CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS IN CHRIST: REFLECTIONS OF FAITH IN THE DIOCESE OF DES MOINES

The Catholic Mirror

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2026
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INSIDE

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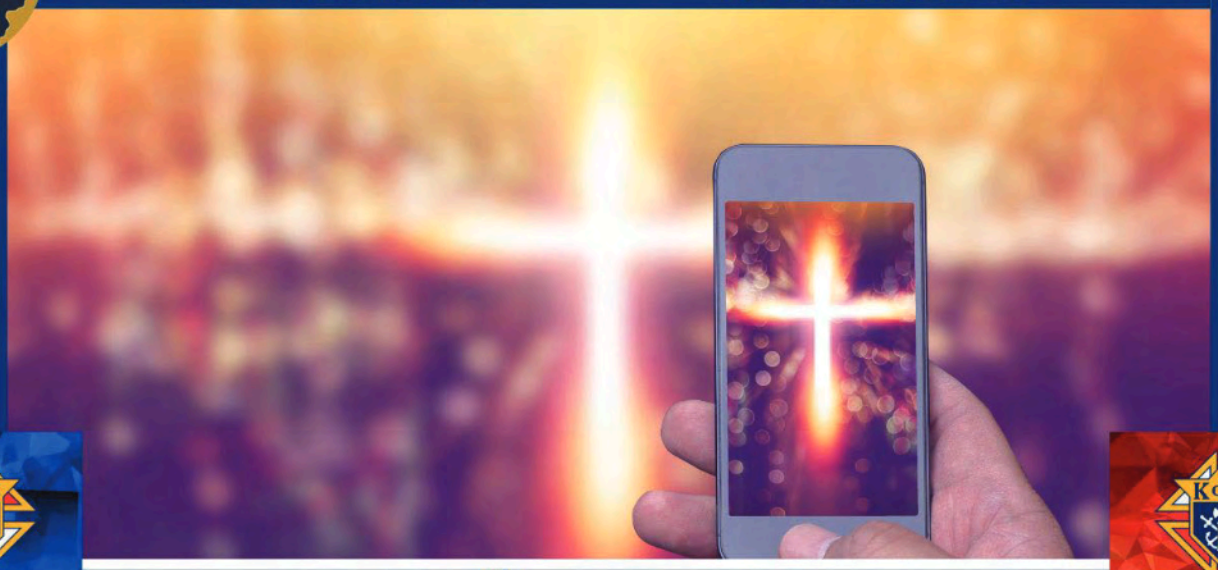
PREMIER ISSUE!

Rooted in Faith

His life began humbly in Mexico. Now he serves on an international leadership team. All along, Antonio Bañuelos has shared joy that's rooted in his faith.

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR



Welcome to your first edition of *The Catholic Mirror* magazine, where we mirror God's love in the Diocese of Des Moines. Every other month, registered Catholic households in central and southwest Iowa will receive this publication, which highlights stories of encounter, friendship, and communion as we realize our vision of cultivating connections in Christ.

A few years ago, through an extensive listening process, we invited parishioners to share their hopes and dreams. A common mission, vision, and set of priorities for our Diocese and its parishes emerged. Each issue of our new magazine will focus on one of these pastoral priorities. In this inaugural edition of *The Catholic Mirror* magazine, we focus on Welcome and Care. From invitations by a leader in the Knights of Columbus to the invitation to prayer through stained glass windows and small groups in Alpha, parishes across the Diocese are welcoming newcomers and inviting the faithful to deepen their relationship with God.

We know you want to be aware of the latest news and events so we've launched *The Catholic Mirror* digital newsletter. Use the QR code or go to **dmdiocese.org/newsletter** to sign up for this free, every-other-week e-newsletter to get inspirational stories, news on what's happening in our diocesan community, and more.

I hope you enjoy the new format of *The Catholic Mirror*. Let me know what you think with a note to communications@dmdiocese.org. ✝

Peace,
Anne Marie Cox



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DEL OBISPO

Trazando la Esperanza más allá de las Estrellas



El Papa León XIV, anteriormente Cardenal Robert F. Prevost, saluda a la multitud en la Plaza de San Pedro en el Vaticano luego de su elección como Papa el 8 de mayo del 2025. EL nuevo papa es nativo de Chicago. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

Mucho antes de que la aplicación Skyview estuviera disponible para que apuntáramos nuestro teléfono hacia las estrellas e identificar las constelaciones que estamos observando. Tomé una clase electiva de astronomía en mi último semestre en Iowa State. Pase tiempo en el planetario del campus observando algunos de los fenómenos que se manifestaban en el cosmos, grabados por manos humanas, pero también se me asignó el aventurarme a las gélidas noches invernales de Iowa para verlos en persona. Algunas veces me acompañaba a las búsquedas nocturnas mi papá quien había sido un navegador de la Fuerza Aérea que venía de la antigua escuela de "apuntar a las estrellas" para trazar el curso de su tripulación hacia su destino. Su maravilla casi infantil de señalar las constelaciones y puntos luminosos de referencia era deliciosamente contagiosa.

Recientemente, el Santo Padre Papa León XIV publicó una carta conmemorando el 60mo aniversario del documento del Concilio Vaticano Segundo en la "importancia y relevancia de la educación en la vida humana," titulada "Diseñar Nuevos Mapas de Esperanza." El rango de su reflexión va mucho más allá de la educación católica o incluso pública formal; él es tanto visionario como poético al establecer la inherente aventura formativa en la misión de la Iglesia de la misión de la Iglesia de traer el Evangelio a incorporarse en todo aspecto y edad de la experiencia humana.

El Papa León habla de "'constelaciones educativas': experiencias humildes y fuertes a la vez, capaces de leer los tiempos, de custodiar la unidad entre la fe y la razón, entre el pensamiento y la vida, entre el conocimiento y la justicia." Todos estos momentos son oportunidades de gracia para descubrir la intención creativa de Dios, la "epifanía" de su voluntad salvadora manifestada en su Hijo Jesús. Estas se convierten en un faro en la noche para guiar la navegación durante el trayecto de nuestras vidas ("Diseñar" 1.2), pero solamente mientras imitemos la clarividencia de Abraham, cuya fe generó descendientes más numerosos que las estrellas en el cielo ("Diseñar Nuevos Mapas" 1.2.5.1). Tal fe es una compañía íntima de la virtud de la esperanza que hemos cultivado en el recientemente concluido Año Jubilar.

Hay demasiadas frases motivantes y aspiracionales en la relativamente breve carta del Santo Padre que mencionamos aquí, pero el Papa León me inspiró y motivó personalmente a recordar la voraz alma de mi propio padre que nunca se cansaba de aprender y de vivir el mundo bajo los términos de Dios. La "coreografía" de toda educación, incluyendo la educación católica, es una compacta confianza entre socios mutuos que respetan la dignidad humana y los potenciales que nos da Dios, para quienes el acceso a la educación es tanto un privilegio como un derecho sagrado. "Las constelaciones reflejan sus propias luces en un universo infinito," creando variaciones de color y, entre personas humanas, carismas que buscan ser utilizados y servir a la sociedad en general (6.2, 8.3, 9.1, 10.4).

Mientras tanto, la misión formativa que acoge la Iglesia y las demás personas que exploran los horizontes de la identidad humana, es la de extender nuestra familiaridad con nuestros propia vida interna y espiritual; debe despertar un sentido de maravilla, ser un laboratorio de discernimiento que ayude a los individuos a navegar sus propios caminos de vida. De manera ideal, la verdadera educación ayuda a eliminar las fuerzas de división cuando nos escuchamos los unos a los otros, haciendo a un lado las etiquetas, y trayendo un armonioso aprecio a nuestras historias.

¡Vaya! Este es un amplio y desafiante cargo para todos. Pero al nivel local, es lo que espero que nuestra nueva versión de The Catholic Mirror, al comenzar un nuevo formato de revista bimestral. Nuestra directora diocesana de comunicaciones Anna Marie Cox, sus consejeros y su equipo tuvieron un buen discernimiento sobre este cambio. El formato brillante, las gráficas más claras y contenido conciso hablando de historias humanas animadas y conectadas dentro de nuestro ecosistema y órbita de la fe católica deben animar y ser atractivos para personas de todas las edades. Más que nunca, al trazar una nueva fase de comunicar el Evangelio en nuestra Diócesis, The Mirror debe reflejar el perfil único de la brillante luz de Cristo que ilumina todo rostro humano y para intensificar el sentido de que nuestro Padre Celestial nos tiene gran afecto y aprecio. La Iglesia no es un planetario que imita lo que Dios tiene en plan para nosotros; es un laboratorio de verdadera vida y amor, donde nos formamos unos a otros y navegamos juntos en nuestro camino hacia el destino que tiene Dios para nosotros. ✝



EL RVDMO. WILLIAM M. JOENSEN, PHD
es el 10mo obispo de la Diócesis de Des Moines.

Charting the Hope beyond the Stars



Pope Leo XIV, formerly Cardinal Robert F. Prevost, smiles as he appears at the central loggia of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican following his election as pope May 8, 2025. The new pope was born in Chicago. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

Long before the Skyview app was available to point one's phone toward the stars to identify the constellations one is gazing upon, I took an astronomy elective in my final semester at Iowa State. We spent time in the campus planetarium observing some of the manmade phenomena that portrayed the cosmos, but we were also assigned to venture out into the frigid Iowa winter nights to behold the real thing. A few times, I was joined in my nighttime searches by my Dad, an ex-Air Force navigator who came from the old school of "shooting the stars" to chart his crew's course toward their destination. His childlike wonder in pointing out constellations and luminous reference points was delightfully contagious.

Recently, our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, released a letter commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council's document on the "importance and relevance of education in human life," entitled "Charting New Maps of Hope." His scope of reflection is much broader than Catholic or even formal public education; he is both visionary and poetic in laying out the formative adventure inherent in the Church's mission to bring the Gospel to bear on every aspect and every age of human experience.

Pope Leo speaks of "'educational constellations': experiences that are both humble and powerful, capable of interpreting the times, of preserving the unity between faith and reason, between thought and life, between knowledge and justice." All of these moments are graced opportunities to discover God's creative intent, the "epiphany" of his saving will be manifested in his Son, Jesus. They become a beacon in the night to guide navigation along the trajectory of our lives, but only insofar as we imitate the farsightedness of the biblical Abraham, whose faith generated descendants more numerous than the stars in the sky ("Charting New Maps" 1.2, 5.1). Such faith is an intimate companion of the virtue of hope that we have cultivated in this recently concluded Jubilee Year.

There are too many stirring, aspirational phrases in the Holy Father's relatively brief letter to recount here, but Pope Leo personally inspired and moved me to recall my own Dad's voracious soul that never grew tired of learning and experiencing the world on God's terms. The "choreography" of all education, including Catholic education, is a compact of trust among mutual partners who respect human dignity and God-given potentials, for whom access to education is both a privilege and a sacred right. "Constellations reflect their own light in an infinite universe," creating variations of color, and among human persons, charisms meant to be enlisted and serve the larger society (6.2, 8.3, 9.1, 10.4).

All the while, the formative mission embraced by the Church and other persons who explore the horizons of human identity is to expand our familiarity with our own inner, spiritual life; it should awaken a sense of wonder, to be a laboratory of discernment helping individuals navigate their own life paths. Ideally, true education helps dispel forces of division as we listen to one another, cast aside labels, and bring our stories into harmonious appreciation.

Whew! That's a vast, daunting charge for all of us. But on a local level, that's my hope for our new version of *The Catholic Mirror* as we embark on a new, bimonthly magazine format. This change has been well-discerned by our diocesan communications director, Anne Marie Cox, her advisors, and team. The glossy format, the enhanced graphics, and concise content displaying human stories animated and linked within our ecosystem and orbit of Catholic faith should sparkle and appeal to persons of all ages. More than ever, as we chart a new phase of communicating the Gospel in our Diocese, *The Catholic Mirror* is to reflect the unique profile of Christ's light shining upon every human face, and to intensify the sense that our Heavenly Father beholds us with great affection and delight. The Church is no planetarium mimicking what God has set before us; it is a laboratory of true life and love, where we form one another and navigate our way together toward the destiny God has ordained. ✝



MOST REV. WILLIAM M. JOENSEN, PH.D
is the 10th bishop of the Diocese of Des Moines.

Getty Image/Jose A. Bernat Bacete

Happy Birthday

to our Diocesan Priests for February and March

February

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

March

3 Rev. John Dorton
5 Rev. John Bertogli
5 Rev. Andrew Windschitl
9 Rev. Ross Parker
10 Rev. Robert Harris
11 Rev. Ryan Andrew
13 Rev. Rodrigo Landeros
15 Rev. Wayne Gubbels
16 Rev. Dean Nimerichter
17 Rev. Patrick Amedeka
17 Rev. John Owusu-Agyemang
23 Rev. Michael Mahoney

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Rooted in Faith

His life began humbly in Mexico. Now he serves on an international leadership team. All along, Antonio Bañuelos has shared joy that's rooted in his faith.

BY ANNE MARIE COX

For Antonio Bañuelos, "Catholic" is not something you are. It's something you do. His long list of volunteer and leadership roles over the years reflects that. And those roles have a common theme: welcoming people. He invites them to experience the joy that's in his heart.



Getty Images/Anna Blazhuk

Antonio feels blessed and says he wants to do more in gratitude to God.

"My life is his," he said.

"When you like something so much, you don't want to keep it there. You want to share it," said his wife, Mayra Moriel Bañuelos.

Antonio has been inviting people to find the happiness that he found in God's love. The secret he shares? Practice your faith day in and day out.

Faith Foundation

His foundation in faith was laid in his home in Chihuahua, Mexico. His father died when he was six months old, leaving him to be raised by a single mother and grandparents.



"They were dedicated to the faith. They believed it," Antonio recalled. "They instilled in me the principles, taught me to pray, taught me to be respectful, and sent me to a Catholic school."

In high school, he says he strayed just a bit. He went to college in El Paso, Texas, and there he strayed a bit more, noting he didn't have a car to go to Mass.

His sophomore year of college, he went home for spring break and met his future bride at a dance. Antonio and Mayra managed a five-year long-distance relationship while she studied in Mexico and he studied in Texas.

Personal Conversion

As an adult, the foundation of Antonio's faith is again rooted at home — this time the one he shares with Mayra, whom he married in 1998.

"My conversion was my marriage. That changed my vision," he said. "Today, 27 years later, we're still here. We still love each other much more than we did before. Conversion is a journey. It's when I realized I need to follow that journey."

The newlyweds moved to Des Moines for his job and settled in at Our Lady of the Americas Parish, then called Visitation Parish. It felt like home.

"We always know you cannot live the faith by yourself. You have to live the faith in community," Mayra said.

For years, they served as catechists, youth ministers, marriage sponsors, and baptism class instructors. They assisted with a large cultural event called the Jamaica Festival and dances at the Val-Air Ballroom. He served on the Pastoral Council.

"Antonio and his wife, Mayra, were a young couple with a growing family," said their former pastor, Father David Polich. "They were friendly and present for all parish functions. Antonio was outgoing, fluent in both Spanish and English, obviously intelligent and talented, and willing to be involved. I do not recall that it took any effort to convince him to be part of the council, which more and more would need Hispanic presence. He has taken off from there."

Knights of Columbus

Multiple people urged Antonio to join the Knights of Columbus, but he declined their invitations. So his good friend, Phil Munoz, asked him more bluntly.

"'It's time for you to join the Knights. You have given too many excuses,' and I did," Antonio recalled. Last September was his 20th anniversary as a Knight of Columbus.

Within a year and a half of joining the Knights, he established a Spanish-language council with 30 members. Today, that council numbers about 120.

He served two years as the state deputy in Iowa, just the second Hispanic and first Mexican immigrant to do so. To Antonio, it was another opportunity to invite men to be a part of the fraternal organization that focuses on faith and family.

"I think that has helped us as an order to become a symbol of diversity and integration," he said at the time. "Considering that Iowa is 90 percent Caucasian, having an immigrant as the leader of the group sends a very visual message about how we are all welcome to join this wonderful Catholic order."

Antonio's leadership was appreciated for the statewide organization as a whole and for his one-on-one approach to accompanying people through challenges.

John McGee, the immediate past state deputy, considers Antonio a friend and confidant, someone who would bring you under his wing. He remembers when he was Grand Knight in Perry and how Antonio coached him on how to take a primarily Anglo council and welcome more members of Perry's Hispanic community.

"He not only gave me some coaching and some direction but helped me understand something bigger, the culture of Catholic Hispanics. You can't look at it through the lens of Anglos," McGee said. He learned that each Spanish-speaking country has its own personality and culture. "I never thought about it that way. He really helped us understand that."

Antonio was invited to run for a spot on the international board for the Knights. He was elected in 2019, was re-elected in 2022, and elected once again last year for his third and final term.



Leadership

Humility Sister Jeanie Hagedorn saw a leader in Antonio years ago, when she invited him to be a catechist at Visitation Parish in Des Moines.

"He had never taught before and the thought of standing in front of a classroom of junior high students was, to say the least, not comfortable for Antonio. Yet, after encouragement and guidance, Antonio said 'Yes.' He took a risk, opened himself to a new challenging situation to help others," she said. "I knew then that Antonio had the ability to be an influential leader. He showed the natural qualities of self-confidence and enthusiasm with a humility open to taking a risk into an unknown situation to help others. And as often happens, that openness to taking a risk to serve others in faith ends up being a grace we ourselves receive and from which we continue to grow in faith."

Antonio has been a leader in many different capacities and encourages others to step up, too.

"I get to motivate other people to say, 'You can do it, too. Just give it a shot. Get in the spotlight. Don't be afraid.' Sometimes it's scary, but God will provide," he said.

His support for others crisscrosses the state, from Council Bluffs to Harlan to Des Moines.

"I think of his example of servanthood and leadership," McGee said. "He's inspired many others to step up and serve and lead across our Diocese."

Banuelos is confident his life's path has been guided by God.

"He had a plan for us to be here. I never heard of Iowa until I was 15. I liked Pittsburgh because they had a good football team and Dallas because everybody loved Dallas. I started working here, but the plan was to get the immigration stuff done (become a citizen) and move closer to home," he said. "At some point, we said let's stop looking and just settle here. From that, many things have followed."

Today, Antonio is a member of a Vietnamese council and a parishioner at St. Ambrose Cathedral Parish. He continues looking for ways to share God's love with others.

Yet the roots of his faith continue to be at home.

"He lives his faith," said McGee. "If you know his family and his kids, you know it's rooted deep and they live it every single day," McGee said.

What will Antonio do when his service on the Knights' international board ends? He says he'll continue to focus on the mission of caring for families and growing in faith.

"We need to keep making men know their worth, know their value, and know their mission as evangelizers," he said. "It's like a marriage. It's a job of both the husband and the wife."

Antonio is a living example of the phrase from a Letter from St. James: "Faith without works is dead."

Mayra expects he'll continue inviting people to the Cor faith program of the Knights, to join councils, to volunteer in their parishes, and more.

"Wherever we go, he is inviting people," said Mayra. "When we invite people, it's part of the joy that you want to share." ✝

Getty Image/Anna Blazhuk

FOUR ATTRIBUTES OF THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS DREW ANTONIO BANUELOS.

First, he said, was a sense of belonging. The sense of brotherhood, the polo shirts with logos and council numbers, built a sense of community and family.

Second was organized service to the parish.

"Usually, we needed help, and we'd pray that help would come," he said. His experience on a parish council taught him a more organized approach to providing assistance was more efficient and orderly.

Third, he likes the insurance protection offered by the Knights.

"Normally, the Hispanic community doesn't have insurance. There's no trust in insurance back home," he said. The Knights of Columbus was founded by Blessed Father Michael McGivney in 1882, an effort to provide insurance protection for Irish immigrants. That protection is needed for everyone, including the Hispanic community, Banuelos said.

Fourth, he wants the connection to faith.

"Being a part of the Knights brought structure to my faith life through prayer and service," he said. "It also helped me, through the Knights, promote the value of men both in the community and in faith."

As a bonus, he likes that it helps him leave a legacy of faith for his son and son-in-law.

TO LEARN MORE
about the Knights of Columbus, go to KofC.org.

FEATURE STORY



New stained-glass windows *point to the Light*

BY ANNE MARIE COX

As the new St. Patrick Catholic Church in Council Bluffs was being constructed several years ago, Father Glen Wilwerding pointed to the walls where parishioners hoped, some day, stained glass windows would be installed.

Today, that dream is coming to fruition.

A unique design is taking shape, with images of Jesus on one side of the church, and complementary images of Mary on the opposing wall.

The idea came to Father James Ahenkora, who succeeded Father Wilwerding, as he was driving to visit a parishioner in the hospital.

"I had this inspiration that it should tell the story of love, pain, and triumph," he said. "And then suddenly the images started coming to me."

For love, he envisioned an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on one side, and an image of the Immaculate Heart of Mary on the opposite side.

For pain, there will be an image of the Agony in the Garden, and facing it from the opposing wall an image of Our Lady of Sorrows.

For triumph, an image of Christ the King will face a window featuring the Coronation of Mary.

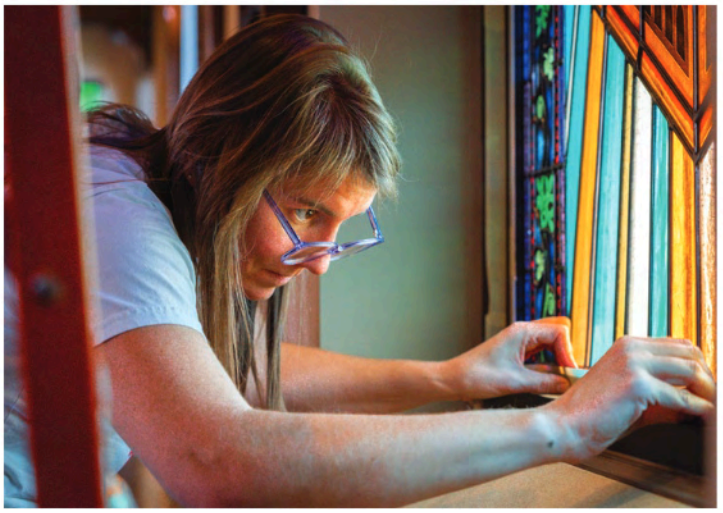
"This is an utterly unique concept," said the current pastor, Father Joel McNeil. "Wherever you are in life, if you're feeling joy or feeling sorrow, you can see that reflected in our Lord and in the Blessed Mother."

On each side of the sanctuary, large windows will depict Divine Mercy on one side and St. Michael on the other side. Four smaller windows will feature the four evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. There will be a stained-glass window high above the altar depicting the Holy Spirit descending from heaven.

Above the front doors, there will be a window highlighting a strong Eucharistic theme with a crucifix, grapes and wheat, a Celtic trinity, bread, and wine.

Photography by: Pete Soby







"You will know, when you walk in, this is a building for the Eucharist," said Father McNeil.

"When the first window went up, people were just delighted," he said. The first window was Christ the King. In early November, the Coronation of Mary window was installed.

While parishioners wanted stained glass windows from the start, they focused on paying down debt for the church, which was dedicated in 2018. Then, a family came to Father McNeil, and asked, Father Joel McNeil, and asked if they could honor a family member by sponsoring six of the windows.

"It was a shock," said Father McNeil. "The word got out and we basically had a rush of people who wanted to sponsor windows."

"We are delighted with what we have," he said.

Now serving at Our Lady's Immaculate Heart Parish in Ankeny, Father Ahenkora will one day go back to Council Bluffs to see his inspiration come to life.

He told Father McNeil, "I had a dream and you helped to fulfill that." ✝



SACRED ART, USED IN CATHOLIC CHURCHES FOR CENTURIES, IS MEANT TO DRAW US CLOSER TO GOD.

"Art is capable of making visible our need to go beyond what we see and it reveals our thirst for infinite beauty, for God," said Pope Benedict XVI in 2011 during a general audience.

Stained glass was originally used hundreds of years ago to teach illiterate Catholics about the faith through images about Jesus' life, about salvation history, about the saints, and more.

Sacred art continues to tell a story and helps us pray.

"If you go into a church and you see this beauty, it draws us to God," said Father James Ahenkora, pastor of Our Lady's Immaculate Heart Parish in Ankeny. "It reminds us that there is something beyond this world, a transcendence that takes our minds and hearts in prayer."

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Listen to the Spirit when called to go deeper in faith

BY DAVID DUFEK

Eight hundred years of Dominican preaching and 1,500 years of following St. Benedict's Rule might be practices one expects to find reserved for religious or clergy. Instead, they are increasingly showing up in parishes, offices, and schools through laypeople who have made promises to bring these time-honored spiritualities to bear on their day-to-day lives.

Andy Milam is a fully professed lay Dominican. "Living my life and witnessing my Catholic faith to people in front of me is preaching."

Tom Primmer, the director of operations for Our Lady's Immaculate Heart Parish in Ankeny, is a Benedictine oblate. His heart was drawn to the hospitality and humility the Rule of Benedict instills. "No work is off the table; you wash the dishes, you sweep the floor, you do the paperwork ... *ora et labora* ... prayer is work but work is prayer. It's intertwined. It's you."



Andy Milam was received into life as a professed Dominican. He served at the Mass, hence his presence in the cassock and surplice. Pictured with him is Dominican Father Timothy Combs and Taylor Fernholz, who also made his life profession.

Benedictine oblates are attached to a monastery. For Primmer, that's St. John's in Collegeville, Minnesota. Oblates try, in many ways, to bring Benedictine thought outside of the monastery's walls: work and prayer, silence, listening, hospitality, stability, conversion of life, and obedience.

Lay Dominicans embrace community, too. For them, it's a local group that meets at Christ the King Parish in Des Moines every second Saturday from 9 a.m. until noon, and it is part of a province of lay Dominicans, where there is a long tradition.

For Dominicans, each person anchors to four pillars: prayer, study, community, and preaching.

With Benedictine and Dominican spirituality being two of the many expressions of Catholic faith, both men advise listening to the Holy Spirit.

"One of the beautiful things about our Roman Catholic faith is you can have these different expressions of spirituality within the same family," says Primmer.

Milam advises that if you feel a tug toward a deeper spirituality to just try. "That's one of the things Dominicans allow you to do, is to try it out. We want you to come and see." ✝

Benedictine Oblates: Christian laypeople (and secular clergy) who **affiliate with a specific Benedictine monastery** and make an **oblation** (a personal promise) to live the **Rule of St. Benedict** in the world as their state of life permits (not monastic vows).

Distinguishers: stability to a particular monastery (even if one moves away from that monastery) and Benedictine spirituality (*ora et labora*) expressed in daily prayer/lectio/hospitality, with no monastic vows but a lived Benedictine rhythm outside the cloister.

For those who are interested in exploring Benedictine oblation near the Diocese of Des Moines:

- Christ the King Priory, Schuyler, Nebraska christthekingpriory.com
- St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota saintjohnsabbey.org
- Conception Abbey, Conception, Missouri www.conceptionabbey.org

Lay Dominicans (Order of Preachers, Lay Fraternities): Catholic laity who, after formation, make a formal **profession** (promises) to live the **Dominican Rule** and share in the order's mission through the **four pillars**: prayer, study, community, and apostolate/preaching.

Distinguishers: explicitly oriented to preaching/teaching truth, organized in Rule-governed fraternities with temporary then perpetual profession.

For those interested in exploring lay Dominican spirituality in the Diocese of Des Moines:

- Every second Saturday, 9 a.m.-12 p.m.

Christ the King parish, 5711 SW 9th St., Des Moines

Making 'welcome' a part of our identity



Tom Primmer found his home in the Catholic faith after time as a Methodist minister. As he was exploring Catholic spirituality, he attended a Catholic experience weekend that caught his attention.

"The very first evening, two deacons came up beside me, put their arms around me, and they said, 'you probably know you're the only non-Catholic here.'"

His response: "Well, I do now!"

He recalls this fondly as a shining example of the type of hospitality that Benedictines aim to show others and an example that he tries to practice daily.

"Obviously, we speak a different language than the secular world," he reflected. "To Christians who aren't Catholic, it's a monumental feat for them to walk in the door."

It's this that he remembers so well about that retreat evening. "[The deacons] said, 'You know what? It doesn't matter. You're a brother in Christ. We're glad you're here ... we're here to support you and just walk with you. Don't worry about anything. We love you. We're so glad you're here.'"

Primmer sees this as part of his identity. In part, it's in welcoming strangers and being intentionally kind that we keep St. Benedict alive.



Alpha is Igniting Faith, CHANGING PARISH CULTURE

For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them. (Matthew 18:20)

BY RYAN JOHNSON

Jesus calls us to evangelize and spread the Gospel as part of our Christian mission. Catholics across the Diocese are answering this call by using the Alpha program to welcome guests into their parishes, living out the promise that where two or three are gathered in God's name, there he is among them.

Alpha is a method of evangelization. Its purpose is to facilitate a personal encounter with Jesus through a simple structure: a shared meal, a short video, and a small group discussion.

The program takes place in both rural and urban areas where people are searching for opportunities for parish renewal, deep discipleship, and community building. It enables Catholics to reach out to people in their communities and invite them to radical hospitality, a call rooted in Scripture: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers...." (Hebrews 13:2) Alpha offers guests an opportunity to find answers to their questions about life.

Small Parish Success

Maryanne Dailey, Rita Laughlin, and Rick Dailey lead Alpha at St. Patrick Catholic Church in Imogene, a small rural parish in the western part of the Diocese. After overcoming initial doubts about whether the program could be successful in the parish, Dailey is pleased with its growth.

Since the initial Alpha pilot at the parish, the number of participants has grown from 6 to 21. She says attendees describe the program as life changing.

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN BRINGING ALPHA TO YOUR PARISH, CONTACT YOUR PASTOR.
Learn more about Alpha online: alphausa.org.

"The focus on confidentiality and deep, face-to-face connection meets a clear hunger for faith in our secular world," she says. "Alpha teaches that you don't preach. So, there's no teaching, there's no judging."

Dailey believes every parish in the Diocese — both big and small — can offer Alpha using members of the staff along with parishioners.

"Alpha is just the beginning of their journey," she says. "It's not the end."

Looking for Something Good

At St. Mary of Nazareth Parish in Des Moines, Deacons Dan Maxcy and Greg Lievens are helping to lead the Alpha program. They're promoting it as an opportunity to provide a source of hope for people who have grown frustrated or discouraged with society.

"I think it's obvious anytime that you see issues going on in the secular world that cause people to look for something better, look for something different, look for something that makes them feel good instead of making them feel bad," says Deacon Maxcy.

The deacons at St. Mary of Nazareth Catholic Church are witnessing how the Alpha program is leading people to explore the Catholic Church.

In an era when people are supposed to be more connected than ever, the rates of loneliness in the United States are remarkably high. To combat this trend, some people are switching from digital communications, like social media, to in-person conversations at Alpha meetings.

Deacon Lievens says, "It's a welcoming place where they can see how other people feel and find that they're not alone, and to have that hunger fulfilled."

As the name implies, Alpha is intended to be the beginning of something special, to help people start their journey toward a relationship with Jesus. Its success lies in radical hospitality and a belief in the program's power to bring people to Christ. ✝

DIOCESAN SERVICES

TRIBUNAL: Caring for individuals seeking the truth

BY JENNIFER WILLEMS



In his 14 years with the Diocese of Des Moines, Adam Storey has accompanied people through the many joys and challenges married couples face.



Now, he is using that experience to help them find healing and peace through the ministry of the Tribunal when a marriage breaks down.

Storey is the vice chancellor of canonical affairs for the Diocese of Des Moines. He completed four years of study at The Catholic University of America last summer, earning a licentiate in canon law.

"He has a keen mind for canon law. He loves it and really enjoys it. That helps," said Father Christopher Pisut, judicial vicar for the Diocese and pastor of St. Augustin Parish in Des Moines. "He fully throws himself into it."

That enthusiasm will come in handy as Storey works to implement the recommendations made by a team from the Canon Law Society of America, who audited the Tribunal — at Bishop William Joensen's request — in December 2023. The goal was to look at how the office functions, what was being done well, and offer suggestions for growth.

"We always have room to grow, and that's what we're trying to do," said Storey, who started his transition from director of the Office of Marriage and Family Life to the Tribunal about a year ago. During that time he served as an advocate, assisting people who were presenting cases for annulments to the Tribunal.

Seeking the truth

"The Tribunal is essentially the judicial office in a bishop's governance of his Diocese," Storey explained.

People approach the Tribunal when they question the validity of their marriage and give the reason they're asking. They may refer to this as "seeking an annulment."

"The work of the Tribunal is to inquire into that truth," Storey said.

The staff and judges take this very seriously.

"We're going to look into this with great compassion, with understanding, and not with judgment but with real reverence for the two people involved," he said. "We're going to — as best as we can — try to understand and then declare the truth of the matter."

In 2024, the Tribunal handled 44 cases. In 2025, it handled 60 cases, according to Cathy Gearhart, Tribunal coordinator.

Areas for growth

As the Tribunal staff implements the 2023 audit, Storey said he is reviewing and updating their internal procedures. They are also focusing on three areas of growth, the first one being to enhance the interactions they have with petitioners and respondents.

"The work of the Tribunal oftentimes can be very correspondence based — lots of letters and information going back and forth," he said. "One of the areas of growth we're trying to lean into is to have more direct contact with parties — to be present to them, speak with them, to answer their questions, to take more time explaining the 'why' behind the 'what' that we're doing."

The second kind of reform is taking steps to enhance the quality of the information received from the parties and witnesses involved, Storey said. This helps the judges to have a clear picture of the question at hand.

> “I’m pleased with the progress we’re making.”
>
> — Judicial Vicar Father Christopher Pisut



The third area of growth is investing more resources into the Tribunal, and Storey thanks Bishop Joensen for this. A concrete example of this is that he received the education he needed and then was moved into the Tribunal on a full-time basis.

“We’re investing more time, more attention, more resources to the work of the Tribunal, which is going to really help us do the substance of our work at a higher quality,” he said.

Another resource came last spring, when 21 people from around the Diocese started their training as advocates. They came together for half a day to talk about what the Tribunal does, how the marriage nullity process works, and the role of the advocate. There are sessions every six weeks about specific elements that are relevant to advocates.

The sessions are recorded, so there is a professional database for them to consult as they do their work, Storey said.

Of the 21 who began the training program, 5 are now active as advocates. The others will be incorporated into the process when they feel prepared.

Progress is being made

“With Adam Storey in there full time, we’re able to give regular attention to the working of the Tribunal,” said Father Pisut, who has been the judicial vicar or chief judge in the Tribunal since 2009.

He added that having more canonists — such as Father Adam Westphal, who is pastor at St. Thomas Aquinas in Indianola, and Father Alex Kramer, who is parochial vicar at St. Francis of Assisi in West Des Moines, as well as Storey — will be beneficial for all concerned.

He also praised Cathy Gearhart, who assists them as Tribunal coordinator.

“I’m pleased with the progress we’re making,” Father Pisut said. “As often happens, these things don’t go as quickly as you like or expect, but we’re diligently working on making sure we’re following all the proper canonical procedures and making improvements that need to be done.” ✝

TRIBUNAL TERMS

What is an advocate? An advocate represents parties in a petition for a declaration of nullity (either petitioners or respondents) and assists them in presenting the strongest case possible to the judge. Through advice and assistance, an advocate acts as legal representation during the canonical process.

Annulment: An “annulment,” or more properly, a “declaration of nullity” is a statement regarding the non-existence of a valid marriage (even when a valid civil marriage existed) at the time of the exchange of consent, due to a defect of consent, form, or the presence of an impediment.

Possible outcomes in a marriage nullity process: When a person approaches the Tribunal, they are accusing their putative marriage of nullity, and the Tribunal then investigates the truth of that claim. A declaration of nullity never changes the status of a marriage, but it declares the fact that a valid marriage never existed. A marriage nullity process might also conclude with the conviction that a person did in fact enter a valid marriage, even if their common life subsequently broke down. In these situations, it is the Church’s duty and desire to continue to accompany those individuals who find themselves in profoundly difficult circumstances.





Bishop William Joensen blesses an addition to St. Luke the Evangelist Catholic School in Ankeny in 2021.

COLLABORATIVE SPIRIT fosters growth in Ankeny

BY JENNIFER WILLEMS

With gifts of 35 acres of land and $2 million for a school, St. Luke the Evangelist Parish was established in Ankeny in the western part of Polk County on Dec. 17, 2010, making it the newest parish in the Diocese of Des Moines. Those gifts kept on giving, making dreams come true for the last 15 years.

Now there are new dreams.

"It's a very young, very vibrant, very active parish," said Father Ken Halbur, pastor for the last six years. "It's a beautiful thing to see so many young, faithful families that are here."

Young is right.

St. Luke grew from Our Lady's Immaculate Heart Parish on Ankeny's east side to accommodate the growing Catholic community. It now has more than 900 families, with 42 percent of the parish population being younger than 18, according to Father Halbur.

They have filled the school to capacity at 390 students. Another 350-375 children are enrolled in the faith formation program. That doesn't include the homeschool community.

More signs of life can be seen on Sundays, when the 8:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. Masses are half children, Father Halbur said. "So it's a very active, kind of noisy Mass, but you get used to it."

There are also Masses on Saturdays at 4:30 p.m., which draws many older parishioners, and Sundays at 6 p.m., which has a mix. The Sunday evening Mass is livestreamed.

"Bursting at the seams"

Kayla Boyle, the parish coordinator at St. Luke, said it's not unusual for there to be more than the church's capacity of 378 people at Mass. When that happens, chairs are set up in the gym, which is directly across from the worship space, where there is a TV screen with a remote feed.

"We're bursting at the seams," said Jeremy Swim, the business manager at St. Luke. "We have a lot of groups, and we just don't have space. Our meeting rooms have something going on in them all day long, every single day, every single evening."

To meet the need, parishioners at St. Luke are preparing to break ground on a third phase of construction on the land that was donated to them by Fern Ringgenberg.

The first phase in 2015 gave them a worship space, gym, classrooms and narthex, while the second phase five years ago added six classrooms, meeting rooms, and bathrooms.

The third phase will add eight more classrooms for the middle school, including a dedicated science lab and space for music and art classes that are now taking place in portable classrooms behind the school. The cost for that construction is $5.5 million,

If $7.5 million is raised, they could include more office space, a lunchroom, and a dedicated school kitchen.

Architects have been interviewed, and the goal is to have the new addition ready for use by the 2026-2027 school year or the beginning of the following school year, Swim said.

The fourth phase of construction, which is scheduled for 2031, would give the faith community a church that could seat nearly 1,000 people. Swim said the current worship space would be converted to a parish hall.

Father Halbur said this phase would cost between $20 million and $30 million.



St. Luke the Evangelist Catholic Church in Ankeny hosts an annual Oxtoberfest featuring a 5k run.

> **“It’s a beautiful thing to see so many young, faithful families that are here,”**
>
> **—Father Ken Halbur, pastor, St. Luke the Evangelist Parish in Ankeny.**

“We’re very hopeful that in 10 years ... it will all be different because the sanctuary space will be finished and it will be a gorgeous, extensive campus,” Swim said. “We estimate that there will be some kind of building project probably for the next 20 to 25 years.”

Future dreams include a rectory and sports fields.

A sense of family

As the principal of St. Luke the Evangelist School, Misty Hade said it is important to her that the staff fosters the sense of family and supports that in everything they do.

“There is a community and value in that community,” she said. “It’s not just parish and school, but the entire St. Luke’s community is something that we strive to build upon — all of our kids, all of our families, whether they are coming for religious education on Wednesday or homeschooled or part of the school, and continues on the weekends.”

She also wants people to know that the school, made possible with a gift of $2 million from Don and Charlene Lamberti, is a Catholic school and not just a school that says it is Catholic.

“That’s important,” she said. “I think we do a pretty good job with that. To me, even as we grow, that continues to happen.”

Collaborative, collegial, congenial

Hade is a member of Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart Parish, and when St. Luke was established, she thought, “It’s about time, just because of the growth of the community. I wanted it to be successful.”

At that time, there were 1,300 children in the faith formation program, kindergarten through 12th grade, at Our Lady’s, as well as Our Lady’s Little Learners Preschool, which continues, according to Tom Primmer, director of operations at Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart.

While some parishioners there moved to St. Luke the Evangelist, he said the numbers have bounced back and Our Lady’s currently has about 2,330 families. Faith formation classes now have 710 students and the preschool enrolls 78.

“When you combine that with St. Luke School and their parish formation program, we’re probably up to 1,500 to 2,000 in the Ankeny area that are receiving some form of Catholic formation and education,” Primmer said, emphasizing, “It’s all one Catholic community.”

And more is possible because of the tremendous growth in Ankeny, he said, pointing to an increase of 50,000 people since 2000. A Special Census by the city in 2024 puts the population at 76,207, making it Iowa’s fifth largest city.

The two parishes have a collaborative relationship that Primmer calls “collegial and congenial.” They alternate who hosts major devotions, such as Divine Mercy Sunday and Corpus Christi, and coordinate their schedules for Lenten fish frys.

“Parishioners here that I interact with and staff, we’re very glad there’s St. Luke’s,” Primmer said. “We’re glad that there’s a partner in ministry in the community.” ✝



Living LENT

Lent is a 40-day period of praying, fasting, and almsgiving that prepares us for Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. The Lenten season begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Thursday.

The Diocese of Des Moines offers resources on the practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. We also offer ideas for how to live them individually or as a family.

Go to dmdiocese.org/living-lent to find:

The Lent Essentials. Here we have a short how-to guide and context for Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, ideas for starting conversations of faith with the family, a Lenten planner, a family almsgiving project planner, a short guide to feast days during Lent, and seven meatless soup recipes.

Lenten Activities for Kids. We have a variety of options, including hiding the Alleluia, activities to help with learning the Hail Mary, guidance on doing a neighborhood food drive, a chart to track Corporal Works of Mercy by the family, Lenten prayer cards for children, and more.

Holy Week. Our guide describes the focus of each day of the Triduum and provides family-friendly ideas for making it come alive.

ASH WEDNESDAY — FEB. 18

This is a day of fasting and abstinence. Those who are between the ages of 18 and 59 are obliged to fast, meaning they can eat one full meal as well as two smaller meals during the day. Those who are 14 years old and older are to abstain from eating meat.

FRIDAYS DURING LENT

We abstain from eating meat.

GOOD FRIDAY — APRIL 3

This is a day of fasting and abstinence, like Ash Wednesday.

EASTER — APRIL 5

We celebrate Christ's resurrection from the dead, fulfilling God's promises. "The resurrection of Jesus is the crowning truth of our faith in Christ, a faith believed and lived as the central truth by the first Christian community; handed on as fundamental by Tradition; established by the documents of the New Testament; and preached as an essential part of the Paschal mystery along with the cross: Christ is risen from the dead! Dying, he conquered death; to the dead, he has given life." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 638) ✝



> "The resurrection of Jesus is the crowning truth of our faith in Christ, a faith believed and lived as the central truth by the first Christian community."

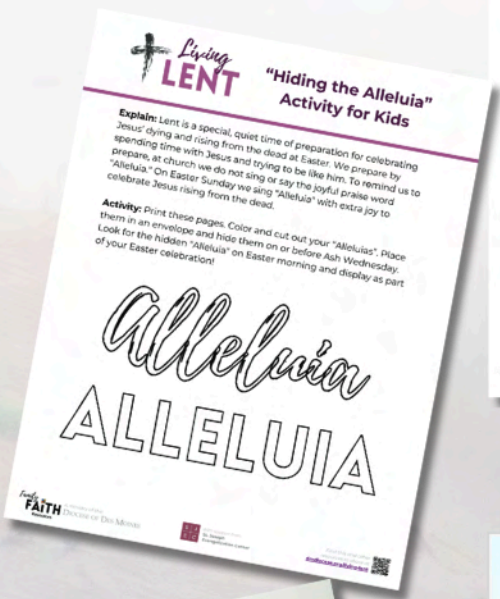
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FOR MORE LENTEN RESOURCES
go to dmdiocese.org/living-lent









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LET'S GET **PSYCHED**

THE GREATEST HOME REMEDY MAN NEVER MADE. My parents were big believers in Vick's VapoRub for almost every ailment.



For the smallest of sniffles, out came the Vicks. It either went on the chest, under the nose, was boiled in a pot of water, steamed in a vaporizer, or if a cough persisted, it went down the old hatch.

"Okay now, Open up!" So, with eyes closed as tight as possible and a silent scream yelling *No*! Sure enough, down it went, and the cough would subside.

These were the only moments I wanted to run away from home.

Strangely, my mom's home remedies worked. And if we weren't sure they would work, we knew better than to ever express any doubt.

Home remedies are a part of life. The roots of modern medicine are found in many ancient home remedies.

But medicine isn't the only matter in which home remedies have been useful. They can be found in home repair, farming, cooking, music, and let's not forget prayer.

Our holy Mother gave us a home remedy from heaven in the prayer of the rosary. She first gave it to St. Dominic in the 13th century.

Many would attest that this is the greatest of home remedies.

While it has been psychologically documented that praying the rosary may reduce depression, alleviate symptoms of anxiety, and comfort wounds, it is utmost a spiritual and salvific home remedy. Its purpose: to combat heresy, to form a theologically sound prayer life, and to convert souls. The motives that our holy mother Mary had for the people of that time are still as valid in this day and age.

Years ago, upon finding out the "news" that Randy Kiel was no longer an evangelical Bible-believing Christian but that he was a convert to Catholicism, a long-time friend said to me, "So tell me, why do I need a relationship with Mary?"

This was phrased as a question but tonally postured as a declaration of theological war.

I responded, "Apparently, you don't. And the Catholic Church would agree with your premise of thought."

He looked perplexed.

He then asked, "Well then, why do you all say that rosa-ry-thing instead of really praying?"

Now, this was a true question. I shared with him that Jesus gave Mary the ability to give us graces, 15 to be exact, every time we prayed the rosary, and that even though this prayer was over a thousand years old, it was just as effective now as it was when it was first given.

I showed him that every prayer in the rosary was found right in the Bible and they are all living Scriptures.

He opened his mind, and we continue these conversations even to this day.

In the next several articles, I will explore how this "heavenly home remedy" continues to open our minds and souls for the sake of our spiritual health as well as our mental health as we delve into each mystery of the rosary.

"Okay now, open up" — your heart that is — and go get those beads. ✝



DEACON RANDY KIEL
serves Christ the King Parish in Des Moines. He is the founder of Kardia Counseling. Connect with him at Randy@Kardiacounseling.com.

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The Usefulness of *Useless Virtue*

In *Ecce Homo*, his strange and self-aggrandizing autobiography, Friedrich Nietzsche tried to convince the world of his greatness by asking and responding to four questions: ***Why am I so wise? Why am I so clever? Why do I write such good books? Why am I a destiny?***

Each self-reflection question gushes with pride: the voice of a man who believed greatness can only be self-made. Yet read through the lens of Lent, those same questions expose a deeper ache: the human person who wishes to be seen, to matter, to leave a mark. Lent begins with what Nietzsche could never accept: "You are dust, and to dust you shall return." (cf. Gen 3:19)

Our culture prizes cleverness, productivity, and significance. True humility, by contrast, seems almost useless. It won't fill a résumé or net thousands or millions of online followers. But in the economy of salvation, the "useless" virtue turns out to be the most necessary one of all. Humility alone tells the truth about who we are and how we are meant to live with one another.

Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, in one Lenten homily, cautions against "useless words" by noting that even holy speech can become hollow if it bears no fruit. The same is true of our lives. Words, work, and accomplishments become empty when they stop drawing others toward Jesus. Humility rescues us from that emptiness. It roots wisdom in receptivity to Christ rather than in performance. "The fear of the Lord," Scripture reminds us, "is the beginning of wisdom." (Prov 9:10; Ps 111:10)

Nietzsche's first boast — *Why am I so wise*? — becomes, for the Christian, an invitation to unlearn the illusion of mastery. Wisdom begins not with knowing more but with remembering that we are creatures. Lent reminds us to kneel before the mystery of dependence. The humble can see reality clearly because nothing is beneath them, not even the dust from which they came.

His second claim — *Why I am so clever*? — celebrates intellect freed from moral constraint. But St. Paul turns that idea inside out: "The foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom." (1 Cor 1:25) The Cross shatters cleverness. It reveals a love that does not calculate gain. To fast and pray is to quiet the noise that insists on desiring control. Cleverness may be raucous; humility listens.

Nietzsche's third question — *Why do I write such good books*? — names a subtler temptation: believing our work can make us immortal. Yet, Christians labor not to preserve themselves, but to participate in Christ's work of love in the world. When humility shapes our work, it ceases to be self-serving and, instead, empties itself in service. Every act of love — teaching, creating time for the lonely, parenting, advocacy — is fruitful when it finds grounding in Christ's self-emptying love.

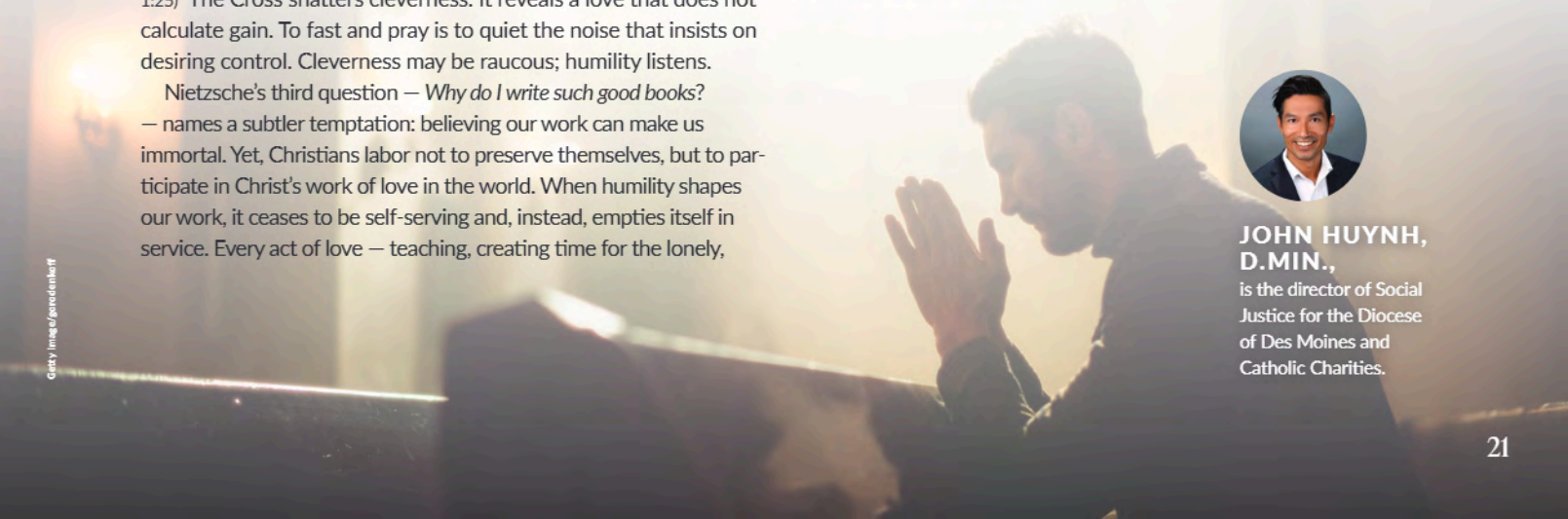
Finally, let's examine the fourth question — *Why am I a destiny*? Here, Nietzsche seeks to divinize himself. Yet the Gospel turns destiny upside down: "He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant." (Phil 2:7) True power reveals itself in surrender. The humble Christian does not seek to control history; he seeks to be faithful to his part in God's providence. The world may see no purpose in such humility, yet the saints, often dismissed as useless in their own time, are the very instruments of God's enduring grace throughout history.

This inversion is the pulse of Catholic Social Teaching. Its first principle, the dignity of the human person, rests upon humility: the recognition that every life, no matter how small, bears God's image. The call to community, the pursuit of the common good, the care for creation: all begin when we stop insisting that we are the center of the universe. Humility is the antidote to pride: it restores communion where pride isolates, offers generosity where pride consumes, and embraces service where pride seeks to rule.

Lent, then, is not *only* about personal holiness but about the healing of our relationships. To be reminded of our return to dust is to remember that we belong first to God, and through him, to one another and to all creation entrusted to our care. In seeking humility, we also seek justice, seeing others not as rivals or strangers, but as brothers and sisters in Christ, journeying together towards heaven.

So our Lenten question is not "Why am I so wise or clever?" but "Why am I so loved?" The answer lies not in what we achieve, but in the One who stooped to wash our feet *(cf. Jn 13:5)* – in Jesus who chose humility over glory, service over praise, the cross over the crown. His love is not earned but received, not measured by our usefulness but revealed in our very poverty. Lent teaches us to rest in that love, to let it reorder our desires and redefine our worth. For in the end, we are not saved by our brilliance or strength, but by the mercy of the God who washes our feet and calls us his own.

In a world that measures worth by visibility and praise, Lent whispers a different standard: what is hidden can be holy, what is small can be strong, and what seems useless can save. Humility neither creates clamor nor seeks to reign over destiny; instead, it abides in peaceful silence and yields to God's providential grace. And in that consent, the useless virtue becomes the seed from which all love grows. ✝



Getty Image/gorodenkoff

JOHN HUYNH, D.MIN.,
is the director of Social Justice for the Diocese of Des Moines and Catholic Charities.

ON PRAYER

Sowing God's Spirit is rooted in prayer

Our Jubilee Year of Hope has ended but our journey in prayer is never-ending. God is always waiting to welcome us into conversation. He desires to spend time with each of us. Our desire for prayer with him is our pursuit of holiness. The saints, sinners who toiled like us on their own paths toward holiness, left behind great wisdom. They teach us by their own example how to engage in our pursuit as we ask them to intercede for us.



Image Wiki Commons: Saint Joseph's Catholic Church (Central City, Kentucky) – stained glass, St. Theresa of Ávila detailing

Welcome to a new year on prayer with the saints.

St. Teresa of Avila, a Carmelite nun and the first female doctor of the church, wrote extensively on her experiences with prayer and meditation. One of her most famous works, *The Interior Castle*, was written for her Carmelite sisters to guide them on their journey in prayer. She also describes prayer in four stages we can relate to today.

As seed catalogs begin to arrive in mailboxes soon after the holiday decorations are packed away, we long for warmer temps and the beauty of spring to arrive. We purchase seeds preparing to labor in order to have prosperous crops and beautiful flowers. Sowing seeds is labor. Prayer also requires labor. Prayer is the soil where our seeds of faith grow. St. Teresa of Avila describes this first stage of prayer as labor-intensive, requiring perseverance while relying on God's grace. It is at this stage where God is watering the seeds in our soul with the water we labor and draw from the well.

During St. Teresa's second stage the water wheel arrives making our toiling of drawing water less work. With each turn the water wheel waters our prayer garden as we settle in with greater focus and prayers flowing more freely. With this growth in faith our souls experience great trust in God. My water wheel comes in the form of a prayer corner. The regularity in this space each morning provides warm sunshine for my prayer garden.

When the third stage arrives our prayer garden is being water regularly by a steady stream. The labor wanes and we rest in God's presence. Prayer becomes a time of relationship with God allowing the Holy Spirit to point out areas needing watered or weeded. It is a time of surrender seeking God throughout our day not only in our prayer space. This stage is not without difficulty as growth is often accompanied by struggle. But we rely on the perseverance we learned in stage one and continue.

And, finally, the rains come and God's love overwhelms our soul. Rain requires no labor from the gardener. St. Teresa calls this stage Prayer of Union where grace rushes towards us and God makes our prayer garden flourish. We are refreshed in this moment where God brings forth the beauty. These moments of grace might only bloom for a short time like some flowers but their beauty is worth the labor.

Perhaps today is the day to ask for St. Teresa of Avila's intercession to guide us on our prayer journey into the garden of God's grace. ✝



MONICA PUGH
is a spiritual director and the Faith Formation director at St. John the Apostle Parish in Norwalk.

The Communion of Saints



At a conference which I attended, a psychiatrist shared this story. A woman who was in considerable distress came to see him. Her anguish had to do with the last conversation she had with her husband before he died. She shared how they had enjoyed a good marriage for more than 30 years, with never more than a minor quarrel between them. Then one morning they had a quarrel over some trivial thing (she couldn't even remember the substance). Their argument had ended in anger, and he had stomped out the door to go to work – he died of a heart attack that day before they had a chance to talk again.

What awful luck! Thirty years without an incident of this kind and now this, anger in their last words to each other!

He asked her, "if your husband was here right now, what would you say to him?" She answered that she would assure him that after all their years together this little incident meant nothing, that their love for each other utterly dwarfed that mini moment. He assured her that her husband was still alive in the communion of saints and was with them right now. Then he said to her, "Why don't you sit in this chair and tell him what you just shared, that your faithful love for each other completely obliterates your last conversation. Indeed, share a laugh over its irony." Fanciful thinking? No.

As Christians we have a doctrine which asks us to believe that we are still in live, conscious contact with those who have died. This doctrine, The Communion of Saints, is enshrined in our creeds and is celebrated explicitly on two days each year, All Saints and All Souls Days.

Among other things, this doctrine invites us to pray for the dead. Not surprisingly, some people balk at this, protesting that God doesn't need to be reminded to be merciful and forgiving. They are right. However, in the end that is not the reason we pray for our deceased loved ones.

The real intent of our prayer for the dead is for us to stay in touch with them, to continue to be in a conscious communication, to maintain our relationship of love, to finish unfinished business, to apologize to them, to forgive them, to ask them to forgive us, to remain mindful of the special oxygen they breathed into the planet during their lives, and to occasionally share a celebratory glass of wine with them.

Thus, among other things, our belief in the communion of saints gives us a second chance, and that is a much-needed consolation. No matter who we are, we are all inadequate in our relationships. We can't always be present to our loved ones as we should; we sometimes say things in anger and bitterness that leave deep scars; we betray trust in all kinds of ways; and mostly we lack the maturity and self-confidence to express the affirmation we should be conveying to our loved ones. None of us ever fully measures up.

At the end of the day, all of us lose some loved ones in ways similar to how that woman lost her husband, with unfinished business, with bad timing. There are always words that should have been said and weren't said, and there are always things that shouldn't have been said and were said.

But that's where our faith comes in. Indeed, we aren't the first ones to come up short. At the time of Jesus' arrest, trial, and death, virtually all his disciples had deserted him. The timing here was also bad. Good Friday was bad long before it was good. But, and this is the point, as Christians, we don't believe there will always be happy endings in this life, nor that we will always be adequate in life. Rather, we believe that the fullness of life and happiness will come to us through the redemption of what has gone wrong, not least with what has gone wrong because of our own inadequacy and weakness.

G.K. Chesterton once said that Christianity is special because in its belief in the communion of saints, even the dead get a vote. They get more than a vote. They still get to hear what we're saying to them.

So, if you've lost a loved one in a situation where there was still something unresolved, where there was still a tension that needed easing, where you should have been more attentive or where you feel badly because you never adequately expressed the affirmation and affection that you might have, know it's not too late. It can still be done!

And, in having that make-up conversation, don't be afraid to share a laugh about how the inadequacy of our human situation has the devilish habit of fudging our best intentions. ✝



OBLATE FATHER RON ROLHEISER
is a Professor of Spirituality at Oblate School of Theology and award-winning author. He can be contacted through his website www.ronrolheiser.com. Follow on Facebook, facebook.com/ronrolheiser

Getty Images/Jacob Wackerhausen



Christ Our Life Conference announces speaker lineup

Conference invites Catholics to start the new year with renewed faith

BY ANN THELEN

As a new year begins, many Catholics set intentions to grow spiritually and return more intentionally to prayer. One meaningful opportunity to do that arrives this fall, when the Christ Our Life Catholic Conference returns to Des Moines Sept. 26-27 at the Casey's Center (formerly Wells Fargo Arena).

Christ Our Life has grown from a regional gathering into an international event that includes worldwide livestream attendance. Testimonials consistently highlight the impact of confession, Eucharistic adoration and compelling Catholic teaching.

The biennial gathering, which draws thousands from across the Midwest and beyond, has released a dynamic and diverse roster of international speakers for 2026. The roster includes returning favorites along with several new voices, each offering a powerful witness to the Gospel: ✝



TICKETS FOR THE 2026 CHRIST OUR LIFE CONFERENCE

are $30 for adults, and youth age 23 and younger may attend free. A ticket is still required for entry. Streaming options will also be available. Visit ChristOurLifeIowa.com for details, speaker information and to purchase tickets. Follow ChristOurLifeIowa on Facebook for updates throughout the year.

HOTELS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

Special hotel room blocks will again be available in Des Moines. Information is listed at ChristOurLifeIowa.com. The arena will offer accommodations for those with disabilities, and a breastfeeding station will be available throughout the weekend.



Bishop Joseph Espaillat is known as the beloved rapper priest from the Bronx. The youngest bishop in America challenges and awakens deeper faith in youth and adults alike.



Bishop William Joensen bishop of the Diocese of Des Moines, is recognized and esteemed not only for his intellect and wisdom but for his warmth as a spiritual leader.



Father Robert Spitzer scientist and host of EWTN TV's *Father Spitzer's Universe*, shares compelling research he has gleaned from studying more than 1,500 near-death experiences.



Sister Medhin Tesfay works with Mary's Meals in Tigray, Ethiopia, tirelessly providing daily school meals in a region of Africa devastated by civil war and drought.



Chris Stefanick known internationally as an acclaimed speaker, author, TV host and radio personality, is the founder of Real Life Catholic and inspires love and respect for the family.



Crystalina Evert founder of Women Made New Ministries, has spoken to more than one million people about the virtue of chastity, healing and God's plan for human sexuality.



Charbel Raish experienced a dramatic encounter with Christ that led to his powerful story, *How Islam Led Me Back to Christ*, as well as the founding of Parousia Media.



Gabriel Castillo host of the podcast *Children of Mary* and passionate author of *The Power of the Rosary*, is an evangelist who initiated True Faith TV, reaching many millions.



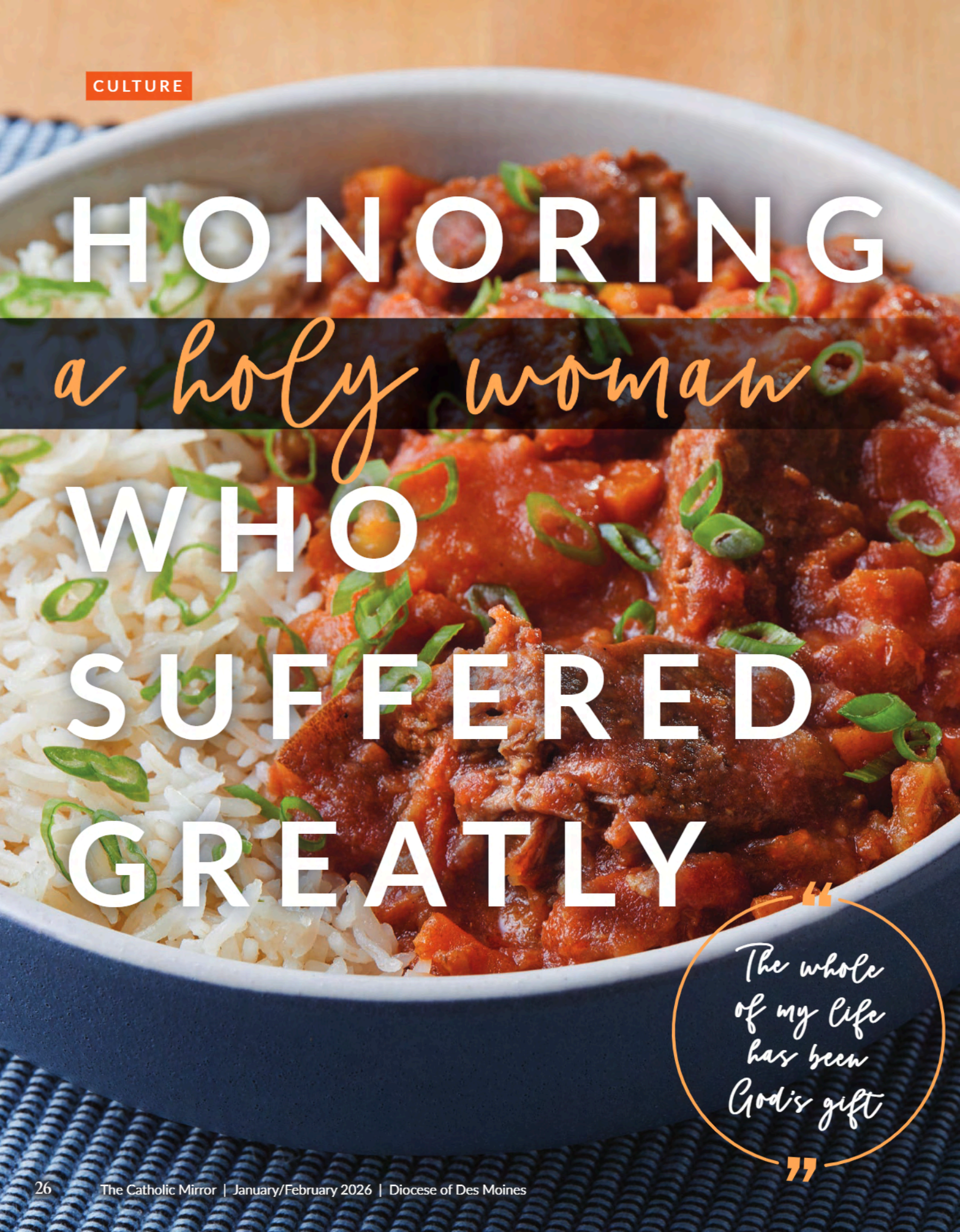
Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow founder and CEO of Mary's Meals, leads an organization that is proud to now feed more than 43 million hungry children and sustain children's lives in 16 countries.



Steve Angrisano is a music missionary, musician, storyteller, composer and speaker who leads thousands daily in the Divine Mercy Chaplet online and again inspires faith at the Christ Our Life Conference.



HONORING *a holy woman* WHO SUFFERED GREATLY



> "The whole of my life has been God's gift"



If I was to meet those slave raiders that abducted me and those who tortured me, I'd kneel down to them to kiss their hands, because, if it had not have been for them, I would not have become a Christian and religious woman." -St. Josephine Bakhita



Imagine being a child living a happy and comfortable life until one day, being terrifyingly kidnapped and sold into slavery.

This is the story of an African woman who, after years of horrible treatment, would profess that she would never have come to know Jesus and enter his Church had she not been kidnapped.

St. Josephine Margaret Bakhita was born around 1869 in the Darfur region of Sudan. As a young child, she was kidnapped by Arab slave traders and forced to walk hundreds of miles to a slave market to be sold.

Eventually, Josephine was sold to an Italian consul who took her to Italy. There, she made her way to a school run by the Canossian Sisters, which is an international missionary congregation. Josephine felt drawn to Christ and wanted to learn more about the Catholic Church. Eventually, in 1890, she was able to celebrate the sacraments of Christian initiation, and six years later joined the religious sisters of the Daughters of Charity of Canossa.

For the next 42 years, she was a cook and doorkeeper at her convent. Her missionary spirit drove her to travel to other convents to share her story and to prepare other sisters for work in Africa. The local people loved her gentle, holy ways and felt safe in her presence. Josephine was canonized by Pope John Paul II in 2000. She is the first person to be canonized from Sudan, and is the patron saint of the country. Her feast day is celebrated on Feb. 8.

What follows is a traditional Sudanese dish in honor of St. Josephine. The recipe has a wonderful flavor! As we relish the beautiful cuisine to come from that part of Africa, may we also focus our prayers to St. Josephine Bakhita in the month of February and ask for her intercession for the protection of all people threatened by slavery and human trafficking. ✝



MICHELLE SESSIONS DIFRANCO
is a designer and the busy mom of three children.

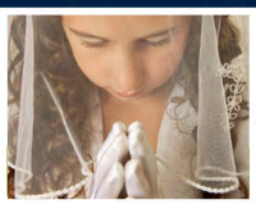
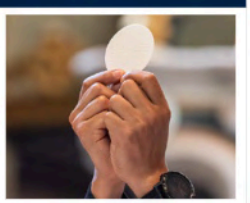
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHANE FOLKERTSMA

SUDANESE BEEF STEW

2 pounds beef (cubed)
3-4 tablespoons canola oil
4-5 onions (sliced)
2-3 carrots (diced)
1 cinnamon stick
1 tablespoon coriander powder
1 tablespoon cumin powder
1 teaspoon curry powder
¼ teaspoon ground cardamom
1 14.5 oz can diced tomatoes
2-3 cloves garlic (minced)
1 ½ pounds diced potatoes (1 ½ inches)
1 ½ cups beef broth
2 tablespoons tomato paste
Salt and pepper to taste

In a large Dutch oven, sauté the onions for 2-3 minutes. Add the beef and cook until brown on all sides. Add the cinnamon stick, spices and a bit of salt and pepper. Stir until combined. Add the carrots and tomatoes and cover with lid. Cook on low to medium heat for 15-20 minutes stirring occasionally and breaking down the onions. Remove lid and add minced garlic, potatoes and 1 to 1 ½ cups of beef broth. Stir in tomato paste, cover with lid and cook for an additional 40-45 minutes. Remove lid and stir until some of the liquid evaporates. Add more salt and pepper to taste (if necessary). It should be the consistency of a sauce rather than soup. Serve with rice or flat bread.

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TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

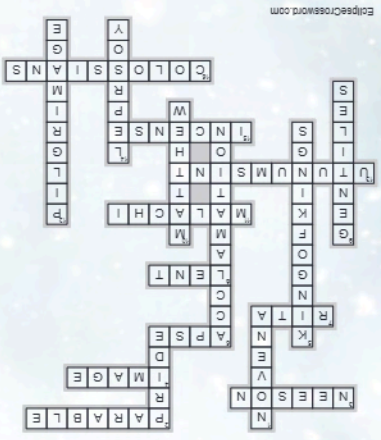


ACROSS

2. Method of story telling used by Jesus
3. Irish Catholic actor of Star Wars and Batman fame
4. Made in the ____ and likeness of God
6. Part of the church where the alter is located
7. She is the saint of impossible causes
8. The Church's "desert" season
11. Last book of the O.T. written by "my messenger"
13. "That They May Be One" by John Paul II
15. One part this + one part fire = holy smoke
16. One of Paul's "prison epistles"

DOWN

1. Devotion that is practiced for nine days
2. Most serious of the seven deadly sins
5. ____ and Lord of lords
6. The "shout" before the Gospel
9. Only two kinds of people: Jews and ____
10. A "Gift of Yahweh", an apostle and an evangelist
12. Journey that is an act of devotion
14. a.k.a. Hansen's disease



This crossword puzzle was created with EclipseCrossword. Try it today— it's free!

Getty Images/Stephen Inman

OFFICIAL PASTORAL APPOINTMENTS

BISHOP WILLIAM JOENSEN HAS MADE THE FOLLOWING APPOINTMENTS.



VERY REV. AQUINAS NICHOLS
retiring as Rector (Pastor) of the Basilica of St. John, Des Moines, and from active, assigned ministry, effective Jan. 5, 2026.



VERY REV. TREVOR CHICOINE
to Parochial Administrator (to later be installed as Rector/Pastor) effective on Jan. 5, 2026. His current assignment as Vicar of Divine Worship for the Diocese of Des Moines will continue within its current scope of responsibilities. Also, he will no longer serve as Dean of the Atlantic Deanery at the time of his new assignment.



REV. BRAD ROBEY
to Parochial Administrator of Ss. Peter and Paul Parish in Atlantic, St. Mary's Parish in Anita, and St. Timothy's Parish in Reno, effective on Jan. 5, 2026.



REV. JOSEPH PINS
while remaining Pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Parish, West Des Moines, has been granted a three-month Medical Leave from Jan. 1, 2026-April1, 2026.



REV. LARRY HOFFMANN
(retired) to Parochial Administrator at St. Francis of Assisi Parish, West Des Moines, from January 1, 2026-April 1, 2026, providing administrative and pastoral assistance.



VERY REV. P.J. MCMANUS
while remaining Pastor of Christ the King Parish, Des Moines, has been granted a six-month Sabbatical for renewal and study from January 1, 2026-July 1, 2026.



REV. RODRIGO MAYORGA LANDEROS
to Parochial Administrator of Christ the King Parish, Des Moines, effective Jan. 1, 2026.



REV. RYAN ANDREW
has been granted a Personal Leave of Absence from ministry for self-care and discernment effective Nov.10, 2025.



VERY REV. CHRISTOPHER PISUT
while remaining Pastor of St. Augustin Parish, Des Moines, and Judicial Vicar of the Diocese of Des Moines, has been granted a Medical Leave of Absence for healing and self-care effective from Nov. 15-March 1, 2026.



REV. GREG LEACH
(retired) to Parochial Administrator at St. Augustin Parish, Des Moines, effective from Nov. 15-March 1, 2026, providing administrative and pastoral assistance.



REV. MR. GREGORY LIEVENS
from St. Mary of Nazareth, Des Moines, to retirement, effective Nov. 24, 2025.



REV. MR. ROB STARK
from St. Pius X Parish, Urbandale, to Christ the King Parish, Des Moines, and St. Elizabeth Seton, Carlisle, effective Dec. 10, 2025 to July 30, 2026.

Faithfully in Christ, ✝

+ Wm. M. Joensen

Most Rev. William Joensen, Ph.D.
Bishop

Jason Kurth

Jason Kurth
Chancellor

JAN. 24
PRAY ALWAYS ALL WAYS
URBANDALE
Have you been curious about different ways to pray but you're not sure where to start? Each month, **Emmaus House** introduces different methods of prayer. Learn about the differences and similarities between prayer and meditation with Father Dan Krettek. Get more information at theemmaushouse.org.

FEB. 6
YOUNG CATHOLICS OF DES MOINES
DES MOINES
YCDM invites you to **First Friday Mass and fellowship** at Christ the King Church. First Fridays devotion is a practice of honoring the Sacred Heart of Jesus by attending Mass and receiving Holy Communion the first Friday of every month. Come for 5:30 p.m. Mass and 6:30 p.m. dinner. All young adults are welcome to dinner after Mass. Join the GroupMe (groupme.com/join_group/93039924/wrLdNlkW) for the location.

FEB. 7
PRAY ALWAYS ALL WAYS
URBANDALE
Each month, we introduce different methods of prayer in smaller experiences. Join us at Emmaus House to learn about **Lectio Divina** with Father Dan Krettek. Get more information at theemmaushouse.org.

FEB. 9
NOURISH FOR CAREGIVERS
URBANDALE
Nourish for Caregivers is for anyone juggling the challenges of life, health, and career while caring for an aging parent, grandparent, or spouse either in your home, in town, or at a distance. Join us at 6 p.m. at St. Pius X Church. Questions? Contact Deacon Troy Thompson at troyt@holytrinitydm.org or Deacon Jim Houston at pastoralcare@saintpiuschurch.org.

FEB. 13-15
YOUTH 2000 RETREAT
URBANDALE
Youth 2000 is an international spiritual initiative established to draw young people to a deep and lasting union with Jesus. The retreat, held at St. Pius X Parish, is for all youth ages 13-18. Go to dmdiocese.org/youth2000 to register by Feb. 1. For questions or more information contact Mary Settle at 515-865-5791 or Maureen Stone at 515-537-3710.

FEB. 14
NOURISH FOR PARENTS
WEST DES MOINES
Nourish for Parents is a Christ-centered support group to encourage and empower parents of children with disabilities or mental health challenges, offering practical, emotional, and spiritual support through faith. We'll gather at Sacred Heart Parish from 9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Childcare is provided. Questions? Contact Kate McInroy at kmcinroy59@gmail.com.

FEB. 21-23
TEENS ENCOUNTER CHRIST
PANORA
TEC retreats are back in the Diocese. The three-day retreat, held at the St. Thomas More Center, is designed to draw high school juniors and seniors into the heart of the Paschal Mystery. Questions? Contact the TEC team at tecdm@stmcenter.com or by calling the St. Thomas More Center at 515-309-1936.

FEB. 28
FORGE MEN'S CONFERENCE
DES MOINES
The FORGE Conference 2026 from 8 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. at the Iowa Events Center will empower current and future fathers to flourish in their day-to-day lives. The conference provides a unique blend of high-impact, short-form keynotes paired with extended breakout sessions. The conference is open to males ages 16 or older. To register, go to myforge.org/conference/

MARCH 7
SHAMROCKS AND SHENANIGANS
WEST DES MOINES
Join **Catholic Charities** at 6 p.m. at Glen Oaks Country Club for a night of Irish fun while learning about the vital work of Catholic Charities. Proceeds support the programs and services offered to support our neighbors in need. Get tickets at catholiccharitiesdm.org/get-involved/shamrocks/

MARCH 7-9
TEENS ENCOUNTER CHRIST
PANORA
This three-day retreat, held at the St. Thomas More Center, is designed to draw high school juniors and seniors into the heart of **the Paschal Mystery.** Questions? Contact the TEC team at tecdm@stmcenter.com or by calling the St. Thomas More Center at 515-309-1936.

MARCH 9
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SEPT. 26-27
CHRIST OUR LIFE CONFERENCE
DES MOINES
This conference, held every other year at the **Casey Center,** is a grassroots effort of faith sharing, faith building, and praise featuring world renowned speakers focused on bringing Catholics together. Learn more and get tickets at christourlifeiowa.com/

BYZANTINE LITURGY
DES MOINES
A **Byzantine Catholic Divine Liturgy** is celebrated every Sunday, 11 a.m., at All Saints Church. For more information go to byzantineiowa.org, or contact Father Bruce Riebe at 440-227-5037. ✝

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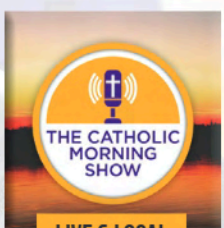
Barb Bellizzi - St. John the Apostle
Kelly Broderick - St. Boniface
Mark Dreckman - St. Pius X
Jan Hogan - St. Francis of Assisi
Mary Jo Howe - Sacred Heart
Ted Lockwood - St. Pius X
Mark Masters - St. Boniface
Pat O'Keefe - St. Mary of Nazareth
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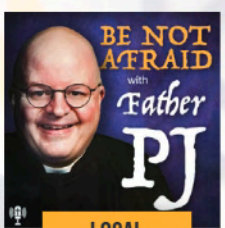
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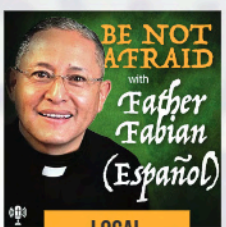
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LOCAL
MON. | 9:30AM



LOCAL
SUN. | 9AM



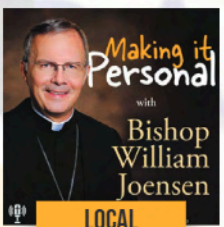
LIVE & LOCAL
WED. | 8AM



LOCAL
SAT. | 8:30AM
SUN. | 11:30AM



LOCAL
SAT. | 6PM
SUN. | 2PM



LOCAL
SAT. | 8AM
SUN. | 11AM



LOCAL
THUR. | 9AM
SUN. | 6:30PM



LOCAL
MON. | 9AM
SUN. | 6PM

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