DACA recipient, mother left Mexico in search of a better life

Jessica Hernandez thanks God

By Kelly Mescher Collins
Staff Writer

Jessica Hernandez, 28, of St. Anthony Parish in Des Moines is grateful for the opportunities the United States has afforded her.

At just 7 years-old, Hernandez’s mother left Mexico City with her and her grandmother, seeking a better life. As a single parent, she wasn’t making enough to sustain the three of them. Violence was also escalating in the country.

The three took a flight in August 1999 to Des Moines, where they had family who had already immigrated to the United States.

Biological and religious Sisters Jeanie and Elaine Hagedorn remember meeting Jessica’s mother not long after she arrived in the United States at Our Lady of the Americas Parish in Des Moines, where they served.

“She [Hernandez’s mother] said, ‘Sister, I want to do something for the church. I want to serve. What can I do?’” Sister Jeanie said.

Though she was new to this country and didn’t have much, she already wanted to give back.

“Five dollars is all I have, but I want to do something,”” Sister Jeanie recalled her saying. “I was so touched by her simplicity and her willingness to give whatever she had.”

Her selfless and giving personality is something they’ve seen her pass along to daughter Jessica, agreed Sisters Jeanie and Elaine Hagedorn. Jessica also gave freely of her time and contributed to the parish community.

Continued on page 3

Deacon of humble service dies

By Anne Marie Cox
Staff Writer

Deacon Dennis Kirlin was a humble man of service. In fact, he would have been uneasy about this article featuring him.

“In the end it would be really hard for my dad to read an article about himself,” said his son, Dennis. “He would want to highlight the benefit he’d gotten from every person around him.”

Deacon Kirlin, of St. Peter Church in Council Bluffs, died June 25 at age 87.

His life was all about serving others.

“His sense of service was what drew him to the diaconate,” said his son. “It wasn’t the diacate that put a sense of service in him. It let him express that well. I enjoy a lot of stories of him well done. I enjoy a lot of stories of him well done.”

Continued on page 7

Weekend Masses resume in diocese

Catholics joyful about receiving the Eucharist, joining community of believers

By Kelly Mescher Collins
Staff Writer

In late June all parishes throughout the Diocese of Des Moines were given the green light to celebrate weekend Masses while practicing social distancing, sanitation between services and the use of face masks.

Larry Salvini, of St. Pius X Parish in Urbandale, was ecstatic about returning to Mass after several months.

“It called and reserved myself a seat at the 7 a.m. Mass,” Salvini said. “I’m going to guess there were maybe 80 people there.

“It just felt so good to go to Mass and receive the Eucharist,” Salvini said. “Even though you can’t socialize it was good to see familiar faces and priests and deacons and to be in the building.”

Though he was apprehensive, his fears were soon put to rest.

“When you get to the church, somebody met you at the front door and was wearing a face mask and gloves and they checked you off and took you to a numbered seat,” Salvini continued. “You weren’t close to anybody else. They really spread the people receiving Eucharist out. The whole experience really felt good for me.”

Father Andrew Windschitl, pastor of St. Mary / Holy Cross Parish in Elkharl, said parishioners were eager to receive the sacraments and gave positive feedback after attending Mass.

“One person [said] they were impressed with how it was set up,” Father Windschitl said. “Thankfully we have the social hall for overflow, which is appropriately spaced. For the first couple weeks we’re not doing any singing and no communion line; I’m going through the pews that are vacant.”

Nate and Keri Guerdet of St. Mary / Holy Cross Parish in Elkharl celebrated their daughter Ava’s First Communion on June 20 after it was postponed for months due to COVID-19.

Beloved pastor dies at age 60

By Stanley Asjes
Staff Writer

Father Mathai Thomas Kunnel, beloved pastor, has passed away at the age of 60.

Born on Sept. 14, 1959, Father Kunnel grew up in Kottayam, India, a city in Kerala which has the highest Christian population of all the states in India.

He was ordained a priest in the Third Order of St. Francis in 1988, and served in India for 13 years before he was sent by his superior to the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis as a missionary. His first assignment was as an associate pastor at The Church of the Epiphany, at that time the largest parish in the archdiocese.

The pastor he worked under at that time, Father Pat Kennedy, recalled how Father Kunnel adapted to his first assignment in the United States with grace and humility. “Tom had a great sense of humor; he was a very good man, a great preacher.”

Father Kennedy especially remembered Father Kunnel’s great generosity.

“The place where we were at was not the easiest place, but he was always supportive,” he said. “When I was on sabatical, I visited him at home in India and he treated me like a king. Hospitality was part of who he was... There are a lot of people who are going to miss him.”

It was in the Twin Cities where he met Bishop Richard Pates, then an auxiliary in that archdiocese. Bishop Pates recalled how Fa-
In early July I finally set out on the Great Western Trail for what I hoped would be a bike ride down the main trail back, sailed along for the first ten miles, but then my back tire flatted and so I pulled over to change the tube. I’m not the most adept at bike maintenance, and sure enough, I patched it with the supplied tube and air, and so was quite receptive to the friendly group that stopped to lend a hand and get me back on the road. Ten more miles, two more flat tires—the last one coming after I changed the rear tube a third time and turned my bike upright, only to have the front tire hiss at me with no apparent fault mounted the bike. “God, this is not funny!”

Thank goodness for the Good Samaritan who gave me one last tube. I gave up on destination Martensdale, turned around and headed home, free and unfrazzled for the whole twenty miles on my bike’s condition. I never was able to get into the contemplative “zone,” where bodily rhythm libertes the mind and senses to behold the horizon and majestic tunnel of trees surrounding me—the true joy of cycling in Iowa, without the stress.

Even though we are free once again to celebrate Mass and other sacraments in person, though we have been blessed with another sandrenced Iowa summer, many of us are finding it hard to find our “zone” of measured activity, freedom, and refreshment. Pandemic-induced fears, political and social tensions, and other interior factors can thwart our abili- ties to simply breathe, relax, and care, and be wholly present before God and the beautiful world he has created. Jesus promises that if we come to him and assume his yoke, we will find rest for our souls (Matthew 11:29). Perhaps we need to refrain from work. Outsiders might bemusedly see this as an absurd proposition in times of crisis, but given the servant hearts of our employees and daily tendency to soldier on against work before it pule up, we know that any ability to actually rest and be refreshed can be an intentional task. It will require discipline and practical steps to resist our own inclinations.

Jesus’ invitation to be “yoked” with him is an offer to experience real freedom, to let the frustrations and fears that oppress us—stirred by the allure of the prospect of illness and even death—to recede and no longer rule us as an “evil zone.” When the “eyes of the heart” (cf. Ephesians 1:18) gaze upon God’s physical body, God is drawn into a more holistic union of trust and self-feeling that sees all things according to God’s per- spective. God’s yoke becomes our own—a beautiful moment that by yoking our minds and bodies to his, we can actually extend to all. We develop an enduring contemplative posture that will allow the Lord to do his good work and setbacks losses our way.

For two weeks in a July, a smallish group with those who are experiencing setbacks caused by the pandemic, are finding the contemplative brothers and sisters, regular meetings in the virtual world, and the occasional bike ride, are helping to remain as far as possible from the world before it pule up, we know that any ability to actually rest and be refreshed can be an intentional task. It will require discipline and practical steps to resist our own inclinations.

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At the invitation of Jesus to carry with “yoga” is a offer to experience real freedom, to let the frustrations and fears that oppress us—stirred by the allure of the prospect of illness and even death—to recede and no longer rule us as an “evil zone.” When the “eyes of the heart” (cf. Ephesians 1:18) gaze upon God’s physical body, God is drawn into a more holistic union of trust and self-feeling that sees all things according to God’s perspective.
Dental office gives free care to hundreds

By Stanley Asjes
Staff Writer

Despite all the negative news these days, Catholics across the diocese are still doing great things for others. Dr. David Jones joined the Catholic Church in 2004 and is now a member of Corpus Christi Parish in Council Bluffs.

Along with the other dentists and staff at Omni Dental in Council Bluffs, he has been giving free dental care to hundreds of uninsured and low-income children in the Council Bluffs area.

For the past 12 years, Omni Dental has been offering free dental care through the “Give Kids a Smile” program, which unites several dental practices across Council Bluffs for one day a year to bring free dental care to kids in need.

Caring for kids in need doesn’t end there, said Jones. “Generally, from there we’ll take a case or two—one or two of those kids—and then often times when we see them, they need a lot of work, so what we end up doing is taking them in for a follow up and we continue to see them,” he said.

During the six weeks they were completely closed due to the coronavirus, the practice was still able to offer free dental care to a few uninsured or underinsured patients in dire need. Most recently, the dental practice expanded its charitable work with “Omni Cares,” a program which offers free dental services to low-income adults a couple of days during the year.

Despite the fears and slowdowns of the coronavirus, their charitable dental work for low-income families has continued to expand. Omni Dental is planning to expand starting in July. “We’re going to have the team nominate patients that we’ve seen in our practice who need treatment, but can’t necessarily afford it,” said Jones. “We’ll choose one of those patients per quarter and we’ll do the treatment for them.”

The charitable work is a win-win because it’s good for the community, but also keeps things positive for the whole staff, said Jones.

Father Thadakipuram, pastor of Corpus Christi Parish, said Dr. Jones is active in the parish, serving on the Finance Council and as a lector. “He’s a very dedicated Catholic, said Father Thadakipuram.

Omni Dental serves the Council Bluffs area among seven partners at five practices.

DACA recipient found better life in U.S.

Continued from page 1

It wasn’t until high school that Hernandez realized her situation was very different from her peers.

“I was wanting to work or get into a study abroad program or take a trip with the mission trip to a city in high school,” she said. “And because I didn’t have a social security number, it was the first notion of my legal system that prevented me from doing things [others could do].”

After graduating from Lincoln High School in 2009, Hernandez went to Iowa State University for four years on a full ride scholarship from Science Board—a program created to help encourage people of color in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields.

It was during her time in college that President Barack Obama introduced DACA, otherwise known as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. The newly created position at the ISU with a degree in microbiology and in 2014 and began working in a nutritional analysis center immediately after college. But her work felt somewhat empty, and she felt called to something more.

It was another religious, Sister Blanca Contreras, who came to Des Moines with the Catholic Extension Services Exchange Program from Mexico, who told Hernandez about the newly created position at the Diocese of Des Moines, the coordinator of Hispanic Youth Ministry. Sister Blanca encouraged her to apply.

Hernandez got the job and has been actively ministering to young Hispanics throughout the diocese since January 2016.

Though DACA provides legal working status to young Hispanics, anxieties remain, as they renew their work permit every two years.

“There’s always this sense of doubt about whether it’s going to go through,” she said.

In 2019 and 2020, DACA recipients were on edge awaiting the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision on whether the Administration could end the program. If the program was eliminated, this would have given immigration services the authority to deport Hernandez and hundreds of thousands of others.

On June 18, the Supreme Court ruled that the DACA program would stay in place for now, although there are new reports the current administration will again start the process to eliminate it.

Hernandez is extremely grateful she can continue to do God’s work in the Diocese of Des Moines.

In fact, she is currently in graduate school part time, earning her master’s degree in theology and pastoral ministry from Boston College. Her education is paid for entirely by a grant through Catholic Extension.

She hopes to graduate in May 2021 and plans to use her knowledge and skills to continue providing ministry, outreach and support.

“Our faith always calls us to love our neighbor and be welcoming to our neighbor—no matter their background,” Hernandez said. “You still have to show the face of Christ.”

Two-week furlough begins

Diocesan staff of the Catholic Pastoral Center will be on furlough July 11-24 to exercise prudent financial stewardship and stand in solidarity with parishioners who are sacrificing due to the economic impact of the pandemic.

During the furlough, the entire diocesan staff at the Catholic Pastoral Center, with only a few exceptions, will be unable to work or able to work only in response to essential tasks and emergencies. Out of office email and phone messages will provide information on how to receive support.

Neither Catholic Charities nor the Catholic Tuition Organization staff will be on the furlough (Catholic Charities continues to serve clients through the pandemic), and the Catholic Foundation of Southwestern Iowa will have a partial furlough meaning they will accept calls and voicemails to the main number or to Sue McEntee at 712-397-4911 during the furlough (Catholic Charities continues to serve clients through the pandemic); and the Catholic Foundation of Southwestern Iowa will have a partial furlough meaning they will accept calls and voicemails to the main number or to Sue McEntee at 712-397-4911 during the furlough.

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Bishops: Consider contacting senators in support of DACA

By Mayra Moriel de Banuelos
Contributing Writer

Last month about 5,500 young adults from Iowa who are Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) experienced anxiety and fear as they waited for the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision that could have ended the program.

DACA is an immigration policy launched in 2012 by the Obama Administration calling for deferred action for certain undocumented young people who came to the United States as children. This status provides them with a temporary permit to live and work in the United States.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in June that DACA recipients were on edge awaiting the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision on whether the Administration could end the program. If the program was eliminated, this would have given immigration services the authority to deport Hernandez and hundreds of thousands of others.

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Iowa’s four Catholic bishops—Dubuque Archbishop Michael Jackels, Sioux City Bishop R. William Joensen—asked President Donald Trump to commute the federal death sentence of Iowa inmate Dustin Honken and others related to the 2004 murder of five people to life in prison without the possibility of parole. In doing so, the government could punish the offenders and defend the common good.

“It is our concern that the death penalty contributes to a growing disrespect for the sacredness of all human life,” they wrote through the Iowa Catholic Conference in a July 1 letter. “We believe that state-sanctioned killing would not deter or prevent violent crime, but instead perpetuate a cycle of violence. We oppose the death penalty to follow example of Jesus, who both taught and practiced the forgiveness of injustice.”

Attorney General William Barr had announced last year the federal government was reinstating the federal death penalty. At press of time, Honken was scheduled to be executed in July.

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The Catholic Mirror July 17, 2020
Three sisters have passed away

On June 14, three Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, based in Dubuque, Iowa died.

Sister Carolyn (Lester) Farrell was born in Des Moines (Holy Trinity Parish) on Nov. 2, 1934, the eldest of seven children. She professed her final vows in 1961.

Sister Farrell dedicated her life to education, serving schools in Davenport, Chicago and Dubuque. While she was the director of continuing education at Clarke University, she served on the Dubuque City Council and as mayor in 1980. She was a regional representative for her congregation, interim president of Mundelein College, associate vice president at Loyola University, founding director of the Gannon Center for women and Leadership, director of the Roberta Kahn Center in Dubuque and served as a member of the board of trustees at Clarke University. In retirement, she continued to advocate for women and justice.

At her visitation, fellow BVM Sister Betty Voss shared through her tears how “Carolyn was not a hugger, but she loved with a huge, compassionate, humble heart, a wise and caring heart. That was the underpinning of all her service, all her work, all the struggles for justice that she engaged in, and everything she did. All this emanated from that huge loving heart.”

Sister Kathleen Marie Carr was born in Seattle on Feb. 19, 1947, and professed her final vows in the congregation in 1974. She served across the West and Midwest, including a post at Drake University from 1984 to 1987. Fellow BVM Sister Mary Diane Forster, remembered Sister Carr for her “passion, devotion, and joy.”

Sister Carr died in Mercy Hospital, Dubuque, at the age of 73.

Sister Dorothy (Agnes Cecile) Feehan was born in Oak Park, Illinois on Feb. 15, 1927, and took her final vows as a BVM sister in 1952.

Sister Feehan worked at Clarke University, served as an elementary teacher in Fort Dodge, Sioux City, and Chicago, and served as a principle and spiritual director in Missoula, Montana.

At Sister Dorothy’s visitation, her niece Barbara said, “Aunt Dot will always be a light in our lives. She will continue to teach us to be filled with joy and see things from our heart as she did.”

Sister Feehan passed away at the age of 93.

Sister celebrates 75th jubilee

Mercy Sister Karen Varkosky is celebrating 75 years of religious life. Born and raised in Albany, Iowa as one of eight children, she graduated from high school in 1943 and moved to Des Moines where she took a job with an insurance company.

She lived at St. Catherine Hall, where she first felt a calling to religious life. In 1945 Sister Karen entered the Mercy novitiate, Mt. Loreto in Council Bluffs. She spent 38 years as a school teacher and in 1986 she was approached by her friends, Sister Martina Woulfe and Sister Lilian Keller, to consider joining them at Bishop Drumm.

She spent 22 years at Bishop Drumm until her retirement in 2008.

Sister Karen reflected on her 75 years with the Sisters of Mercy: “I am grateful to my mercurial and loving God, who called me to be a friend and advocate to others as a Sister of Mercy. I thank my family, friends and Mercy community who have journeyed with me through these happy and rewarding 75 Mercy years.”

Bishop Drumm Retirement Center invites all to "show er" Sister Karen with cards to thank and congratulate her on 75 years of ministry. Cards may be sent to 5921 Winwood Drive, Apts 212, Johnston, IA 50131.

Beloved pastor dies at age 60

Continued from page 1

Father Kunnel was a great scholar and pastor. “He formed a great community wherever he went. He was very outgoing, very positive,” said Bishop Pates, adding he especially remembered the Rural Life Day events which Father Kunnel would organize. Father Tom Thakadipuram, a longtime friend of Father Kunnel, served his time as a transitional deacon in Father Kunnel’s home parish. They both ended up in the Twin Cities.

“He was very dedicated to his parish, and was always very creative,” said Father Thakadipuram. He described how Father Kunnel would take parishioners with him on trips back to India to experience the Christian culture and hospitality there. Father Thakadipuram also shared how his friend grew up in a farming family in India, and always felt at home in rural Iowa. “He was very close to the earth and nature.”

Father Kunnel came to the Diocese of Des Moines in 2011 and served as pastor at St. Mary Parish in Red Oak and St. Patrick Parish in Imogene. In 2017, he became pastor of three parishes: St. Mary in Guthrie Center, St. Patrick in Bayard and St. Cecilia in Panora.

Betty Donahey, a parishioner of St. Cecilia, was present when he received the bad health news in June 2019, and along with Maureen Lubeck and Mary Dersett was one of a trio of women who helped to care for Father Kunnel during his subsequent battles with cancer.

Donahey recalled how he took time every day during the week to say Mass and visit the patients at St. Gregory Recovery Center, a rehab center for people struggling with substance abuse. Although things seemed to be improving and he was able to return to India to see his family earlier this year, the cancer re-surfaced in April. Eventually, Donahey and the other volunteers were no longer able to provide care for Father Kunnel, and he moved to Kavanagh House in Des Moines, where he passed away on the evening of June 24.

His funeral Mass was held at St. Ambrose Cathedral on June 29, and can be viewed online at caldwellparrish.com.

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Continued from page 1

Community College for more than 30 years in several roles including chair of information technology and dean of business/information technology. He was married to Pat and together they raised Dennis and Ann.

Deacon Kirlin and Pat joined others on a Cursillo retreat in the late 1960s that left them wanting more.

“We met weekly, as far as the Cursillo movement,” said longtime friend, Deacon Larry Knotek. “We kind of decided maybe we should be doing something else.”

At about the same time, Bishop Maurice Dingman was sharing with diocesan priests a document from Pope Paul VI restoring the permanent diaconate, which hadn’t existed in the Catholic Church for more than 1,000 years.

Deacon Kirlin, Deacon Knotek and a few others from the Council Bluffs area were in the first group to be ordained as permanent deacons serving the Diocese of Des Moines.

In a 2017 story in The Catholic Mirror about the 50th anniversary of the restoration of the diaconate, Deacon Kirlin recalled his ordination on June 7, 1972 at Memorial Auditorium in Harlan. The men were ordained in business suits. The stoles were designed by one of the deacon candidates, Dennis.

After many years of serving parishioners, Deacon Kirlin said the best part was bringing the Eucharist to the homebound and nursing homes.

“The closeness that people sense, the presence of Christ, I met a few saints doing this,” he had said.

The deacon’s son described his father as the fuel behind getting projects done, a purposeful man who did things with a sense of levity and humor.

Deacon Kirlin began a communion service on Mondays and led Stations of the Cross during Lent.

He supported other leaders in the church. Dennis remembered Father Chuck Kottas told him that his father always supported his ministry as a pastor. And Deacon Kirlin supported Deacon Scott Brooks, serving as a mentor.

“He was one of the most humble persons I’ll ever know. My wife and I always said if we ever had to come back to be somebody else, it would be Pat and Dennis. There was so much compassion, so much love,” said Deacon Brooks.

“He’d be missed in my heart.”

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Being a Knight reminds us of our duty to God and country.

They are the Knights on Main Street, the men you probably envision when someone says Knights of Columbus to you. They're present in their distinct regalia at civic and Church events, acting as honor guards and color corps, or standing in respect at the funerals of members or during adoration of the Eucharist.

They are the Knights who have chosen to embrace the Order's fourth principle of patriotism, the men who lead the efforts to reach out to veterans and active military and to embody the fact that one can be a faithful Catholic and also be a faithful citizen.

Patriotism was added to the Order’s principles in 1900, based on the idea that Knights are loyal to both God and country. It is important, particularly in this day and age, that our Councils encourage active Catholic citizenship and foster the spirit of patriotism in our members and the community at large.

The Knights of Columbus has representatives at almost every Veterans Affairs medical clinic in the United States, where they recruit and manage K of C volunteers in developing activities and programs that aid patients’ most essential needs.

The Knights have also supported priests, in particular those who go on to serve as military chaplains. Through a special scholarship program, the Knights helped fund the education of seminarians preparing to become Catholic chaplains in the U.S. Armed Forces.

The fourth principle ‘Patriotism,’ commits our members to the preservation of our Church, our Order and to the many nations where Knights serve.

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

 Jeromy Brockelsby
402-651-7613
Council Bluffs, Gilmanton, Red Oak & Shenandoah

Dan Ginther
515-480-3411
Carlisle, Atalona, Elkhar & Des Moines

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

 dbdiocese.org

www.dmdiocese.org

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Mike Bormann
General Agent
563-689-6801
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