This is a concrete re- tion "and the very real prospect of extinc- tion. This is a concrete re- tion "and the very real prospect of extinc- tion. This is a concrete re- tion "and the very real prospect of extinc- tion. This is a concrete re- tion "and the very real prospect of extinc- tion. This is a concrete re- tion "and the very real prospect of extinc- tion. This is a concrete re- tion "and the very real prospect of extinc- tion. This is a concrete re- tion "and the very real prospect of extinc- tion. This is a concrete re- tion "and the very real prospect of extinc- tion. This is a concrete re- tion "and the very real prospect of extinc- tion. This is a concrete re- tion "and the very real prospect of extinc- tion. This is a concrete re-
Expansion helps form ‘good, wholesome, holy men’

Msgr. David Toups, left, rector of St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary, addresses those gathered for dedication ceremonies Dec. 7. Florida’s bishops were present for the ceremony that included the blessing of two dormitories. (PHOTOS BY LINDA REEVES | FC)

Dec. 7. The seminary, one of only two bilingual seminaries in the United States, began a capital campaign in 2013, when it celebrated its 50th anniversary.

About 300 supporters of St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary in Boynton Beach joined Florida’s bishops for the dedication and blessing of two dormitory wings Dec. 7. The seminary, one of only two bilingual seminaries in the United States, began a capital campaign in 2013, when it celebrated its 50th anniversary.

Some of the buildings are as old as the seminary, and staff understood that expansion and modernization of buildings was critical. Florida’s bishops supported the extensive capital project.

The new dorms provides rooms for 76 students. The modernization of existing dorms and faculty residences will also provide additional guest rooms which will be utilized for continued education for both clergy and laity, as well as a master’s degree program for permanent deacon candidates.

Lucas Gunalan, a seminarist from the Archdiocese of Kingston, Jamaica, said the new dorms are “wonderful.”

“We have our own personal bathroom and showers. The dorms are more spacious,” Gunalan said. “They are more comfortable. They provide a better study area.”

Wielding a giant pair of scissors, Archbishop Thomas Wenski cut the ribbon in front of the new dorms after offering a blessing. Msgr. David Toups, rector, thanked all supporters and recognized members of the construction team.

In a handout offered during the dedication, Msgr. Toups wrote, “How can we repay you, the faithful, for all of the good you have done for us? By forming good, wholesome and holy men to devote their lives to serving you and your families for decades to come. This is our mission here at St. Vincent de Paul, and by God’s grace and your generosity it is happening in miraculous ways, as today we have blessed 76 new dorm rooms to provide for the growth of the seminary and prepare for a future full of hope.”

Currently, there are 91 students at the seminary, including 14 transitional deacons and 14 others on pastoral leave. Along with the new dormitories, other renovations have been completed, such as to the Field House, which consists of an exercise room, student kitchen, laundry facilities and community television room, and renovations of guest rooms, faculty suites, and seminarian student rooms.

More than 530 of the seminary’s alumni serve in parishes throughout Florida and beyond.

For information on the seminary, visit www.svdp.edu.

New dormitories are featured on the grounds of St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary, which is owned by Florida’s bishops, to better serve the growing number of men enrolling.

SMALL IMAGE 9X136 TO 179X276

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FINISH PAGE
N.Y. religious leaders ask that protests be peaceful

Catholic News Service

NEW YORK | The day after a grand jury decided it would not indict a New York police officer in the chokehold death of Eric Garner on Staten Island, the New York City Commission of Religious Leaders asked that any protests arising from the matter be peaceful.

“We all agree that these protests must remain nonviolent. Now is the time to build a sturdy and empowering infrastructure for a social movement representing people of all faiths, races and ethnicities,” said Father James Massa, chancellor of the Brooklyn Diocese; Jesuit Father Gregory Chisolm, pastor of St. Charles Borromeo Parish in New York City; and Father Carlos Rodriguez, administrator of Holy Cross Parish in New York City.

“This is also a great area to act,” the religious leaders’ statement said. “As we continue this work, we need to work to avoid destructive violence, build trust and create a more just city in which the dignity of each person is respected and enhanced,” they said.

An AP story cited police union officials and the officer’s lawyer as saying that Pantaleo used a “legal takedown move” because Garner was resisting arrest. Garner’s death was ruled a homicide.

“Serene Jones, president of Union Theological Seminary in New York, said the ecumenical Christian seminary’s community reacted with sadness and anger to the religious leaders’ call for peaceful protests.”

Just Philly for a papal visit? Catholics hope other cities get added

MARK PATTISON

WASHINGTON | To date, the only city officially announced for a September 2015 visit by Pope Francis is Philadelphia, where he will attend the eighth World Meeting of Families. However, other cities are still making their bid to be part of a papal itinerary.

Talk persists about the pope including two more East Coast cities on his first U.S. visit as pontiff. One is Washington, where he has been issued an invitation to address a joint session of Congress. The other is New York, where he has been invited to address the United Nations General Assembly.

Even before the Philadelphia visit was confirmed this month by Vatican, which was Nov. 17, the pope’s press representatives accompanying him on the plane back from South Korea in August he wanted to go Philadelphia and noted the invitations from Washington and New York.

Catholics in Detroit, which only emerged in early December from a yearlong bankruptcy, did not get attached to the papal itinerary despite a letter-writing campaign by students at Catholic schools in the city. Margaret Cone, who helped shepherd the letter-writing initiative, told Catholic News Service that an appeal for a papal visit could take an additional tack.

A globally recognized center on infant mortality is located in Detroit, in the Detroit Medical Center complex — now one of the city’s largest private employers. Pope Francis is keenly interested in infant mortality, Cone said. New Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan, a Catholic, had been CEO of the Detroit Medical Center before taking the mayoral reins.

“This is a global issue and Detroit is at the epicenter of all this,” Cone said, adding that giving the pope “someplace to visit” would help in a Detroit bid.

Where else might Pope Francis go if he accepts their invitations?

• Boston. Mayor Martin Walsh asked Cardinal Sean P. O’Malley of Boston to deliver the invitation to Pope Francis. St. John Paul II visited Boston in 1979. In the letter, Walsh said he would love to have Pope Francis bless a park in Dorchester, Mass., named for the new saint.

• Chicago. This invite was extended nearly two years ago by Cardinal Francis E. George, the now-retired archbishop of Chicago. The cardinal extended a personal invitation to Pope Francis immediately after his selection as pope last year,” said Colleen Dolan, his spokeswoman. “Cardinal George invited the pope during their official papal greeting by stating: ‘You’ve taken my name (Francis), so why not welcome you to Chicago.’

• El Paso, Texas. “There is no community on the border that is as large as our own — with Juarez, El Paso and extending to the whole border,” said Msgr. Kevin Sullivan, the archdiocesan chancellor.

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Bishop Mark S. Seitz of El Paso told the El Paso Times, “This is also a great area to highlight the international cooperation that we have between our cities.” He issued the invitation jointly with Bishops Oscar Cantu of Las Cruces, N.M., and Renato Ascencio Leon of Juarez, Mexico.

• Green Bay, Wis. “It comes back to why not Green Bay?” Mayor Jim Schmitt told The Compass, Green Bay’s diocesan newspaper, last February. “It just seems that there’s a whole lot of synergy with what the pope speaks and what the greater community of Green Bay believes,” he said, adding it is possible the pope could celebrate Mass at Lambeau Field, home to football’s Green Bay Packers.

A Staten Island police officer, Joseph Pantaleo, used his nightstick to place a chokehold on Garner, 44, who was unarmored. Chokeholds are banned by the New York Police Department. This officer’s video of the arrest was captured with a smartphone and later posted on YouTube. In the video, Garner can be heard saying repeatedly, “I can’t breathe.” A Staten Island grand jury decided it would not indict Pantaleo for actions in Garner’s death.

“Serene Jones, president of Union Theological Seminary in New York, said the ecumenical Christian seminary’s community reacted with sadness and anger to the religious leaders’ call for peaceful protests.”

The Staten Island grand jury decision followed by one week a St. Louis grand jury that did not issue an indictment in a shooting of an unarmed African American 18-year-old, Michael Brown, in Ferguson, Missouri. The Staten Island grand jury decided that the law is not being applied that city to erupt once more in violence, with businesses looted and set afire, and protesters arrested and injured by police.

In New York, AP reported that peaceful protests continued through the Dec. 6-7 weekend. Mostly peaceful protests about the Garner grand jury decision also took place in several cities around the country. A California demonstration turned violent, resulting in the arrest of six people who broke the storefront windows. Two police officers were injured when marchers threw objects at them.

Boles said he would not withdraw it.

• Tucson, Ariz. In August, Bishop Gerald M. Kicanas of Tucson personally wrote to Pope Francis to visit the U.S.-Mexico border to see firsthand immigrants fleeing their native countries and trying to cross the border. “Pope Francis has deep interest and concern for the plight of migrants,” Bishop Kicanas said, “and Tucson is the epicenter of the immigration movement across the border.”

Of course, it’s not just U.S. cities that are hoping for a papal visit. Mexico City has been talked about as one possible destination.

On that plane with reporters in August, Pope Francis said he could visit the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe — the patroness of the Americas — on the same trip, “but that is a separate papal visit.”

President Enrique Pena Nieto announced in June after a visit with Pope Francis in the Vatican that the pope had accepted an invitation to visit Mexico, but the Vatican has not confirmed that.
Pope wants solidarity in creating world without nuclear weapons

CHAZ MUTH
Catholic News Service

VIENNA | Pope Francis called on world leaders, activists and people of faith to pull together to rid the world of the threat of nuclear weapons.

Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Vatican's permanent representative to U.N. agencies in Geneva, read the pope's statement in Vienna Dec. 8 at the opening of Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons.

In his message, Pope Francis restated the Vatican's long-standing advocacy for the global elimination of nuclear weapons and said peace is not just a balance of power, "but true justice."

The pope's statement said nuclear nations should move beyond the mere ideal of the abolition of atomic weapons stressed in the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation Of Nuclear Weapons and take the next steps toward meeting that objective.

"The humanitarian consequences are predictable and planetary," the pope said in the statement, read before representatives of more than 150 countries gathered for conference.

More attention should be given to the unnecessary suffering that would result from the use of nuclear weapons, the pope's statement said.

He encouraged open dialogue between nuclear and nonnuclear states, with the inclusion of religious communities and civil society.

The pope's statement was one of several during the opening remarks of the two-day conference, in which experts have been dispatched to discuss the short- and long-term consequences of nuclear weapons explosions, especially in the areas of health, environment, climate, food security and infrastructure.

Possession of nuclear weapons does not provide safety or security, but increases the likelihood of accidents and mistrust among nations, said Angela Kane, the U.N. high representative for disarmament affairs.

A nuclear strike would cause devastating effects beyond the borders of the nation targeted for the attack, said Sebastian Kurz, Austria's foreign minister. "It would have regional and global consequences," Kurz told the audience. "No one would win, everyone would lose. It's high time we move from words to action."

Scientific experts said nuclear strikes between two nations like the U.S. and Russia would initially kill thousands of civilians and would reduce targeted cities to rubble. The same experts also said the long-term environmental impact of such an engagement would decrease global temperatures, halt agricultural production and potentially cause billions to die of starvation.

"The risk is high, the danger is real," said Peter Maurer, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross. "Let's bring the era of nuclear weapons to an end." He said no team on the planet could launch an adequate response if one or more nuclear bombs were detonated, either intentionally or by accident.

Not all was doom and gloom during the opening of the government-sponsored conference. While there are currently 17,000 nuclear bombs worldwide in a high-alert status, experts told participants that figure is far less than the 70,000 weapons that were combat-ready at the end of the Cold War. However, the 85 percent reduction in nuclear weapons has created a false sense of security among the masses, who see nuclear destruction as an abstract threat, Kurz said.

In his message, Pope Francis warned of such complacency and encouraged participants of the conference to remind the world of the risks of nations possessing any nuclear weapons. "I'm convinced the desire for peace will bear fruit in concrete ways," the pope said in the statement, adding that it was his hope that "a world without nuclear weapons is possible."

CNS staffer Chaz Muth is part of a media delegation to Vienna; his trip was sponsored by the Nuclear Threat Initiative.
VATICAN CITY | Pope Francis said that the Catholic Church must consider various ways to integrate the divorced and civilly remarried in the life of the Church — not merely allowing them to receive Communion, but letting them serve as extraordinary ministers of holy Communion and godparents — and to make it easier for Catholic families to accept their homosexual members.

The pope also said he would travel to three Latin American countries and several African countries in 2015, and that major reforms of the Vatican bureaucracy, including the possible appointment of a married couple to head a new office, will not be ready before 2016.

Pope Francis made his remarks in an interview published Dec. 7 in the Argentine newspaper La Nación. The interview, with journalist Elisabetta Pique, was conducted Dec. 4 in the pope’s suite at the Vatican guesthouse, where he lives.

The pope answered several questions about the October 2014 Synod of Bishops on the family, which considered controversial proposal to allow some divorced and civilly remarried Catholics to receive Communion even without an annulment of their first, sacramental marriages. By Church law, such Catholics may not receive Communion even without an annulment of his first, sacramental marriage, even outside customary models.

“Such godparents are more worthy of their role than "political crooks" who happen to be properly wedded, the pope said. "We must go back and change things a bit, in terms of standards," he said.

Regarding the pastoral care of couples who cohabitate between a man and a woman, the questionnaire asks: "What door can be opened for them?" Pope Francis said: "Communion alone is no solution. The solution is integration."

The pope noted several currently prohibited activities, including teaching Sunday school and distributing Communion, that he said amounted to the de facto excommunication of divorced and civilly remarried Catholics.

"Why can't they be godfathers or her first, sacramental marriage, the questionnaire asks: "What is possible? What suggestions can be offered to resolve forms of undue or unnecessary impediments?" A related question asks how the marriage annulment process can be made "more accessible, streamlined and possibly free of charge" — the mandate of a commission that Pope Francis established in August.

While acknowledging that positive elements can be present in a civil marriage or in nonmarital cohabitation between a man and a woman, the questionnaire asks how such a couple can be encouraged to marry in the Church. In asking "how can the Church achieve a true dialogue with them?" Pope Francis' emphasis on social justice, the questionnaire repeatedly solicits thoughts on the social, economic and political causes of stress on the family. But it also asks how the Church should respond to the "diffusion of cultural relativism in secularized society and to the consequent rejection, on the part of many, of the model of family formed by a man and woman unit ed in marriage and open to life."

In asking how to "guide the consciences of married couples" with respect to contraception, which is forbidden by Church teaching, the questionnaire emphasizes the practice's impact on birth rates, asking: "Are people aware of the grave consequences of demographic change?"

The questionnaire alludes to in vitro fertilization, which was not a prominent topic at the 2014 synod, asking how the Church can uphold the "human ecology of reproduction" in its dialogue with "the sciences and biomedical technologies."

Pope Francis called for more 'integration' of divorced Catholics, gays

VATICAN CITY | Pope Francis sent the world's Catholic bishops preparatory questionnaire for the 2015 Synod of Bishops on the family, the Vatican City announced Dec. 3. In an interview with the Argentine newspaper, La Nación, the pope said the Church must find ways to "open the doors" to divorced and civilly remarried Catholics.

The questionnaire alludes to in vitro fertilization, which was not a prominent topic at the 2014 synod, asking how the Church can uphold the "human ecology of reproduction" in its dialogue with "the sciences and biomedical technologies."
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MORE ONLINE: The Sunday Word for Sunday, Jan. 4, will be online at www.thefloridacatholic.org.

Family in the flesh

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph 2014

Sunday, Dec. 21
2 Sm 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16; Ps 89:2-5, 27; Rom 16:25-27; Lk 1:26-38

Only several days out from Christmas, and I begin to wonder whether the Church has placed this feast on our radar as a kind of humorous poke in the ribs, or perhaps an act of penance. After all, we’ve most likely been steeped in all manner of “family” arrangements as the days of this Christmas season have unfolded: some of this “family” time festive, some of it annoying, some of it confounding, some of it like a skipping CD, some of it “I’m glad that’s over for another year,” and most of this family-making, I suspect, far from what we have been schooled to call “holy”!

Does the Church give us this “holy family” of Jesus, Mary and Joseph as a goal, a dream, a guilt-trip, or simply as a Hallmark-card formula? I suspect, far from what we have been schooled to call “holy”!

While the Church has been schooled to call “holy” the Nativity of Christ, a holy day of obligation, is celebrated Dec. 25. The feast of the Holy Family is Dec. 29. (CN|CROSSERS)

A detail of a stained-glass window from St. Edward Church in Seattle shows Jesus, Mary and Joseph on their flight into Egypt. The feast of the Nativity of Christ, a holy day of obligation, is celebrated Dec. 25. The feast of the Holy Family is Dec. 29. (CN|CROSSERS)

Father Ben Berinti, Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood, is director of Catholic Campus Ministry at the University of Central Florida in Orlando.

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The Baptism of the Lord

Eph 3:2-3a, 5-6; Mt 2:1-12

Sunday, Jan. 4
1 Jn 3:22–4:6; Ps 147:12-15, 19-20; Lk 1:22-38

Colossians that a family, striving to form one body and one spirit, must rely upon healthy doses of forgiveness, patience and a whole lot of bearing with one another.

Luke’s festive portrait of family consecration is upsprinted with the bone-rattling words of Simeon to Mary: “This child is destined for the rise and fall of many; and you yourself a sword will pierce.”

Yes, to be family, in its many shapes and forms, requires a daily struggle with forbearance, settling with far less than perfection or even momentary satisfaction, patient peace, and wounded hearts that will more than occasionally bleed because of love. And this is why, I believe, we are given this feast of the Holy Family, to remind us that family is indeed flesh and we are all families striving for holiness. Family is indeed flesh. It can be beautiful and banal; it can be tender and tedious. Family can be gentle and violent; it can be nurturing and disruptive. Family can be all of these and is all of these. And yet, family can still give birth to the holiness of God’s presence in our midst.

May these remaining days of Christmas find us making a deeper commitment to live as families seeking holiness. May we reach beyond the romantic comfort and calm of the Christmas crèche and into the real world of our families — families in the flesh, the only kind there really ever will be.

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How can this be?

Every so often we receive unbelievable news. The “Publisher’s Clearing House Prize Patrol” pulls up in the driveway and surprises you while you’re in your pajamas. Imagine the look on the face of a husband and wife when it’s announced they’ll be parents for the first time — of twins! How about studying a whole 10 minutes for a major exam, and the paper comes back with an A-plus?

Then there are times when life seems to be breezing along and all of a sudden, someone is struck with a debilitating disease, or one’s personal fortunes seem to change overnight, or the boss calls you in for the pink slip right after you’re acing your performance review.

Whether it is something joyful or sad, trivial or touching the depths of our spirit, our first reaction, in each of these cases, most likely is: How can this be?

Gabriel’s astonishing greeting to the young Jewish girl Mary must have taken more to explain than the 18 lines Luke gives us in this passage. I’m sure it wasn’t quite that neatly packaged.

There would have been a lot of questions asked and answered, a lot of crying and shaking of heads, but the question “How can this be?” was as good a place as any to begin.

Just as Mary was astounded that such words should be spoken to her, so too might we be astonished if our Gospel reading that such words should be spoken to us. Imagine the face of a husband and wife when it’s announced they’ll be parents for the first time — of twins! How can this be? The good news is: Nothing will be impossible with God!

Still a little doubtful? Repeat to yourself, “How can this be?” The voice of Gabriel, somehow, was able to allow space for God, to become a suitable dwelling place for the Lord. And once Mary allowed God that space within her, God began great things in and through her.

We too are highly favored and blessed by God. If we look closely enough at our lives, we are a graced and blessed people. The voice of Gabriel is calling out to us this day, and his words can spark new and wonderful things in and through us!

Still a little doubtful? Repeating to yourself, “How can this be?” The good news is: Nothing will be impossible with God.

Yes, to be family, in its many shapes and forms, requires a daily struggle with forbearance, settling with far less than perfection or even momentary satisfaction, patient peace, and wounded hearts that will more than occasionally bleed because of love. And this is why, I believe, we are given this feast of the Holy Family, to remind us that family is indeed flesh and we are all families striving for holiness. Family is indeed flesh. It can be beautiful and banal; it can be tender and tedious. Family can be gentle and violent; it can be nurturing and disruptive. Family can be all of these and is all of these. And yet, family can still give birth to the holiness of God’s presence in our midst.

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CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1 This stone on Moses after he spoke with the Lord (Ex 34:29)
2 Physical remains of or items that have touched the body of a saint
3 Comply
4 The Mount Canadian province (abbr)
5 USA
6 Sponsorship
7 "So, could you not watch with me one hour?" (Mt 26:30)
8 "...for ___ and tooth for..." (Ex 21:24)
9 Consider the ___; they neither sow nor reap..." (Lk 12:24)
10 The attitude of Mary of Nazareth
11 "Do it ___ will"}
12 Flatfish
13 Malt beverages
14 Book containing the readings used at Mass
15 Actresses in "Paper Moon" fame
16 "Do ___ for us"
17 Paper packs
18 The Christmas tree is positioned in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican Dec. 4. The tree is an 82-foot white fir from the Calabria region in southern Italy. (PAUL HARING | CNS)
19 cardboard boxes
20 Time for the heavens to open and begin the new year
21 Nuns’ partner
22 "Recessed"
23 "Flatfish"
24 "Heavenly"
25 "Stuffed peppers"
26 "Alvin ___"
27 "Change direction"
28 "...for us"
29 "___ for us"
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DOWN
1 He says there is no God (Ps 53:1)
2 Father in the Bible
3 Luck
4 "...for ___ and tooth for..." (Ex 21:24)
5 "Consider the ___; they neither sow nor reap..." (Lk 12:24)
6 Online reads
7 Optical device
8 End of Time
9 Alphabet string
10 Reception of Holy Orders
11 French World War I soldier
12 Number of Persons in God
13 What 41A used
14 Paper packs
15 "___ for us"
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DOWN
1 He says there is no God (Ps 53:1)
2 Father in the Bible
3 Luck
4 "...for ___ and tooth for..." (Ex 21:24)
5 "Consider the ___; they neither sow nor reap..." (Lk 12:24)
6 Online reads
7 Optical device
8 End of Time
9 Alphabet string
10 Reception of Holy Orders
11 French World War I soldier
12 Number of Persons in God
13 What 41A used
14 Paper packs
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