Bishop celebrates first Chrism Mass as shepherd of San Angelo diocese

By Becca Sankey

SAN ANGELO — With a glinting crucifix high on the wall behind him and three pews of priests seated immediately before him, Bishop Michael J. Sis on April 10 presided over his first-ever Chrism Mass at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in San Angelo.

Celebrated worldwide in the Catholic Church, the Chrism Mass is held annually on Holy Thursday morning or on another day near Easter. It is a sign of the communion of the priests with their bishop.

Sis, who in January replaced retired Bishop Michael Pfeifer, blessed the Oil of Catechumens, the Oil of the Sick and the Sacred Chrism before they were distributed in three bottles to each pastor or pastor’s representative in the Catholic Diocese of San Angelo. Per Church tradition, the oils will be used in the sacraments at each parish.

“It’s beautiful to be a witness to the blessing of the holy oils that are used throughout the year in the life of our church,” said Roselva Ruiz, who with her husband, Bill, traveled from Odessa to attend the Mass. “I believe it’s just very important that as the people of God, we

(Please See CHRISM/23)
Farming, ranching can bring greater appreciation of work, family

By Most Rev. Michael J. Sis
Bishop of San Angelo

Agriculture touches all our lives, wherever we live and whatever we do. The cotton in our clothes, the food on our plates, the leather in our shoes, and even the ingredients in our beer, come from farms and ranches.

Anyone who has ever been in the Diocese of San Angelo knows that rural life has a dominant place in our culture. On Tuesday, June 3, 2014, we will celebrate our annual diocesan Rural Life Mass, hosted by Father Hugh Wade and St. Mary Star of the Sea Parish in Ballinger. The Church stands with farmers and ranchers, particularly those who own family farms and ranches, as they seek to carry out their work with dignity and to strengthen rural communities.

There are many blessings and challenges in rural life. One of the greatest joys is to live so close to the order, harmony, and beauty of God’s creation. Through agriculture we have the privilege of being co-creators with God, participating in God’s ongoing work of creation. Farming and ranching brings the satisfaction of hard work and a deep appreciation of the family as a source of support and training in moral principles.

Those who make a living in agriculture are keenly aware of their total dependence on God’s providence for rain, health, safety, and life itself. The practice of religion has always had a strong role in rural communities. Living in the country, a person learns what true stewardship is all about. Stewardship is taking care of the good things God has entrusted to us, developing them, leaving them better than we found them, and always thinking about the condition in which we will leave things for future generations.

My father and mother both grew up on farms in Kansas during

(Please See BISHOP/22)

La vida rural

Por Obispo Michel J. Sis

La agricultura afecta todas nuestras vidas, donde sea que vivamos o lo que hagamos. El algodón en nuestra ropa, la comida en nuestros platos, la piel en nuestros zapatos, y hasta los ingredientes en nuestra cerveza, vienen de las granjas y los ranchos.

Cualquiera que ha estado en la Diócesis de San Angelo sabe que la vida rural tiene un lugar dominante en nuestra cultura. El martes, 3 de junio del 2014, celebraremos la Misa diocesana anual de Vida Rural, con el Padre Hugh Wade y la Parroquia St. Mary Star of the Sea de Ballinger como anfitriones. La Iglesia Católica respalda a los agricultores y rancheros, particularmente con los que son propietarios de una granja o rancho familiar, mientras buscan llevar a cabo su trabajo con dignidad y fortalecer comunidades rurales.

Hay muchas bendiciones y desafíos en la vida rural. Una de las más grandes alegrías es la de vivir tan cercas al orden, la armonía, y la belleza de la creación de Dios. Por medio de la agricultura hemos tenido el privilegio de ser co-creadores con Dios, participando en el desarrollo del trabajo de Dios de la creación. La agricultura y la ganadería nos traen satisfacción de trabajo duro y un aprecio profundo de la familia como una fuente de apoyo y entrenamiento en principios morales.

Aquellos quienes ganan su vida en la agricultura están profundamente conscientes de su dependencia total en la provisión de Dios por la lluvia, la salud, la seguridad, y en la vida misma. La práctica de religión siempre ha jugado un papel crucial en la vida rural.

DIOCESAN BRIEFS

Correction

The April 2014 edition of the West Texas Angelus incorrectly stated that a Rite of Election ceremony was celebrated in March 2014 at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in San Angelo. Although there were two rites of election in the diocese — the second being at St. Ann’s in Midland — the rite in San Angelo was celebrated at Holy Angels Church. The Rite of Election at Holy Angels was the first time the ceremony had been conducted in a church other than the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in San Angelo. The Angelus regrets the error.

Rural Life Mass

WINTERS. “The Stewardship of Creation,” the diocese’s annual Seed & Soil Rural Life Mass, will be celebrated Tuesday, June 3, 2014, at 6:30 p.m. The Mass will be at the Bobby and Joyce Myers’ Ranch, 1687 County Rd. 173, in Winters. Bishop Michael Sis will be the celebrant. Ribbons and signposts will be visible to help visitors locate the ranch entrance. The Mass is hosted by St. Mary’s Church in Ballinger. For additional information, contact Deacon Charlie Evans, at deacon65@centex.net.

Marriage Jubilee Mass

SAN ANGELO. The Diocesan Marriage Jubilee Day will be Sunday, June 29, 2014, at 3:30 p.m., at the Sacred Heart Cathedral in San Angelo. Couples celebrating their 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50 and 50+ sacramental wedding anniversaries in the calendar year of 2014 and are especially invited to attend.

ACS Garage Sale Planning

SAN ANGELO. It’s that time again! Spring cleaning is upon us, and ACS needs your “treasures.” We will take your unwanted clothing, furniture, outdoor yard equipment, toys, bikes, electronics, etc., for our annual ACS Garage Sale. You will receive a tax receipt for your donations. If you or someone you know has items for donation, please feel free to call to arrange a time for pick up. Of course we will need your muscles, too! Volunteers will be needed to work before and during the sale scheduled for May 31. More details coming soon! Please contact Mia West at 325.656.9402.

Help wanted

SAN ANGELO. The Office of Education and Formation is seeking a professional and qualified person for the position of Secretary in the Office of Education and Formation for the Diocese of San Angelo. This position requires that the applicant have excellent organizational skills; computer skills that include working with Microsoft Office Word, Excel, PowerPoint and be able to communicate appropriately in both verbal and written language. Applications are available at the Office of Education and Formation, 804 Ford St., San Angelo, TX 76905.

Ordination videos

DVDs of Most Rev. Michael J. Sis’s Ordination/Installation Mass as sixth Bishop of San Angelo are now available.

To obtain a copy, please send $15 per DVD to: Diocese of San Angelo Pastoral Center, PO Box 1829, San Angelo, TX 76902. Attention: Ordination Video. Please denote “Ordination Video” in the memo field of your check. Make sure your return address is clearly noted either on your check or in an accompanying note.

Carmelite brother’s anniversary

You are cordially invited to celebrate with the Carmelite Hermits of Christoval, a Mass of Thanksgiving in honor of Br. John David’s 20th Anniversary of Religious Life at 10:00am on Saturday, May 17 at Mount Carmel Hermitage, with a reception following.

Upcoming Holy Land Pilgrimages

July 21-30...August 18-27...September 15-24...October 20-29...November 3-12...Dec. 8-17. Price Starting at $3,390. To make a reservation, please call 810-397-8669 or www.Goodshepherdtravel.com

Prayer for the persecuted Catholic Church in China

A growing number of people in China are openly seeking God for the first time in decades. Since 2007, the universal Church has observed May 24 as a World Day of Prayer for the Church in China. Continuing this observance, Pope Francis has sent the following message to all of us.

May 24 is the day dedicated to the liturgical Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Help of Christians, venerated with deep devotion at the Shrine of Sheshan in Shanghai. I ask all the world’s Catholics to join in prayer with the brothers and sisters who are in China, to implore from God the grace to proclaim humbly and joyfully Christ who died and was raised, to be faithful to his Church and to the Successor of Peter, and to live daily life in the service of their country and their fellow citizens, in a manner consistent with the faith they profess.

“Making our own a few words of the prayer to Our Lady of Sheshan, I would like to invoke Mary with you in this way:

‘Our Lady of Sheshan, support the commitment of all those in China who among their daily labors continue to believe, to hope and to love, so that they may never be afraid to talk to the world about Jesus and about the world to Jesus’. Mary, faithful Virgin, sustain Chinese Catholics, make their challenging tasks ever more precious in the eyes of the Lord, and give growth to the affection and participation of the Church which is in China on the journey of the universal Church.’

The following is a suggested petition for the General Intercessions in the weekend Masses for May 24-25, the Sixth Sunday of Easter:

‘That the Church in China may persevere in fidelity to the Gospel and grow in unity, we pray to the Lord.’
Seminarians joyful at meeting new bishop

By Fr. Francis Onyekozuru

On the day he was officially pronounced the Archbishop-designate of San Antonio Ecclesiastical Province, Bishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller celebrated with the seminarians in our chapel. It was the same day that he had a warm welcome and press conference in the archdiocese. Coming to the sacristy to vest for Mass, he literally jogged down the seminar path to get to the sacristy...he looked like a sportsman, a simple, down to earth, physically fit, and humble man! Doesn’t it sound like some of the qualities embodied by the new shepherd in West Texas: Bishop Michael Sis? Sounds like both were cut from the same piece of cloth. It’s not so surprising then that fate or Divine Providence made the former the Principal Consecrator of the latter.

After wearing the vestments, then Archbishop-designate Gustavo Garcia-Siller came to the last one, the mitre, (commonly called the Bishop’s Hat) and he took it in his hands. He closed his eyes and recited a solemn and hearty prayer. Then, symbolically he said, “the first Mass of many in the archdiocese.” He said this in a way that expressed the importance and significance of that “first Mass” with his new flock. It seemed like a simple reflective statement but it was deep. He values his flock so much, and celebrating with them means a lot. Few of the seminarians were privileged to flock around him in the sacristy when this was happening. Guess who was among them?

This calls to mind how the DOSA seminarians flocked around Bishop Sis in front of the Cathedral at the solemn Vespers on the eve of his installation. There were also family, friends, relatives, colleagues, and well-wishers exchanging pleasantries and giving words of welcome to the new shepherd. Of remarkable presence was a group of young men who have been recently making trips to the seminaries with the diocese’s Vocation Director, Rev. Rodney White and some of their various parish youth ministers. These young men could otherwise be called a discernment group as they try to listen to the voice of God in their hearts and around them.

Meanwhile, the diocesan seminarians were up close to our new shepherd through the entire celebrations and were deeply drenched in such holy realities. It was amazing to see how enthusiastic and joyful they were. Such enthusiasm and joy radiated even through a fresh rhymed coined expression of theirs: “DO NOT DISS THE SIS!” Thus, pointing to more determination in their discernment commitment.

Some of our young people who are discerning their vocations (in various parts of the diocese and beyond) may not have frequent access to The Angelus newspaper and thus, to these memorable stories. Such discerners could be our friends, relatives, colleagues, co-workers, acquaintances, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Please feel free to share these stories with them: monthly stories from the memories of our priests on some remarkable events during their seminary years.

Rev. Francis Onyekozuru is parochial Vicar at St. Ann’s Catholic Church & School, Midland.

Please submit your seminary stories to jpatterson@sanangelodiocese.org.

From the Editor

Think twice about cursing driver who cut you off

By Jimmy Patterson

The man and woman walked into the elevator before us. She was struggling with a walker, he was navigating our way down.

Karen and I were coming from a doctor’s visit; the older couple, too. My wife said something to the two of them and the man, a jovial sort, began talking to us. My mind was elsewhere and all I could remember thinking was that the couple had appeared to have what had been a difficult life. I smiled at what the man said and my mind returned to the trivial concerns of my day. All that mattered was my stuff and I missed an opportunity to share a few moments with this couple. Although nothing earth-shaking or life-changing emerged from the exchange, which couldn’t have lasted more than 30 seconds, I missed an opportunity. The man laughed quietly as he spoke, and Karen and he continued small talk during the length of the elevator conversation. Toward the end of the ride, it suddenly dawned on me my actions could have very well been considered rude. But the man quite obviously didn’t see rude in others, he only saw good, judging by his ever-present smile. I finally saw this in him, but by then, the elevator doors slid open, the woman walked out and the man followed her. Karen and I walked out behind them and didn’t see them again.

What it was that had shaken me out of my selfish thoughts on that elevator was only a fleeting moment, and the words, “What if?”

A lot of us have the habit of maybe not paying as much attention to strangers as we should. We figure, we’ll never see them, I’m too busy, they might ask for money or tell me their problems. So...why bother, right?

But...what if?

At a recent get-together of our small Christian gathering, the night before Divine Mercy Sunday, the group tossed around our usual assortment of spirituality talk. Someone in the group asked what Jesus would look like when he returned. Karen chimed in, certain that when Christ descended he would be in white, flowing robes, perhaps even with that golden halo around his head like in many of the artistic impressions rendered of him.

But what if he is not wearing white robes. What if... (Please see PATTERSON/20)
JUNE
1 — ANDREWS, Our Lady of Lourdes – Confirmation at 10:30 a.m.
3 — BALLINGER, Rural Life Mass at 6:30 p.m.
6 — BROWNWOOD, St. Mary Confirmation, 6:30 p.m.
8 — FT. STOCKTON, Confirmation at 10:30 a.m. and Formal Event of Union for the New Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish
9-13 — NEW ORLEANS, USCCB Spring Meeting
17 — SAN ANGELO, Diocesan Pastoral Center – Presbyteral Council Meeting at 11:00 a.m.
19 — SAN ANGELO, Pastoral Center Staff Meeting 10:20 a.m.
20 — SAN ANGELO, Concho River – Mass – The Lady in Blue at 10:00 a.m.
21 — MIDLAND, St. Stephen – Opening of Fortnight for Freedom at 5:00 p.m. Mass
22 — COLORADO CITY, St. Ann – Confirmation at 10:30 a.m.
29 — ELDORADO, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish. Confirmation at 11:30 a.m.
29 — SAN ANGELO, Sacred Heart Cathedral – Marriage Jubilee Da, 3:30 p.m.

CHRIST THE KING RETREAT CENTER — MAY
13 ACTS Core Meeting 19-23 DOSA- Priests Annual Retreat 19 Heart of Mercy Prayer Group
20 Adoration 23-24 First Methodist-Midland
26 Heart of Mercy Prayer Group
27 Adoration 30 Deacon Formation

NECROLOGY — MAY
7 — Msgr. Kevin Heyburn (2001)
9 — Rev. Leo Diersing (1999)
15-Deacon Wayne Rock (2006)

SEDER MEAL
Angelo Catholic School played host to 270 parishioners from Sacred Heart Cathedral who participated in the annual Seder Meal on Wednesday, April 2. The Max Parker family was the head table family. (Courtesy photo)

CATHOLIC TWITTERVERSE

Pope Francis
@Pontifex
Who among us can presume to be free of sin? No one. Let us ask God to forgive our sins.

Fr. James Martin, SJ
@JamesMartinSJ
Gospel: The Spirit blows where it will. Don't box God in. Don't say "God can't do this." For God will get out of the box, and destroy it.

DioceseCorpusChristi
@diocesecc
No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man. Jn 3:13

ArchdioceseMilwaukee
@archmil
Morning! Another day, another chance to be the Light! =D

Catholic News Svc
@CatholicNewsSvc
In #PopeFrancis homily: what should a Christian community be like? peaceful -no backstabbing; meek -no infighting; and helps the poor

ROME REPORTS
@romereports
Holiness according to John Paul II: "It is intimacy with God the Father who is in Heaven" bit.ly/1h9i6pr #JohnPaulII #Holiness

VaticanCommunications
@PCCS_VA
"Every communicator should passionately announce the Word of God to transform hearts of people" Mons. Celli

Patrick Madrid
@patrickmadrid
"O soldiery of Heaven, whom I contemplate, pray for those on earth who have gone astray after the bad example!" (Dante, Divine Comedy)

Catholic Digest
@CatholicDigest
Memorial of St. Catherine of Siena
If you are what you should be, you will set the whole world ablaze!

Pope Francis
@Pontifex
We must not let ourselves fall into the vortex of pessimism. Faith can move mountains!

VaticanInsider
@VaticanInsider
#Francis: “There’s no room for power struggles, envy and gossip among Christians” bit.ly/PNXQCg

Imagine Sisters
@Imagine_sisters
"We can only learn to know ourselves and do what we can - namely, surrender our will and fulfill God's will in us.”
--Saint Teresa of Avila
Stanton Youth Group Stays Busy

The Junior High Youth Group at Stanton’s St. Joseph Parish has been busy this spring. Several students attended a CRS Rice Bowl training with Catholic Relief Services’ representative Marcos Martinez. Afterward the young people all committed to increasing their contributions to the Rice Bowl effort during 2014.

The group, which just formed this year, entered the Martin County Convent’s Annual Great Soup Cook-off, bringing to the table a CRS Guatemalan recipe: Sopa de Capirotada. The youth groups’ recipe finished second out of 24 entrants at the cook-off.

On April 26, the group worked together on a trash clean-up effort in Stanton, helping beautify the town through litter pick-up along one of the town’s main corridors, near the Stripes location at Interstate 20.

The group continued its busy spring by hosting “Donuts for a Donation,” benefitting CRS. The effort was conducted following two Masses on Palm Sunday weekend.

“I’m really proud of our youth,” said Missy Hernandez, the adult sponsor who works closely with the group on its projects. “We just formed this group and they’ve worked very hard.”

St. Joseph’s Youth Group, in Stanton, formed earlier this year and has already participated in many community and parish charitable activities. The group is helped by adult leader Missy Hernandez, second from left. Also pictured, from left, Maria Ureste, Sebastian Escamilla and Noe Ureste. At right, Noe is holding the group’s second place award from the soup cookoff. (Courtesy photo)

Two sides in Palestinian, Israeli conflict need a just and lasting peace

Dear Editor,

For as long as many of us can remember, the Middle East has been defined by a bitter Israeli-Palestinian conflict that seemingly defies resolution. And for about as long, many people appear to simply accept the conflict as inevitable and irresolvable. Christians must reject this no-can-do attitude.

Both Israelis and Palestinians need a just and lasting peace. This is about real people and real suffering. For over 65 years, Palestinians have been without a country, abiding second-class citizenship and humiliating powerlessness. For their part, the Israelis have lived in continual fear, surrounded by militants who threaten the very existence of their state. In this conflict, there are no winners, and Christians have suffered with both sides, leading to significant emigration because of intolerable conditions.

Pope Francis is scheduled to visit the Holy Land on May 24-26. He supports the current negotiations as “a positive sign” and has expressed the “hope that both parties will resolve, with the support of the international community, to take courageous decisions aimed at finding a just and lasting solution to a conflict which urgently needs to end.”

It is important to recognize the legitimate aspirations of the two peoples and three faiths of the Holy Land. There is a need to affirm the religious freedom of Jews, Christians and Muslims, especially their access to Holy Sites.

As a religious leader, I am encouraging all people of the three faiths of the Holy Land, to redouble their prayerful efforts to support Israelis and Palestinians in achieving peace.

Sincerely in Christ,
Bishop Mike, OM
Most Rev. Michael D. Pfeifer, OM
Bishop Emeritus of San Angelo

March a busy time for St. Joseph Church in San Angelo

SAN ANGELO — St. Joseph’s Parish had a busy March as parishioners saw the completion of restoration efforts on a monstrance and two chalices, near left, and parishioners along with Fr. Emilio Sosa, dedicated a new Pro-Life monument at the church. The monument was dedicated on March 19, the Feast of St. Joseph’s. (Photos courtesy John Rangel)
Confirmation 2014

Confirmation class photos from St. Stephen’s-Midland, top; Holy Redeemer Church-Odessa, at left, and St. Joseph’s in Rowena, above. St. Stephens, Holy Redeemer photos by Alan P. Torre; St. Joseph’s-Rowena courtesy photo.
Top, Bishop Michael J. Sis, blesses the new stained glass windows at Midland’s San Miguel Arcángel Church. Above right, Bishop Sis with Fr. Bernard Getigan, right, and Deacon Mike LaMonica. Above left, the confirmation class at San Miguel, which Bishop Sis addressed and blessed, at left and right.

Photos by Alan P. Torre / aptorre.com
Pro-Life group displays memorial at Angelo State University

SAN ANGELO — On Wednesday April 16, Angelo State University students displayed 3,300 white crosses on the ASU campus to make a statement against abortion. Pro-Life Rams alongside other ASU student organizations, caused a stir displaying Cemetery of the Innocents on the ASU campus to recognize the 3,300 babies lost to abortion each day in the United States. The idea for this event came from Pro-Life Rams leadership who has seen this event done at colleges across the country, and decided it was time to bring it to Angelo State.

“This display brings abortion to a new light,” said Kim Schwartz, president of Pro-Life Rams. “Not only does it make one see the dramatic toll abortion takes on human lives every day, but it also brings one to understand abortion is not a matter of personal or political preference, but a matter of life and death.”

The group partnered with other ASU student organizations including the Baptist Student Ministry, the Newman Center, and St. Mary’s College Ministry to pull off the event.

“We want to show the campus is united in a peaceful, prayerful presence for Life,” Schwartz said.

Members from each group stood by the Cemetery of the Innocents memorial at 8 a.m. to answer questions and share with fellow students the purpose behind the display.

Members of the groups said they had never before joined forces in this manner to take a stand for life, but have enjoyed the collaboration.

The views and opinions of these student organizations and their members do not necessarily reflect those of Angelo State University or the Texas Tech University system.
Making Sense of Bioethics

The path of renewal for couples that have been sterilized

By Fr. Tad Pacholczyk

Among married men and women who undergo surgical sterilization through a vasectomy or a tubal ligation, it has been estimated that anywhere from ten to twenty percent will come to regret the choice. Sometimes there may be an immediate awareness of wrongdoing following the surgery, while in other cases, as Patrick Coffin, radio host and author of Sex au Naturel notes, sterilized couples may “…drift for years before acknowledging that something between them is no longer in sync. After the initial pregnancy fear subsides, and the vision of 1001 erotic nights turns out be something of a scam, spouse may (subtly) turn against spouse while doing their best to ignore the silent, disturbing ‘presence’ of the choice they made.”

Their decision to seek out a permanent form of contraception can also affect their marriage in other important ways. As Dr. John Billings has noted: there is “an effect that is even more tragic than the clinical, and it is that in many cases the use of contraceptive methods in marriage has been followed by an act of infidelity of one of the members. It would seem that contraception diminishes the mutual respect of husband and wife… Additionally, the abandoning of self-control diminishes the capacity to exercise this self-dominion outside the marriage.”

The “abandonment of self-control” that can follow permanent sterilization raises ongoing spiritual and moral challenges for couples who later repent and confess the sin of having undergone a vasectomy or a tubal ligation. A unique and vexing problem arises because sterilized individuals may find themselves, as Patrick Coffin observes, “sorely tempted to delight in the very sex-without-babies mentality that led to the sterilization in the first place.”

Repentant couples, out of an abundance of spiritual caution, may thus wonder what they should do, and whether they are obliged to get a surgical reversal of the procedure. The Church has never declared this to be a required step, in part because of the risks and burdens associated with surgical interventions, in part because of the high uncertainty of a successful outcome, and in part because of the potentially significant expenses involved.

Even though a reversal may not be feasible or obligatory, the repentant couple may nonetheless become aware of the need to order their sexual activity and appetites in the face of their original sterilization decision and its extended consequences. They may recognize a pressing interior need to grow in the virtue of marital chastity and to engage in a lifestyle that authentically embodies their new, albeit delayed, rejection of the contraceptive mentality.

In these situations, clergy and spiritual advisors will often encourage couples to pattern their sex life on the same cycle of periodic abstinence that fertile couples follow when using Natural Family Planning (NFP). During times of abstinence, the couples actively exercise self-control, thereby reordering the sensual and sexual appetites. This strengthens spousal resolve in their resolve not to reduce each other to objects for pursuing sexual self-gratification. This is important because various forms of contraception, including permanent sterilization, often involve the phenomenon of the woman feeling as if she is being “used” by her husband.

Abstinence, therefore, assists couples in learning to express their mutual love in other ways. St. John Paul II explains this perspective in his famous work Love and Responsibility: “Inherent in the essential character of continence as a virtue is the conviction that the love of man and woman loses nothing as a result of temporary abstinence from erotic experiences, but on the contrary gains: the personal union takes deeper root, grounded as it is above all in the affirmation of the value of the person and not just in sexual attachment.” In one of his weekly general audiences later as Pope, he further notes that “…continence itself is a definite and permanent moral attitude; it is a virtue, and therefore, the whole line of conduct guided by it acquires a virtuous character.”

Fertile couples who incorporate NFP into their marriages to avoid a conception often end up acquiring a different attitude towards life as they chart and practice periodic abstinence: they can have a change of heart and discern a call to have one or several additional children. A similar spiritual conversion to a culture of life might reasonably be expected to occur among some sterilized couples who resolve to live out an NFP lifestyle, perhaps becoming more open to adopting a child, or more open to other forms of spiritual parenthood in their communities such as Big Brother/Big Sister programs.

By abstaining during fertile times, then, the sterilized couple reintegrates the same positive behaviors that they might have practiced had they not chosen to be sterilized. In this way, the science of NFP offers the repentant sterilized couple a school of opportunity to acquire virtue within their marriage and their conjugal relations.

Rev. Tadeusz Pacholczyk, Ph.D. earned his doctorate in neuroscience from Yale and did post-doctoral work at Harvard. He is a priest of the diocese of Fall River, MA, and serves as the Director of Education at The National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia. See www.ncbcenter.org

A few words of advice for this year's graduates — and a few others, too

By Erick Rommel

Catholic News Service

It's hard to believe, especially since it snowed the morning that I'm writing this, but another year of school is almost over.

For those graduating, it's a time of significant change, ready or not. For those returning, the opportunities are less obvious, but they're just as readily available.

You have to know what you're looking for and be willing to embrace change. If you're tired of being the quiet type, speak up. If you're tired of always hearing your voice, listen.

Embrace who you are. Watch the movies and TV shows you want to watch. Read the books you want to read. Listen to your music without fear. No matter what you watch or listen to, remember to be considerate of others. Give them the freedom to enjoy their favorites the same way you enjoy yours.

Never turn down a first date. You may be surprised. Consider turning down second dates. You won't be surprised.

Your core values represent who you are. They're too valuable to discard if it means becoming someone you don't want to be.

Always listen to what others say, but don't always believe them. Believe in what you know to be true and right and just, and never stray.

Always plan for the weekend, but never use the weekend as an excuse to not take advantage of today. Limit your regrets. When opportunity presents itself, take advantage.

You've heard, "Whenever a door is closed a window is opened." That's true, and good advice. But, don't forget that closed doors aren't always locked. Sometimes they're closed because the person on the other side wants to see if you're smart enough to use the doorknob.

Don't give others the chance to define you until you're comfortable with how you define yourself. Don't let the friends worth fighting for get away. Let those you've outgrown go gracefully.

That's true, and good advice. But, don't forget that closed doors aren't always locked. Sometimes they're closed because the person on the other side wants to see if you're smart enough to use the doorknob.

Make the most of today before it ends. Always dream. But, never forget some dreams are better when they don't become reality.

Be aware of your personal unwritten rules. You'll promise yourself that you'll go to bed early, that you'll eat right, that you'll exercise more. Follow those rules whenever possible. You created them for a reason.

But never forget that rules are made to be broken. Some of your greatest memories will be created when you stay out too late, eat bad food, and sit around.

Ignorance is bliss. Avoid those who embrace being the happiest person they know.

Appreciate all points of view, but never fool yourself into thinking all points of view are equal. They're not. Some people have beliefs that are wrong; others are misinformed. Whenever possible, ignore the former and educate the latter.

Life is not a race. Go at your own pace. There is no prize for...
The agony in the garden: The place to stay awake

By Fr. Ron Rolheiser

As Jesus and his disciples enter the Garden of Gethsemane, he tells them: “Stay awake, watch!” The implication is that they’re about to learn something, a lesson is to be taught.

But, as we know, they didn’t stay awake, they fell asleep, not because the hour was late and they were tired after a long day, nor even because of the wine they’d drunk at the supper. They fell asleep because they were disconsolate, disappointed, confused, depressed. And, because of that sleep, they missed the lesson they were supposed to learn from watching Jesus in his prayer. What was that lesson?

Jesus, himself, explains it three days later on the road to Emmaus when, in speaking of his suffering and death, he asks: “Wasn’t it necessary?” What the disciples were supposed to see and grasp in the Garden of Gethsemane was the intrinsic connection between suffering and transformation and the necessity, in that process, of being willing to carry tension, disappointment, and unfairness without giving into despair, bitterness, recrimination, and the urge to give back in kind.

We fall asleep out of sorrow whenever we become so confused and overwhelmed by some kind of disappointment that we begin to act out of hostility rather than love, paranoia rather than trust, despair rather than hope. We fall asleep out of sorrow whenever we sell short what’s highest in us because of the bitterness of the moment.

And this is one of perennial temptations we have in life, to fall asleep out of sorrow. Most times when we give in to weakness or commit sin we do so not out of malice or bad intent, but out of despair. For example: A number of times, I have had friends who gave themselves over to periods of sexual promiscuity even though they knew better. They weren’t so naive nor rationalizing to believe for a minute that what they were doing was either life-giving or morally right. So why did they do it? Flat-out loneliness, inchoate depression, practical despair. They were asleep out of sheer sorrow. Unspoken in their actions were these words: “Given my life, my practical situation, that’s the best I can hope for. I’ll take second-best, even fifth-best, because for me there can be no first-best.” Their action was simply compensatory.

The same often holds true too when we give into bitterness, anger, jealousy, hostility, and the urge to give back in kind. Why are we sometimes so petty? Why are we sometimes less than the gracious, understanding, and forgiving persons we would like to be? Simply put, we’re biting in order not to be bitten. Some deep disappointment has rendered us asleep to what’s highest inside of our own selves and some depression has rendered us powerless to our own goodness.

It’s not easy to stay awake to the lesson Jesus was trying to teach in the Garden of Gethsemane.

“Whenever we feel so weak and overcome by disappointment that we give into actions that we know are not good for us, but seem to be the best we can do, we have fallen asleep out of sorrow, just as the disciples did in the Garden of Gethsemane.

“Whenever the unfairness of life so embitters us that we cannot resist the urge to give back in kind, anger for anger, recrimination for recrimination, pettiness for pettiness, we have fallen asleep out of sorrow, just as the disciples did in the Garden of Gethsemane.

“Whenever the complexity of life so confuses us so that we no longer feel any obligation to take care of anyone beyond ourselves, but only want to protect ourselves, to hide, and to find a secure place of shelter, we have fallen asleep out of sorrow, just as the disciples did in the Garden of Gethsemane.

We’re all familiar with the popular song: Help me make it through the Night. Its chorus gives us, in effect, a dictionary-description of practical despair: “I don’t care what’s right or wrong; I don’t try to understand, let the devil take tomorrow, because tonight I need a friend.” That’s exactly the kind of sorrow that overwhelmed the disciples in Gethsemane and dragged them into sleep, numbing them both to what Jesus wanted them to see there and to what was highest inside of their own ideals.

Rev. Ron Rolheiser is a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate, speaker and author.

‘Noah’: A post-modern midrash for the 21st century moviegoer

By Fr. Robert Barron

Darren Aronofsky’s cinematic retelling of the story of Noah has certainly stirred people up. While quite a few reviewers, both religious and non-religious, have given the film high marks, many Christians, both Evangelical and Catholic, have registered a far less than enthusiastic reaction. One prominent Catholic blogger and movie reviewer opined that “Noah” is “embarrassingly awful” and “the stupidest film in years.” Most of the religious critics have complained that the film plays fast and loose with the Genesis account, adding all sorts of distracting and fantastic elements to the well-known story. In the midst of all of this—and no doubt in part because of it—“Noah” took in $44 million on its opening weekend.

“Noah” is best interpreted, I think, as a modern cinematic midrash on the Biblical tale. The midrashim—extremely popular in ancient Israel—were imaginative elaborations of the often sparse Scriptural narratives. They typically explored the psychological motivations of the major players in the stories and added creative plot lines, new characters, etc. In the midrashic manner, Aronofsky’s film presents any number of extra-Biblical elements, including a conversation between Noah and his grandfather Methuselah, an army of angry men eager to force their way onto the ark, a kind of incense that lulls the animals to sleep on the ship, and most famously (or infamously), a race of fallen angels who have become incarnate as stone monsters. These latter characters are not really as fantastic or arbitrary as they might seem at first blush. Genesis tells us that the Noah story unfolds during the time of the Nephilim, a term that literally means “the fallen” and that is usually rendered as “giants.” Moreover, in the extra-Biblical book of Enoch, the Nephilim are called “the watchers,” a usage reflected in the great hymn “Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones.” In Aronofsky’s “Noah,” the stone giants are referred to by the same name.

What is most important is that this contemporary midrash successfully articulates the characteristically Biblical logic of the story of Noah. First, it speaks unambiguously of God: every major character refers to “the Creator.” Secondly, this Creator God is not presented as a distant force, nor is he blandly identified with Nature. Rather, he is personal, active, provident, and intimately involved in the affairs of the world that he has made. Thirdly, human beings are portrayed as fallen with their sin producing much of the suffering in the world. Some of the religious critics of “Noah” have sniffed out a secularist and environmentalist ideology behind this supposed demonization of humanity, but Genesis itself remains pretty down on the way human beings operate—read the stories of Cain and Abel and the Tower of Babel for the details. And “Noah’s” portrayal of the rape of nature caused by industrialization is nowhere near as vivid as Tolkien’s portrayal of the same theme in “The Lord of the Rings.” Fourthly, the hero of the film consistently eschews his own comfort and personal inclination and seeks to know and follow the will of God. At the emotional climax of the movie (spoiler alert), Noah moves to kill his own granddaughters, convinced that it

(Please See BARRON/23)
Christianity's timeless lessons to society in a rush

By Stephen Kent
Catholic News Service

Years and years ago, whaling vessels left the harbor of New Bedford, Mass. never to be seen again. Volcanoes also erupted, earthquakes tore open the land and thousands of people were never seen again. We accepted the news.

But today, we want answers. We want answers now. Where is the missing jetliner with 239 people? We want answers as to why a soldier in Texas fatally shot three people and wounded 16 others on an Army post. We want to know why Jesus' death is so important.

Following this insistence to provide answers is the desire to assign blame as quickly as possible. We want to know: whose fault is it? In some cases, after these events, lawsuits are filed before the last of the bodies are recovered.

Among the multitudes of benefits that Christianity brings to society is being comfortable with mystery. Two centuries ago, ships sailed never to return. No one felt an inalienable right to know as soon as possible what happened. Many things are not to be understood.

World Vision, a well-respected Christian aid organization, announced in March that it would no longer prohibit Christians in same-sex marriages from employment. After an uproar from donors, the new policy was abandoned. Richard Stearns, World Vision president, called it a "bad decision" made from "the right motivations."

This moved Leonard Pitts, Jr., a syndicated columnist, to say Christianity is the last to get it right. Pitts wrote that "the great body of Christendom always seems to bring up the rear, arriving decades late to the place the rest of the nation has already reached."

Wrong. Christianity is already at a place where society hasn't reached on such issues as abortion, euthanasia, the sanctity of marriage.

Pitts' assumption is that short-lived trends and new policies are automatically granted permanence. Pitts notes the "unfortunate tendency to equate Christianity with conservatism."

Conservative yes, if that means stopping to take stock of issues, reflecting before taking action. That, I'd suggest, is another benefit of Christianity to society. There is much to be said for thoughtfulness and prudence to assess the latest trends in society.

Stearns, of World Vision, learned the downside of trying to keep up with society by abandoning values. He said in an apology that "there are certain beliefs that are so core to our Trinitarian faith that we must take a strong stand on those beliefs."

Being comfortable with mystery, relying on timeless standards, these are what Christianity offers to an uncomfortable and impatient world.

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Kent is the retired editor of archdiocesan newspapers in Omaha and Seattle. Contact him at: considersk@gmail.com

Reaching out to those in need: A battle we're losing

By Moises Sandoval
Catholic News Service

On a recent Saturday morning I was walking the streets, praying the rosary. As I went along, I noticed four other walkers going in the same direction. On one side two women -- one older, one young -- both dressed "to the nines," as the New York Irish say, were going door to door.

On the other side, a tall older man and a young woman were doing the same.

At each house the owner would open the door a few inches and talk briefly, accepting or not, the leaflet they offered. As she came back to the sidewalk, I asked the second young woman: "Jehovah's Witnesses?"

"Yes," she answered. I then asked if door-to-door ministry yielded new church members, and she said yes. But, as if to say that was beside the point, she cheerfully told me that she was doing what God wanted her to do.

"The only way to save our world is to put God in charge of our lives," she added.

I agreed that we humans had certainly made a mess of things. We parted, but not until she had pressed the leaflet into my hand, an invitation to attend a brief talk explaining things. We parted, but not until she had pressed the leaflet into my hand, an invitation to attend a brief talk explaining why Jesus' death is so important.

On another recent Saturday, I met a father and a young son from a Baptist church on a similar door-to-door mission. The father urged me to establish a personal relationship with Jesus. I assured him I was trying.

We are being out hustled in the streets. We are not there at all. Home visiting does not seem to be our thing. No ques-
Prayer, celebrations highlight joyful canonizations for Midland pilgrims in Rome
By Tom Collier

ROME — In April, I had the privilege of traveling with my wife Pat and 60 other pilgrims from across the U.S. to attend the canonization of Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II. When Cardinal Angelo Roncalli became Pope John XXIII in October, 1958 I was only one day old. Twenty years later, in October, 1978, Karol Cardinal Wojtyla became the first non–Italian pope to serve the Church in 455 years. On Divine Mercy Sunday, April 27, 2014, both men were canonized as Saints by Pope Francis. It was a blessing to be in Rome to experience our truly universal church praying and celebrating with such joy.

For us, the canonization began when we left the hotel for one of the 19 large screens that had been placed around Rome. The day was cool and cloudy with a light drizzle from time to time. In our group there were four pilgrims from the Diocese of San Angelo. Our guide found and cloudy with a light drizzle from time to time. In our group there were four pilgrims from the Diocese of San Angelo. Our guide found,
By Theresa Laurence
Catholic News Service

BRENTWOOD, Tenn. — Some of the newest members of Holy Family Parish will never attend Mass at their church.

They will never talk with fellow parishioners over coffee and doughnuts after Mass, join the church choir or volunteer for a mission trip.

They are inmates on death row at Riverbend Maximum Security Institution in Nashville. Some have been at Riverbend for decades, with few visitors and limited contact with the outside world.

Parishioner and prison minister James Booth said welcoming them to join Holy Family "gives them a sense that their faith is not in isolation, even though they are." It sends the message that "whatever evil they've done, they are forgiven and accepted," he added.

After some of the prisoners requested church membership this winter, Booth approached the parish council and Father Joe McMahon, the pastor, who granted approval. About a dozen Riverbend prisoners — from death row and another side of the prison — are now officially registered as Holy Family parishioners.

"For all the men at RMSI this is a huge deal and a remarkable event," death-row inmate Bill Stevens wrote in an open letter to Holy Family parishioners.

For prisoners like Stevens, who have been abandoned by their families and have no outside support network, weekly visits from Catholic volunteers are a welcome break in their routine existence. According to the prisoners, to feel a sense of belonging at a parish is a true blessing.

The blessing, though, is balanced by the anxiety of the death-row inmates, as the state pushes to execute 10 people in the next 18 months.

Father McMahon said he hopes his parishioners understand how seriously the Riverbend inmates take their faith and their parish membership. But first, Holy Family members must see their brothers as human beings, he said.

The men may have done great harm, Father McMahon told the Tennessee Register, Nashville's diocesan newspaper, but they still deserve respect.

"No one loses their human dignity and no one is beyond redemption," the priest said.

Father McMahon became involved in prison ministry about three years ago at the request of Nashville Bishop David R. Choby.

"Father Joe was the first person of faith that has ever treated me like a child of God, without making me feel judged and condemned," wrote death-row inmate Ron Cauthern in a booklet introducing himself to Holy Family parishioners. It included calligraphy, photographs and drawings.

Father McMahon said one of his most vivid memories of prison ministry is baptizing Cauthern, surrounded by guards, with his hands and feet shackled.

After pouring holy water over Cauthern's head and blessing him, "I told him, 'Ronnie, real freedom is on the inside,'" he recalled. "It was a profound experience."

When Father McMahon was named pastor of Holy Family last year, he recruited Booth to join the chaplains at Riverbend. Booth, a political science professor at Vanderbilt University who will be ordained a deacon in June, was already making weekly visits to prisoners at the Charles B. Bass Correctional Complex.

Ministering on death row "can be a raucous, messy thing," Booth said.

Sometimes he and other volunteers and chaplains meet with the prisoners in the middle of a large room with people streaming in and out. Or they may gather in a small, awkwardly shaped visiting area, cramped together, reading Scripture and sharing their reflections.

Generally, about eight of the 76 death-row inmates attend Booth's Saturday morning service. Some are lifelong Catholics; others are recent converts; some were raised in different faiths but enjoy the discussion.

"Clearly their faith has not followed a straight path, and they are on the periphery, but they are slowly finding their way back," Booth said.

One of the non-Catholics who participates is Charles Wright. For the last 10 years, almost every week, Holy Family parishioner Kathy Ingelson has visited Wright. She has come to know him as a friend, someone who loves motorcycles and is proud of his job as a prison cook, she said.

Ingelson's friend may soon be put to death. Convicted of two first-degree murders, part of a 1984 drug deal gone wrong, Wright has been on death row for three decades. He is among 10 men who recently received an execution date from the state: June 23, 2015.

"He asked if I would be in the room when it happened," Ingelson said. "I told him we'd have to talk about it later."

While she fervently hopes Wright will be spared execution, she knows abolishing the death penalty "is an uphill battle in this state."

The push to step up executions in Tennessee came after convicted serial killer Paul Dennis Reid died last fall from natural causes, in a hospital room, rather than by lethal injection.

Ingelson considers the death penalty an abomination.

"I feel there is no sense in a death for a death," she said, adding that it is especially hard to understand the value of executing a man who has served 30 years in prison and is no longer the same person who committed crimes decades ago.

Wright "has spent his time trying to make life more meaningful," Ingelson said. "I think I've gained as much from him as he has gained from me."

Ingelson is helping launch Holy Family's "adopt-a-prisoner" initiative that matches volunteers with prisoners to write and visit.

So far, nine parishioners have stepped up. Steve Hayes, a new volunteer, said he "feels called to go and give the gift of time to someone who doesn't have anything but time."
**Our Faith**

**Explaining the cross to a child; How clean is the chalice?**

By Father Kenneth Doyle
Catholic News Service

Q. Recently, I took my 4-year-old grandson to Mass. Above the altar, we have a very large crucifix and I noticed that, while looking at it, the boy was visibly shaken and quite upset. How does one explain Jesus on the cross to a 4-year-old? (Davenport, Iowa)

A. Recognizing that I know precious little about child pedagogy, I will nevertheless venture an answer. First, there is no way to prevent children from seeing a crucifix and asking their elders about it.

Many years ago, our seminary class was studying sign language so we could transmit the Scriptures to the hearing-impaired. I recall very little from that time, but what I do remember is that the sign for "Jesus" was to point to the center of both palms. So ingrained in our consciousness is the suffering of Christ that his nail prints identify him.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal stipulates, in No. 308, that on the altar of every church, or near it, there should be a cross with the figure of Christ crucified, clearly visible to the congregation.

I do take your concern as a helpful caution against display or descriptions that are overly graphic. In explaining the passion of Christ to your grandson, there is no need to highlight the nails, the scourging, the crown of thorns.

I think that I would say something like this: Many years ago, they used to punish people who had done something very wrong by hanging them on a cross. Jesus didn't do anything wrong at all. In fact, he was the nicest and the kindest man there ever was.

But other people have done many wrong things, and Jesus still loves them. So he told his father that he wanted to offer his own life to make up for those other people, so that they could one day be with him in heaven. Jesus suffered a lot that Good Friday, and he died because he loved all of us so much. But the nice thing is that three days later, his father brought him back to life again. He saw his friends and his mother some more after that, and now he is very happy and lives in heaven.

That would be my approach, but you're a parent and I am not, and, without a doubt, you can do better.

Q. I would like to take holy Communion more often from the chalice, but I am concerned about contracting someone else's illness.

Has anyone ever studied how "clean" the cup really is after a quick swipe from the cloth? Has anyone been able to document whether illness could be transmitted even to a whole congregation in this way? And lastly, has the church ever considered using small single-serving plastic cups, as some Protestant churches do? (Newport News, Va.)

A. In 1998, the American Journal of Infection Control tried to answer this question along with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) saying that "a theoretic risk of transmitting infectious diseases by using a common communion cup exists, but that risk is so small that it is undetectable."

Further, the statement explained, "...a recent study of 681 persons found that people who receive communion as often as daily are not at higher risk of infection compared with persons who do not receive communion or persons who do not attend Christian church services at all."

However, during a particularly virulent outbreak of influenza (most notably in early 2013) some Catholic dioceses recommended that Communion from the chalice (and even the handshake of peace) be temporarily suspended.

Some dioceses recommend that eucharistic ministers regularly use hand sanitizers before distributing Communion and that the faithful should not receive from the chalice if they are feeling ill.

As to the manner of receiving, some Protestant denominations (especially, evangelical ones) do, indeed, use individual plastic disposable cups. While larger Catholic congregations may need six or eight metal or glass vessels on Sundays for the consecrated wine, the use of individual containers is believed to stray too far from the Last Supper ideal of the sharing by Christ's disciples in the one cup.

Questions may be sent to Father Kenneth Doyle at askfatherdoyle@gmail.com and 40 Hopewell St., Albany, N.Y. 12208.

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**A tin cup full of grace, and tracing the footprints of God**

By Effie Caldarola
Catholic News Service

Author Annie Dillard has a popular quote: "We catch grace like a person filling a tin cup at a waterfall." That quote intrigued and troubled me. I stuck it on my bulletin board, next to pictures of my kids, prayers for the canonization of Boys’ Town founder Father Edward Flanagan, and a picture of me with Sister Helen Prejean. My bulletin board, in other words, holds for me a variety of reminders of grace.

As Catholics, we're very big into the symbolic love affair with water: God's spirit hovers over the water, representing the Lord moving to control the chaos.

Scripture abounds with water, and its ubiquitous presence should be our first hint that grace is everywhere. Jesus changes large vats of it into the finest wine, and seeks out John at the Jordan River to be baptized in it. He offers the Samaritan woman living water, which only he can give. Water, like fire and wind, is grace's gushing metaphor.

The best baptisms are those done by immersion, rather than in dribbles. During the Easter season, the pastor at my parish literally soaks people with branches full of water as he makes his way through the church.

So here I am, tin cup in hand. I've been carrying it around with me, in my imagination, wondering how stingy I am about asking for grace and how observant I am in recognizing grace when it's pouring down on me.

In my job working for an anti-death penalty organization, I have been blessed to meet people who present me with grace if I'm willing to see it. One of them is a man named Curtis McCarty, who was held for nearly 20 years on death row in Oklahoma for a crime he did not commit.

Our criminal justice system is incredibly flawed, from top to bottom, with punishment and retribution taking the place of rehabilitation and reconciliation. To make things worse, in many cases the verdict is just flat out wrong, or even the product of corruption, and Curtis was a victim of that.

Yet Curtis has overcome bitterness to emerge as a compelling speaker who tells audiences worldwide about his experiences. There's grace in that.

Grace abounds, as well, in the women I've met who are faithful to husbands who have been imprisoned for decades, or mothers whose children, as juveniles, were sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. That kind of mandatory sentence for juveniles has been declared unconstitutional in my state now, but that doesn't mean it isn't still a long struggle. How does one remain strong, loyal, faithful through that kind of trial? Grace, amazing grace.

In a document written for the Society of Jesus in 2008, the Jesuits express their way of seeing God in all things: "Our way of proceeding is to trace the footprints of God everywhere."

I guess my dinky little tin cup just won't cut it in a world where God's grace is overflowing like a waterfall. If I can see the footprints of God in the robins flocking to my backyard these days, then I can say yes to grace everywhere.

Grace isn't just in the time I set aside for formal prayer. It comes to me in the sacraments, but it gushes forth from there, demanding I flow with it. It calls to me. It asks me to throw away my tin cup and immerse myself in the water.
Parish installs Marian shrine to bring comfort to those with addictions

DARBY, Pa. (CNS) — Just about every Catholic Church has at least one and often several images of Mary, and that is certainly the case at Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Darby.

It is an old church, built in 1930, but one shrine to Mary is new. It was installed just last October and is unique among the Philadelphia Archdiocese's 235 parishes.

A large icon painted especially for the church was executed by celebrated artist Brother Michael (Mickey) O'Neill McGrath, an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales, who also gave a reflection at the parish. It is titled "Our Lady of Light, Help of the Addicted."

In the icon, Mary is depicted holding a broken cocktail glass, and growing from it are three flowers: a lotus symbolizing enlightenment and beauty; a golden rose symbolizing the rosary, especially the mysteries of light; and a lily, reminding everyone of the hope of Easter and the promise of a new beginning.

Mary's halo is surrounded by 12 stars symbolizing the 12 steps of addiction recovery programs, and in the background there are words from an ancient prayer: "Assist your people who have fallen, yet strive to rise again."

The shrine, which has two chairs in front of it for meditation, was the idea of Father Joseph Corley, who has pastor for the past 15 years. During that time, he has had to preside at the funerals of too many people who died as a result of addiction.

Substance abuse is probably no worse in Darby than in most other parishes -- maybe 8 percent of the deaths over the years, as a ball park figure.

What really bothers Father Corley is that most of them are way too young to die - they're often between 20 and 45. For some it's a slow death after alcohol has destroyed their system, for others the instant death of a drug overdose.

In Blessed Virgin Mary Parish, the deaths are about evenly divided between men and women and usually members of families Father Corley sees every week. "We try to support the parents," he said.

This isn't a brand new experience for Father Corley. "I was a detox counselor at a VA hospital earlier in my career," he told CatholicPhilly.com, Philadelphia's archdiocesan news website.

Father Joseph Corley, pastor of Blessed Virgin Mary Parish in Darby, Pa., discusses the church's painting of Our Lady of Light with two students of the parish school, seventh-grader Jennifer Eburuoh and eighth-grader Francis Ugorji. The painting is intended to give comfort to people who suffer from substance abuse, and it's titled "Our Lady of Light, Help of the Addicted." (CNS photo/Sarah Webb, CatholicPhilly.com)

It's encouraging to him when he sees members of the parish, or people from other parishes, who attend one of the two Alcoholics Anonymous groups that meet at the Darby church, or family members who attend the Al-Anon groups in the parish.

"I've had friends who have moved from addiction to recovery," he said. The new shrine gives hope. "The grace of God can help and I see people who come before the shrine and pray. Some are in recovery and some are parents."

Some of those who enter recovery programs for addictions do not speak about it outside of their 12-step group. Others might find talking about the issue therapeutic and a way to encourage others to join.

Richard Whalen, 37, an active member and lector at Blessed Virgin Mary, is a recovering alcoholic who belongs to the latter group and is quite open about his own struggle. Growing up the son of an alcoholic parent, he swore to himself he would never drink. That changed when he was 21 and he not only drank but only drank but constantly. It didn't stop after he married. Although his wife, Lee Anne, often threatened to leave him because of his alcoholism, he is thankful she stuck by him. "She has been so supportive and has helped me along the way," he said.

Through it all, there was his Catholic faith, which included daily rosary and prayers even though he refused to admit he had a problem.

"I was drinking and driving, emotionally abusive and in a bad mood every day because I was up all night drinking," Whalen remembers. "I was in a world where I was the only person, it was all about me."

It was back in 2008 that he finally got up the courage to do something about it. He emailed Father Corley and told him he had a "little" drinking problem.

Father Corley was more than helpful, and convinced him to join an AA group, and he has been a steady member of the Wednesday night group ever since.

Were there any relapses? Yes, a very brief one in 2013. But that's why AA members call themselves "recovering alcoholics," not "recovered alcoholics." It is a lifetime commitment to the program.

In Holy Land, it's 'I am a Christian'; denominations not so important

JIFNA, West Bank (CNS) -- Suheir Saliba was running late as she prepared to go to the Easter Divine Liturgy with her husband, Aiamd Kamal, and his family.

Saliba, a Catholic, had a late night. She, along with other Catholic and Greek Orthodox residents of the village, had attended the ceremony welcoming the holy fire at St. George Greek Church.

Father Firas Aridah of St. Joseph Catholic Church was also at St. George, where Greek Orthodox Father George Awad lit his candle with the holy fire. Later, after the Greek Orthodox reception, Father Aridah celebrated Mass at St. Joseph.

Saliba joined her mother and brother and his family at Mass Holy Saturday in the Catholic church where she was raised. Some of the Greek Orthodox parishioners stayed for the Mass, too. Saliba and her family went out to eat afterward, and she did not return home until late.

Easter was the day to spend with her husband's family. In Israel and the Palestinian territories, where Christians make up a little less than 2 percent of the population, it is difficult to find a family where there is no "intermarriage" between people from different Christian denominations. In Palestinian tradition, the women join their husband's church after marriage, raising their children in that church, but most women also continue to attend religious ceremonies in the church where they were raised.

On an international level, relations between Catholics and Orthodox have not always been so positively familial. In fact, it was only 50 years ago that Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople met in Jerusalem and launched a new relationship marked by forgiveness and dialogue. Pope Francis originally planned his May 24-26 trip to the Holy Land to commemorate the 50th anniversary at the invitation of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, whom he will meet May 25.

Saliba's mother was raised Greek Orthodox, but married her father, who was a Catholic. Two of her maternal uncles belong to the tiny Seventh Adventist Church, and a third uncle belongs to the Lutheran Church.

"For me it doesn't matter where I pray, I am attending God's house. How the prayers are said does not matter,"

(Please See CHRISTIANS/21)
We cannot forget the value of human person in debate

By Daniel Cardinal DiNardo
Archbishop of Galveston/Houston

Immigration reform has begun to show up again in news stories as it appears that both national parties in the House of Representatives are growing closer in dealing with this important topic (the Senate already voted on a bill last summer).

The current situation on immigration is unworkable and piecemeal legislation will only exacerbate the problems. Comprehensive immigration reform is required.

For a long time, religious leaders, including an interfaith coalition of religious leaders here in Houston, have been voicing the need for comprehensive immigration reform. It is a view that is also being shared more and more by representatives of the business community.

The Catholic Bishops of the United States have been writing and speaking on comprehensive reforms for many years. Our fundamental approach is first based on the Scriptures and Catholic social teaching, it is an approach developed over centuries, but most significantly shaped by Papal teaching since Pope Leo XIII in the 1880s and confirmed by successive Popes, most recently by Pope Benedict XVI.

That heritage of instruction calls upon us to “welcome the stranger” as exemplified in the Book of Deuteronomy 10:17-19 in the Old Testament and in the Gospel of St. Matthew 25:35 in the New Testament. Our approach also takes reason into account as well as the political realities that are present in any given moment of possible legislation. A few months ago Pope Francis spoke about the special tenderness that is expressed by the Church towards those who are obliged to flee their own country “and exist between rootlessness and integration.”

In this Archdiocese and in many other local churches we witness the human consequences of the current immigration system, a system that does not work.

Our social service agencies like Catholic Charities, our hospitals and our schools deal with this broken reality every day and they see its effects on the human person. The current system does not help the rule of law and does not serve the rights of the human person.

Its flaws are systematic. Incentives for legal behavior must be matched by fairness and also by a way for renewed opportunities for immigrants.

It should also be noted that many polls in the past year show that the majority of the citizens of this country are favorable to an immigration reform that gives undocumented immigrants an opportunity to gain legal status. A central issue for those of us who are religious leaders is the unification of families and keeping families together. Catholic Charities workers have constant stories of the break-up of families, especially those with young children, because a parent is in detention or deported. The family and its unity must remain the cornerstone for immigration reform that works.

In the last two years there has also been a significant increase in the number of unaccompanied minors who were trying to enter the United States and were detained by U.S. Border Patrol.

In 2012 there were some 24,000 juveniles detained along the southwest border of our country.

These juveniles are very vulnerable to exploitation — they leave home because they are desperate, they frequently have no contact with families at home or here, and then are repatriated to their country of origin in places which puts them further at risk.

It is true that work must be done to push and to help other countries to improve their economic conditions and political stability so that immigration to another country will not be necessary.

Border security for our own country is also important; however, some proposals in Congress make border security the only priority and they want 100 percent effective enforcement before any measures are enacted to regularize the millions of undocumented persons who are already here.

Enforcement must be matched simultaneously by policies that regularize the undocumented and open an accessible and achievable path for citizenship for a maximum number of persons.

There are political and social dimensions to the public debate that is now taking place in Congress over comprehensive immigration reform. This involves a certain give and take in the lawmaking process.

However, there are also Biblical and moral dimensions that are equally important — dimensions that remind us of the meaning of the human person, especially the vulnerable human person, a meaning that has been cemented into our Catholic Faith from its origins.

As a society and as citizens, we will be judged by our care of the unborn, the terminally ill, the disabled, the poor and weak, and the alien and the immigrant. They all have a special place in the compassion of God and must mark the hearts of God’s people.
Think 'Noah' is confusing? Try making sense of the movie critics

By Kurt Jensen
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — Time was when hidden messages and obscure references within a big-budget Hollywood film about a religious figure could be treated as lighthearted insider jokes.

Take, for example, the beloved 1945 classic "The Bells of St. Mary's" which follows Father Chuck O'Malley's (Bing Crosby) interaction with a parochial school led by Sister Mary Benedict (Ingrid Bergman).

The script makes mention of the thoroughly modern "St. Victor's School." That was a nod to Msgr. John Devlin, at that time the Hollywood representative of the National Legion of Decency, which kept its eye on Hollywood films; he was also the pastor of St. Victor Parish in West Hollywood.

Similarly, a secondary character, grumpy businessman Mr. Bogardus (Henry Travers), complains that the architects of his new office building are "a couple of thieves, Butler and Dean." That's a dual allusion to director David Butler -- who had recently helmed Crosby's "The Road to Morocco" with Bob Hope and Dorothy Lamour -- and gagman Barney Dean, who contributed material to that and other Crosby pictures.

A "Road" movie gag in a reverent Catholic story? Few were in the know, and no one was much flustered.

Contrast that with the controversy that has swirled around director Darren Aronofsky's "Noah" beginning well before the movie's release.

Aronofsky is an easy target for those on the lookout for anti-Christian messages in his work. Raised as a Jew, he now self-identifies as an atheist, and has often discussed his appreciation of Kabbalah, a mystical offshoot of Judaism.

Yet, since the story of Noah's covenant with God takes up fewer than 100 verses in the Book of Genesis, and contains almost no dialogue, filmmakers seeking to recount it in a feature-length movie have inevitably had to pad the tale. To do so, they've had to rely either on those parts of Scripture that do not concern the Ark builder himself or on non-biblical writings or on their own imaginations.

Aronofsky has chosen to draw from all three of these sources. The result has been a potentially confusing experience for those filmgoers who are less than fully conversant with the literature to which he turned, whether within the canon of the Bible or outside it. Even among presumably well-informed critics, moreover, interpretations of Aronofsky's viewpoint and intent have varied widely.

Theologian Brian Mattson, who works at the Center for Cultural Leadership in Mount Hermon, Calif., was among the first to weigh in. On March 31, he posted a lengthy analysis of "Noah" on his website in which he called the film "a thoroughly pagan retelling of the Noah story direct from Kabbalist and gnostic sources." He went on to identify Kabbalah as a form of Jewish gnosticism.

Among the primary tenets of gnosticism -- a philosophy which, in ancient times, gained adherents among pagans, Jews and Christians alike -- is the idea that salvation comes through secret knowledge rather than, in the Christian context, through the redeeming power of Jesus' death and resurrection. Gnosticism also holds that an evil deity called the Demiurge created the material world.

Focusing on the latter point, Peter T. Chattaway, a longtime film critic for Christian publications, has taken issue with Mattson's critique.

Writing on the Patheos blog, he observes, "Instead of condemning the created world as an illusion imposed on us by an evil Creator, Aronofsky's film celebrates the created world and, through its protagonist, suggests that the animals are 'innocent' in a way that humans are not. ... Gnosticism hates Creation. Aronofsky's 'Noah' loves Creation. So whatever else you might say about Aronofsky's film, it is not gnostic."

On April 10, the volume ramped up again when Mimmo Muolo, an author who contributes to the Italian Catholic newspaper Avvenire, wrote a critical column.

Muolo is not the publication's regular film reviewer. But because Avvenire is owned by the Italian bishops' conference -- and, as The Hollywood Reporter, a trade journal, concluded, "is aligned with the

(Please See CRITICS/21)

‘Heaven is for Real’ not perfect but has something for most everyone

By John Mulderig
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength." Those familiar words, addressed to God in Psalm 8 of the King James Bible, might serve as the tagline for the fact-based drama "Heaven Is for Real" (TriStar).

Audiences of almost any age will benefit from this intriguing, child-guided glimpse into the afterlife.

As readers of Todd Burpo's best-selling book (written with Lynn Vincent) will know, this is the story of his young son, Colton. After coming close to death during an operation, the 4-year-old (Connor Corum) started his Wesleyan minister father (Greg Kinnear) and choir-director mother, Sonja (Kelly Reilly), by announcing that he had visited heaven and met Jesus.

His subsequent description of two deceased relatives, the existence of one of whom was previously unknown to him, lent remarkable credibility to the lad's claim.

Perhaps because they seemed too literal to be readily accepted, however, Colton's matter-of-fact statements about paradise stirred controversy in his family's small-town community of Imperial, Neb. Ironically, they also provoked a crisis of faith for Todd, who was forced to ask himself how genuinely he believed what he had long been preaching.

Director and co-writer (with Christopher Parker) Randall Wallace's adaptation of Burpo's account is substantial and moving, thanks in large part to the mature way in which it grapples with fundamental issues of religious belief -- and doubt. What could have been a hokey, feel-good exercise in Christian cheerleading instead comes across as a sober, though far from humorless, meditation on the reality of death and the virtue of hope.

Those themes are ably personified by Margo Martindale in the role of Burpo family friend Nancy Rawling. A stalwart member of Todd's congregation, Nancy nonetheless suffers deep, ongoing grief over the loss in combat of her Marine son.

Along with its faith-affirming revelations about the beyond, "Heaven Is for Real" also showcases a tenacious marital bond. Beset by money troubles, illnesses and other worries, Todd and Sonja occasionally quarrel. Yet their underlying commitment to each other is unwavering.

Scenes portraying the medical difficulties the Burpos endure -- including a painful baseball injury for Todd -- might not be suitable for the littlest moviegoers.
thousands of volunteers and hundreds of city employees on hand to provide assistance.

Then with a ceremony befitting the great saints, Pope Francis declared Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II canonized saints and applause from a million pilgrims could be heard all around. Church bells rang across the city. At the moment the proclamation was read, the sun broke through the clouds, and the weather warmed. Perhaps it was God's way of showing his approval, too.

Once the two popes were declared saints, the Mass of Thanksgiving began, concelebrated by several bishops including Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, our two living popes. Again the world worshipped together, encountering God in the liturgy and in the Eucharist. The atmosphere was one of profound reverence with the faithful kneeling wherever they were — whether on the grass or the pavement — for the consecration. As Mass ended, we bowed our heads and received the Pope's blessing, and following the final hymn the crowds began celebrating.

Pat and I walked the mile or so to St. Peter's Square and found the broad boulevard that leads from the Tiber River to the square still packed with joyful pilgrims cheering and waving flags from around the world. The crowd ahead of us surged forward just as Pope Francis drove by in the Popemobile greeting the crowd. We felt such joy at having been present for such an event, and shared in the joy of the entire church celebrating two great souls in heaven. Joy was mixed with exhaustion in the faces of those who stood in the street for 8-10 hours to be in St. Peter's Square for this historic event. I saw in this a metaphor for the unity, joy, and hard work that frequently defines the Christian life.
No one asked me that night for what I thought Jesus might look like when he returned. One of my thoughts was that Jesus was in the face of the man covered with boils who Pope Francis recently blessed in St. Peter’s Square. That was Jesus. In both the faith of the disfigured and Jesus was in the face of the man covered with boils who Pope Francis recently blessed in St. Peter’s Square. That was Jesus. In both the faith of the disfigured

In hindsight, the suffering man probably wasn’t Jesus. But what if?

Another frequent point of discussion in a few of other small groups and conversations with friends has been how to extend the feeling of calm and peace and holiness when we are all finished with that day’s discussion and head back into the big, bad world. It is a fascinating topic in that it recurs so often. Maybe it’s a guy thing, but why is it that one moment I am being moved by prayers and stories of King David, the Gospels or someone’s struggles with life’s problems, and five minutes later in traffic, someone cuts me off and I lay into my horn and throw up my hands and scream out a name that I may think describes them accurately at that moment but probably doesn’t describe them at all.

I noticed once that if you ride in the passenger seat of a car, it’s easier to not be angry when someone does something ill advised or dangerous in the car in front of you. It just doesn’t seem as personal when you’re not the driver. But since we cannot be chauffeured everywhere and still hope to feed our families, it is necessary, then, to act responsibly when behind the wheel and refrain from lashing out which, I have also found, only makes the situation that much more intolerable.

And this, you might ask, what has to do with a woman using a walker and a talkative man on an elevator with whom I missed a chance to converse because of my own selfish actions?

On one hand, nothing. On the other, what if? What if he is rushing to be by the side of his dying wife, parent or child? What if she was just fired and isn’t thinking clearly? What if he’s hungry? Or suffers from physical condition that makes it difficult for him to survive, let alone drive? Or what if he just came here and isn’t quite familiar with the layout of the city streets yet?

Jesus was human, as Fr. James Martin reminds us in his new book, “Jesus: A Pilgrimage.” He faced the same challenges of day to day life as others of his time did.” Before he wore white, glowing robes, he dressed — and looked — like everyone else. Since he looked like others and dealt with similar issues facing the people of his time, who’s to say when he comes back, he won’t look like us again? Who’s to say he won’t try to strike up a conversation with a stranger or forget to use his blinker?

What if?

PATTERSON

removed the age-old charge of “deicide people” against the Jews in the Good Friday prayers.

Pope John XXIII began his papacy by being very visible in Rome. He walked about freely and visited the sick and prisoners. These actions earned him the nickname of “Good Pope John.” Unlike many previous popes, Pope John had many years of experience of the world outside the Vatican and continued his custom of traveling outside Rome.

The Pope was receiving reports on problems of the Church around the world and he began planning for “a council.” His intention, according to Burns, was to address the historic splits in Christianity between East and West, between Catholic and Reformed traditions. To start this process, Pope John approved the establishment of a Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity in 1960. He followed this by calling for the immediate consecration of 13 indigenous bishops in the Church in Africa in 1960. He also brought a stronger emphasis on ecumenism and a new approach to the world. Burns wrote that Pope John saw the Church as inward rather than outward-looking when he began his papacy. He wanted to make the message of the church acceptable to the whole world. His intention was “Let us come together. Let us make an end of our divisions.”

In his encyclicals, Mater et Magistra (Mother and Teacher) and Pacem in Terris (Peace on Earth), Pope John wanted to break down barriers to show the relevance of Christ to the world. The Pope’s health declined in the first half of 1963 and he died on June 3, 1963. Rosemary Guiley writes in “The Encyclopedia of Saints” that some at the Second Vatican Council wanted to canonize Pope John by acclamation as had been the practice in the early centuries of the Church. Instead, Pope Paul VI ruled that the canonization process for Pope John XXIII and Pius XII would begin for both. Pope John XXIII was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 2000, the first pope since Pius X to receive this honor. The cause for Pius XII has been dropped. Woodward reported that there have been more than 20 unexplained healings credited to Pope John XXIII’s intercession.

Author Desmond O’Grady wrote about Pope John XXIII’s involvement in world affairs. He stated that during the Cuban missile crisis (1962), Pope John managed to ease the tension between the Kennedy administration and the Khrushchev regime. He traveled widely outside Rome and broke the tradition of the pope as “prisoner of the Vatican.”

Mary Lou Gibson is a Catholic writer based in Austin. Her column on saints is also found in the Catholic Spirit, the diocesan newspaper of Austin.

GIBSON

Patriarch of Venice.

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FORTNIGHT

This year’s event, called “Fortnight for Freedom to Serve” will focus on the freedom to serve the poor and vulnerable in accord with human dignity and the Church’s teaching.

“Religious freedom is under attack in this country and around the world,” said Bishop Sis. “If we do not exercise constant vigilance over our religious liberty, we will lose it. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.’ Some forces in government want to reduce the freedom of religion to the mere freedom of worship, but freedom of religion is more than just worship. Freedom of religion also includes the right of our religious and charitable organizations to serve the poor and needy in a manner consistent with our beliefs regarding contraception and abortion.”

According to the web site, fortnight-forfreedom.org, this year’s observance comes at a time when the liturgical calendar celebrates a series of great martyrs who remained faithful in the face of persecution by political power — St. Thomas More and St. John Fisher, St. John the Baptist, SS Peter and Paul, and the First Martyrs of the Church of Rome.

Religious liberty issues have prompted the Fortnight For Freedom movement, namely the Department of Justice’s attack on the constitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act in 2011. Since then, efforts that would require employers — including religious and charitable organizations and religiously affiliated hospitals and universities — to include coverage for contraception, sterilization, and other forms of birth control as part of the Affordable Health Care Act have been under intense criticism by the bishops and many Catholics.

More information on the observance of the Fortnight for Freedom in the Diocese of San Angelo will be published in the June 2014 West Texas Angelus.
CRITICS

(From 18)

Vatican" -- his comments were portrayed as a form of official rebuke. If so, it was an especially stinging one since both Aronofsky and Russell Crowe, who plays the title character, had aggressively sought a Vatican endorsement of "Noah."

Muolo accused Aronofsky and screenwriter Ari Handel of being "so anxious to give the biblical event an ecological and vaguely New-Age tone that they turn it into a lost opportunity." He concluded, "If the film does not meet expectations it is because it uses Noah only to sound a loud ecological alarm." In short, like Mattson, he thought "Noah" other than biblical.

Muolo ignored one of the movie's most intriguing symbols: the snakeskin Noah occasionally wraps around his arm. Both Mattson and Chattaway mention the unusual adornment, but stumble on its interpretation.

The skin, given to Noah by his father, Lamech, was shed by the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Mattson was scornful of its supposed benefit and Chattaway concluded, "The snakeskin is an odd element in the film, I admit."

Yet at least one aspect of this relic's significance -- its affinity with a widespread Jewish practice -- can easily be explained.

The skin is Aronofksy's version of tefillin, the leather straps with Torah scrolls attached to them that many observant Jews wrap up their left arm for daily prayers. (There's also one worn on the forehead.)

Deuteronomy, in Chapter 6, instructs Jews to bind the words of God "on your arm as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead." The tefillin are a literal means of obeying that command.

The hide is seemingly passed down to remind Noah's family that they are in a direct line from the inhabitants of Eden. Because the descendants of Seth respect what God has made, the skin glows when they wrap it; for Tubal-Cain, the villain of the piece, there's no glow.

If nothing else, as an example of what might be called divine repurposing, this ambiguous item is certainly in line with the film's ecological theme.

Jensen is a guest reviewer for Catholic News Service.

CHRISTIANS

(From 16)

she said. On Sundays she attends Mass with her mother at the Catholic Church and for holidays and special ceremonies she goes with her husband to the Greek Orthodox Church. She said sometimes it is difficult to follow the Orthodox prayers, so she simply prays in her heart.

Though Saliba's son, 12-year-old Fadi, has been baptized in the Greek Orthodox Church, he feels equally comfortable in the Catholic Church, and his parents will allow him to choose which church he wishes to attend when he gets older, said Saliba.

Kamal said that, while in the older generation, the different denominations preferred to marry within their own churches, today nobody differentiates. "I am Greek Orthodox, but I don't care. Sometimes I go to Catholic Mass," he said. "Everyone is praying to the one God. I just go to pray."

Bishop William Shomali, chancellor of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, said that while Greek Orthodox priests are not permitted to concelebrate Mass at a Catholic Church, they are often present at Catholic religious ceremonies as a sign of unity.

Puad Farah, a Greek Orthodox community elder in Nazareth, Israel, said the different affiliations are a non-issue, and nobody even ever thinks about it. He used his own family as an example: While he belongs to the Greek Orthodox Church, his wife is a Protestant, and two of his daughters are married to Catholics.

"We (Christians) are a small minority and there are too many denominations," he said. "There is no problem for us. Sometimes (when the holiday dates are different) we celebrate them once, sometimes we celebrate them twice. We are the most interdenominational community in the world."

Kamal said that, in West Bank villages, Christians celebrate Christmas according to the date of the Latin-rite Catholics' Gregorian calendar and Easter on the date it falls on the Julian calendar used by the Greek Orthodox. This year the date for Easter coincided on the Catholic and Greek Orthodox calendars, and Holy Land church leaders have decided that, beginning next year, they always will celebrate Easter on the same date.

During Holy Week, Father Yacoub Rafidi, a Catholic native of Jifna who was raised Greek Orthodox, helped out at Holy Family Catholic Parish in Ramallah, West Bank. He studied at the Latin Patriarchate seminary in Beit Jalla and served for 16 years as parish priest in various parishes in Jordan. He is currently studying in Rome and was home for the holidays.

His mother is a Catholic, he said, and he attended the Catholic parish school, largely because there was no Greek Orthodox school. He was strongly influenced by the parish priest, and he said his path led to the vocation of priesthood in the Catholic Church. His Greek Orthodox father was happy that his son was happy, and now the family follows the Catholic tradition. In Father Rafidi's family there are both Catholic and Greek Orthodox priests, he noted.

Father Rafidi estimated that almost one-quarter of the students at the Latin Patriarchate seminary have come from Greek Orthodox families. He attributes this to the fact that there are very few Greek Orthodox schools in the area, while every Catholic parish has a parish school attached. In addition, he said, the Greek Orthodox hierarchy is largely Greek. He said the local Orthodox priests are encouraged to marry -- as permitted in the church, although they then cannot become bishops. There is a big division between the local church and the Greek leaders, he said, whereas the Catholic Church historically has worked to create a local-led church.

Many Christians have left the Holy Land due to the political difficulties incurred from the Israeli occupation, he said, and those who are left share a feeling of family, with the Greek Orthodox being the largest church, followed by the Catholics.

"The people here don't say 'I am Catholic' or 'I am Greek Orthodox.' They say 'I am Christian,'" he said. "Inside this family we have good relations. To be a part of a family is very important, the family of Christians."
RURAL

(Para 2)

un fuerte papel en las comunidades rurales. Al vivir en el campo, la persona aprende lo que verdaderamente es la corresponsabilidad. La corresponsabilidad se trata de cuidar las cosas que Dios nos ha encomendado, desarrollarlas, dejándolas mejor que como las encontramos, y siempre pensando en la condición en la cual dejamos las cosas para las futuras generaciones.

Mi padre y mi madre ambos crecieron en ranchos en Kansas durante la Gran Depresión. Siempre nos enseñaron acerca de nuestra dependencia en Dios, aprecio a la tierra, y el valor de una fuerte ética de trabajo. Mi madre manejaba un tractor en los campos cuando era adolescente. Mi padre, cuyo segundo nombre es Francis, ha dedicado su vida entera al cuidado de animales.

La vida rural ofrece una base fructífera para la espiritualidad cristiana. Por ejemplo, San Francisco de Asís nos enseñó como notar la belleza de la mano de Dios en el mundo natural. Francisco podía ver las estrellas en el cielo o escuchar una canción de un pájaro y espontáneamente daba gracias a Dios por esa maravillosa bendición. Él cantaba alabanzas a Dios en su Cántico de las Criaturas: “Alabado seas, mi Señor, por nuestra Hermana la Madre Tierra, que nos sustenta y gobierna y produce distintos frutos con flores de colores y hierbas.”

En los campos rurales del Oeste de Tejas, el don de espacios anchos y grandes nos dirige a reflexionar en la grandeza de Dios. El poder ver alrededor el horizonte, al ver el desarrollo de una tormenta por la tarde, o de admirar los colores de una gloriosa puesta de sol, atrae a nuestra mente a la infinita imaginación de Dios, el artista quien lo crea todo.

Por supuesto, la vida rural también sufre muchas cargas. La escasez de lluvia en años recientes ha motivado a mucha gente a vender su ganado y perder sus cosechas. La población de nuestras áreas rurales ha sufrido por muchos años. La agricultura y ganadería es una de las más difíciles carreras de seguir. Los agricultores necesitan acceso a tierra, crédito, y seguro de cosecha. Hay una necesidad para que estas cosas estén estructuradas para así animar a más jóvenes a entrar en la agricultura. Políticas públicas han de animar a estrategias de desarrollo económico en áreas rurales, incluyendo programas que facilitan un emprendizaje rural. Necesitamos que expandir el uso de los métodos ambientalmente sostenibles a fin de proveer comida para generaciones futuras.

Las decisiones en la agricultura tienen dimensiones éticas importantes, relacionado a los siguientes principios claves de la enseñanza social Católica: respeto por la dignidad humana, la familia como la base de la sociedad, compromiso con el bien común, solidaridad con los trabajadores, la integridad de la creación, y la necesidad de cuidar por el pobre. En el 2010, el Papa Benedicto XVI dijo que una revitalización estratégica agrícola es necesaria, para poder ver como la agricultura es un recurso indispensable para el futuro.

Animo a todos a rezar por nuestros agricultores y ganaderos y profundamente apreciar lo que ellos hacen por nosotros. La próxima vez que le den gracias a Dios por sus alimentos deliciosos, recuerden también de rezar por los agricultores y ganaderos cuyos duro trabajo y responsable corresponsabilidad nos trajeron esa comida.

BISHOP

(From 2)

the Great Depression. They always taught us about our dependence on God, appreciation of the land, and the value of a strong work ethic. My mother was driving a tractor in the fields before she was a teenager. My father, whose middle name is Francis, has dedicated his entire life to the care of animals.

Rural life offers a fruitful foundation for Christian spirituality. For example, St. Francis of Assisi taught how to notice the beauty of God’s hand in the natural world. Francis could look at the stars of the sky or hear the song of a bird and spontaneously thank God for the beautiful blessing. He sang the praise of God in his Canticale of the Creatures: “Praise to you, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains us and governs us, and produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.”

In the countryside of West Texas, the gift of wide open spaces leads us to ponder the greatness of God. To be able to see the horizon all around, to watch the development of an afternoon storm, or to admire the colors of a glorious sunset, draws our mind to the infinite imagination of God, the artist who creates it all.

Of course, rural life also suffers many burdens. The lack of rain in recent years has driven many people to sell off their livestock and to lose their crops. The population of our rural areas has suffered for many years. Farming and ranching is one of the most difficult careers to pursue. Farmers need access to land, credit, and crop insurance. There is a need for these things to be structured so as to encourage more young people to go into farming. Public policy should encourage a variety of economic development strategies in rural areas, including programs that facilitate rural entrepreneurship. We need to expand the use of environmentally sustainable methods in order to provide food for future generations.

The choices in agriculture have important ethical dimensions, related to the following key principles of Catholic social teaching: respect for human dignity, the family as the foundation of society, commitment to the common good, solidarity with workers, the integrity of creation, and the need to care for the poor. In 2010, Pope Benedict XVI said that a strategic revitalization of agriculture is needed, so that we may all see how agriculture is an indispensable resource for the future.

I encourage everyone to pray for our farmers and ranchers and to appreciate deeply what they do for us. The next time you thank God for your delicious meal, remember also to say a prayer for the farmers and ranchers whose hard work and responsible stewardship brought that food to you.

SANDOVAL

(From 11)

Admití que nosotros los seres humanos no hemos desempeñado bien papel en el manejo de las cosas y nos despedimos, pero no hasta que ella puso su folletito en mi mano, una invitación a una breve conferencia sobre la importancia de la muerte de Cristo.

Otro sábado reciente, me encontré con un representante de una iglesia bautista. Con su hijo a su lado, también dejaba un volante en cada casa. Me preguntó que estableciera una relación personal con Dios.

Le aseguré que lo estaba tratando de hacer. Estamos perdiendo la competición en las calles. No es que seamos menos ágiles; es que estamos ausentes totalmente. Visitas a los hogares no es lo que hacemos bien. Sin duda, es una tarea muy difícil como sabe cualquiera quien haya tratado de vender algo de casa en casa. En la cima de su historia, durante el siglo 20, las religiosas de Victory Noll siempre hacían visitas a los hogares.

La Catequista Misiónera, la hoja informativa de la congregación, informaba las visitas caseras. El reportaje de un día cuenta que “nos cerraron la puerta en la cara 7 veces,” pero otras puertas se abrieron.

Encontraban familias que se habían alejado de la iglesia y que querían reconciliarse. Hallaban niños que necesitaban instrucción para hacer su primera comunión. También llamaban enfermos en necesidad de atención médica o con el deseo de recibir los sacramentos.

Cuando no visitaban en las aldeas o en las ciudades, iban a los campamentos de trabajadores campesinos. A veces disfrutaban de momentos graciosos. En una choza, la hermana Agnes Rauschenbach escribió, encontraron a una niña gravemente enferma con fiebre tifóidea. Mientras que el médico quien llamaron la asistía, el sacerdote local indagaba sobre los nombres de la numerosa familia.


El sacerdote entonces preguntó: ‘¿Dónde está Abel?’ Eva respondió, ‘Aquí estás’. No pudo el sacerdote resistir decir: ‘Yo apuesto que Moisés está aquí también’. La hermana mayor entonces llamó a Moisés, el hermanito menor de todos”.

A propósito de todo esto, el evangelio de este domingo relató la historia de la mujer samaritana quien, después de su encuentro con Jesús, caminó hacia el pueblo para contarle a todos: “Vengan a conocer alguien que me contó todo los sucesos de mi vida… muchos de los samaritanos creyeron en Él por la palabra de la mujer que daba testimonio” (Juan 4:29, 39).
BARRON
(From 10)

is God’s will that the human race be obliterated, but he relents when it becomes clear to him that God in fact wills for humanity to be renewed. What is significant is that Noah remains utterly focused throughout, not on his own freedom, but on the desire and purpose of God. God, creation, providence, sin, obedience, salvation: not bad for a major Hollywood movie!

There is a minor scene in the film which depicts some members of Noah’s family administering the sleep-inducing smoke to the animals. They look, for all the world, like priests swinging thuribles of incense around a cathedral. I’m quite sure that this was far from the mind of the filmmakers, but it suggested to me the strong patristic theme that Noah’s Ark is symbolic of the Church. During a time of moral and spiritual chaos, when the primal watery chaos out of which God created the world returned with a vengeance, the Creator sent a rescue operation, a great boat on which a microcosm of God’s good order would be preserved. For the Church Fathers, this is precisely the purpose and meaning of the Church: to be a safe haven where, in the midst of a sinful world, God’s word is proclaimed, where God is properly worshipped, and where a rightly ordered humanity lives in justice and non-violence. Just as Noah’s Ark carried the seeds of a new creation, so the Church is meant to let out the life that it preserves for the renewal of the world.

If Aronofsky’s “Noah” can, even subliminally, suggest this truth, it is well worth the watching.

ROMMEL
(From 9)

being the first person to be engaged or married. It doesn’t matter who gets promoted first. Those things will happen for you when, and if, they’re meant to. You can’t enjoy your life if you’re jealous of someone else’s.

Make mistakes. Don’t be defined by them. If you openly acknowledge your shortcomings, it’s harder for others to criticize you for them.

And, no matter what, recognize the opportunities you receive. They don’t just occur at the end of the school year, or calendar year, or any other measurement of time you can imagine. Opportunities occur every day. Be fearless.

But, most importantly, never be afraid to say no. Pass on opportunities that aren’t right for you.

If you do that more often, you’ll lead a happier life.

CHRISM
(From 1)

have these oils, knowing where they’re coming from and their meaning. It brings about richness to relate that to the people.”

Almost four dozen priests from throughout the diocese renewed their priestly promises after Sis related the story of the Rev. Frans van der Lugt, a Dutch priest who was beaten and shot dead earlier this month in Homs, Syria. Father Frans, as he was known, had elected to stay with his flock in the war-torn city despite a mass evacuation at the beginning of the year.

The 75-year-old priest “was a loving pastor who poured out his life because he cared for the flock that God sent him to serve,” Sis told the parishioners and priests gathered before him.

Addressing the priests, he said, “Priests are the heartbeat of a diocese. I affirm you in the gifts God has given to you and in your generous response to God’s call to service.”

Sis urged his pastors to work with him to build the culture of vocations in the diocese, to make it stronger. “Let’s decide to live our priesthood in a way that attracts new vocations,” he said. “Like Father Frans of Syria, today let us recommit ourselves to being loving pastors who pour out our lives because we care for the flock God has sent us to serve.”

The Rev. Michael Udegbunam traveled to the Chrism Mass from his parish in Colorado City. A native of Nigeria, Udegbunam has participated in a Chrism Mass in each of his 32 years as a priest.

“It energizes us, invigorates us, renews our spirits and our minds in the walk of God,” he said.

The Rev. Albert Ezeanya, also of Nigeria and a priest at parishes in Menard and Junction, said the Chrism Mass is uniform throughout the world. “The vow is the same,” he said, adding, “It makes us fresh again in our commitment.”

The Rev. Steven Hicks, head of the Liturgy Commission and a retired Navy chaplain, said the renewal of promises reminds priests of their dedication in serving the Church. “It’s a renewal of those promises,” said Hicks, who like Udegbunam, has been a priest 32 years. “It kind of brings you back to ordination day, like an anniversary.”

Though Sis has been a priest nearly three decades, as newly appointed bishop of the San Angelo Diocese the Chrism Mass was his first in San Angelo and his first to officiate.

“My was a little clumsy at times, but I was sustained by the liturgy of the Church and the holiness of the priests and the people,” Sis said after the Mass. “The volunteers and staff who planned the liturgy did a great job.”

The trio of oils blessed during the Chrism Mass will be used for adult catechumens and infants preparing for baptism; anointing the sick; and for baptisms, confirmations, ordinations of priests and consecrations of altars. The Chrism Mass and blessing of oils date back to the Church’s early days. The Mass is open to members of the faithful from throughout the diocese.

Becca Sankey is a freelance writer in San Angelo.

Bishop Sis and seminarian Felix Archibong at the Chrism Mass at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart.

(Photo by Becca Sankey for the West Texas Angelus).

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Easter Images

Fr. Michael Rodriguez, top photo, sprinkles the Holy Redeemer-Odessa congregation with holy water during Easter Mass. At right, Msgr. James Bridges, right, lights the paschal candle with the help of Deacon Leonard Herndon, center, as Deacon Luis Mata, far left, looks on.

Photos by Alan P. Torre / aptorre.com