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

The Catholic Mirror

JULY/AUGUST 2026
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At Home in the parish

INSIDE

Lay ministers make parishes feel like home

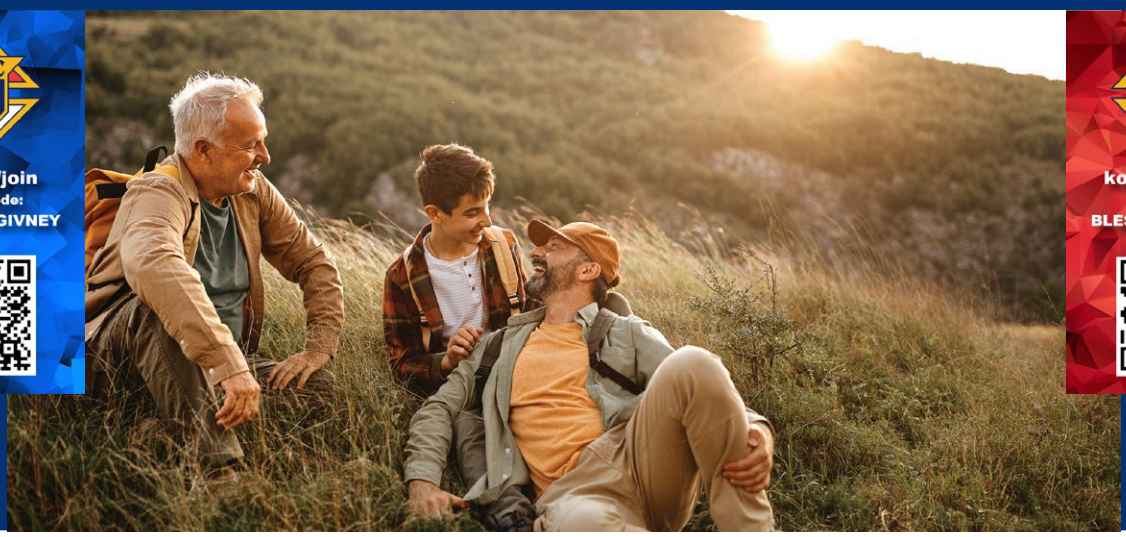
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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR



ANNE MARIE COX
Editor

Let's keep going!

Jesus invites all of us to have a personal relationship with him. It transforms us, and through us, Jesus transforms our families, our parishes, and our communities.

Through *The Catholic Mirror* magazine and digital newsletter, we share the teachings of the Catholic Church clearly and boldly in order to equip Catholics to experience a personal encounter with Jesus and share his love with others. Our magazine and digital newsletter are important tools for sowing God's Spirit in the hearts and minds of people.

Earlier this year, we moved from a newspaper to a magazine format, and from what I'm hearing, you like it. In addition, we have more than 1,200 people receiving the new digital newsletter (sign up for free at dmdiocese.org/newsletter).

I'm asking for your help to keep us going. Help the Diocese of Des Moines continue to cultivate connections in Christ through *The Catholic Mirror* with a gift of $30. It takes a lot of small gifts to fund this important ministry. Can I count on you?

INSIDE



Andrea C. Calderon, Diego Garcia Orellana, and Eduardo Correa of Christ the King Parish in Des Moines work on a project that stems from the Hispanic Lay Formation class. See the story on pages 8-10.

PICTURED ON THE COVER: Members of the most recent Hispanic Lay Formation group are (l-r): Maria del Rayo Banda and Salvador Coronel, both of Christ the King Parish in Des Moines, Fernando Cavanzon, of Sacred Heart Parish in West Des Moines, and Andrea C. Calderon, of Christ the King.

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Declaration of Interdependence

When Abigail Adams, wife of John Adams and the apple of his eye for 54 years of marriage, died on Oct. 28, 1818, the former U.S. President was steeped in grief but not overwhelmed by the sting of death. Among those who consoled him was the drafter and fellow co-signer of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, who in the years after July 4, 1776, became both Adam's fierce political rival and deep personal friend. In response to Jefferson's letter of condolence, Adams responded: "While you live, I seem to have a bank at Monticello on which I can draw for a letter of friendship and entertainment when I please." Adams continued,

"I believe in God and in his wisdom and benevolence and I cannot conceive that such a Being could make such a species as the human merely to live and die on this earth. If I did not believe in a future state, I should believe in no God. This universe, this all, this [totality] would appear with all its swelling pomp, a boyish firework" (McCullough, John Adams, p. 625).

The fireworks were unleashed with heightened festivity and fervor this July 4th, as we celebrated the 250th anniversary of the signing of the document that marks the official founding of our country. I hope that the clarion opening of the Declaration is etched into every American's consciousness: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

We do not share the religious dispositions of many of the Founding Fathers, including Adams and Jefferson, whose notion of God bore traces of the impersonal, rationalist Deism that informed much of both the American and French Revolutions. Still, the recognition of these self-evident truths *is* the inner scaffolding upon which our Republic still stands despite the tumultuous periods through which we've passed — including the rather coarse, antagonistic political and social culture in which we are presently steeped.



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

The late Jesuit Father John Courtney Murray famously identified these truths woven into the American experiment. As summarized by author and theologian George Weigel, they include these tenets: (1) God is sovereign over nations as well as individuals; (2) The human person has the God-given capacity to be self-governing; (3) Just governance is by, through, and with the consent of the governed; (4) There is a sense of justice inherent in the people by which they are empowered to judge, direct, and correct the processes of government; and finally, (5) Only a virtuous people can be free (Murray cited in Weigel, *Centesimus Annus: The Architecture of Freedom*, pp. 19-21).

We celebrate and defend these truths as we celebrate the resiliency of our nation, in which "out of many, one," a democratic form of government has endured for 250 years. We also ponder the vulnerability and fragility that ensue if the clamoring voices that deny these truths prevail.

Only by acknowledging that we are all beholden to the God whose wisdom and goodness brought each of us into being, whose claim to our devotion and obedience takes precedence over any political authority, can we protect ourselves against the incursions of tyranny. Only by honing and refining our sense of justice inherent to human nature, rational beings participating in God's own eternal law that guides us to fulfillment, can we offer valid consent. Only then can we deliver objective judgments of our elected and appointed officials' actions, correcting and redirecting them as needed.

For each of us is beset by self-interest, tending to soften our sense of duty to our neighbor and bending supposed "rights" into privileges and benefits that diminish others' chances of pursuing happiness. All of us need ongoing conversion — perhaps now more than ever — where we allow the Good News of God's revealed intent to save us for himself to first convict our consciences and then spur us to deep personal encounters with the merciful face and heart of Jesus in the sacraments and in our fellow citizens and neighbors. Beyond any moral effort, self-help discipline, or therapeutic regimen, it is only by the grace of Christ that we can become the virtuous agents who are truly able to live, love, and advance a society where freedom rings.

In June, our nation's Catholic bishops expressed this need for deepened dependence and trust in God's abundant mercy and grace. That is why, united as one college of bishops, we consecrated the United States to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and we encouraged all pastors and parishes in the Diocese of Des Moines to do so with you, God's people. In the spirit of St. John Paul II and Pope Francis, we recognize, "In union with Christ, amid the ruins we have left in this world by our sins, we are called to build a new civilization of love.... Amid the devastation wrought by evil, the heart of Christ desires that we cooperate with him in restoring goodness and beauty to our world" (Francis citing John Paul II, *Dilexit nos*, n. 182).

Our prayer of consecration is itself a spiritual "declaration of interdependence," where we thank God for the abundant gifts given to this nation, but also humbly implore God, "May our hearts be united to yours, so that our families and communities

Continued on page 27

Getty Image/SimpleImages

Declaración de Interdependencia

Cuando murió Abigail Adams, esposa de John Adams y niña de sus ojos durante 54 años de matrimonio, el 28 de octubre de 1818, el expresidente de los Estados Unidos estaba hundido en un profundo dolor, pero sin doblegarse ante la pena de la muerte. Entre aquellos quienes le consolaron estaba el autor y compañero firmante de la Declaración de Independencia, Thomas Jefferson, quien durante los años posteriores al 4 de julio de 1776 se convertiría tanto en el feroz rival político de Adams, así como amigo sincero. En respuesta a la carta de condolencia de Jeffeson, Adams respondió, "Mientras vives, parece que tengo un banco en Monticello de donde puedo retirar una carta de amistad o de entretenimiento cuando me place." Admas continuó,

"Creo en Dios y en su sabiduría y benevolencia y no puedo concebir que tal Ser pueda hacer una especie como la humana, simplemente para que viva y muera en esta tierra. Si no creyera en un estado futuro, no creería en un Dios. Este universo, este todo, esta [totalidad] aparecería con toda su gallardía como un fuego artificial infantil" (McCullough, *John Adams*, pág. 625).

Se lanzaron los fuegos artificiales con elevado fervor y festividad este 4 de julio, cuando celebramos el 250 aniversario de la firma del documento que marca la fundación oficial de nuestro país. Espero que a frase de apertura de la Declaración este grabada en la consciencia de todos los americanos: "Sostenemos como evidentes estas verdades, que todos los hombres son creados iguales, que son dotados por su Creador con ciertos derechos inalienables; que entre estos están la vida, la libertad y la búsqueda de la felicidad."

No compartimos las mismas disposiciones religiosas de muchos de nuestros Padres Fundadores, incluyendo a Adams y a Jefferson, cuya noción de Dios veía la marca de un Deísmo impersonal y racionalista que informaba a gran parte de las Revoluciones Americana y Francesa. Aún así, el reconocimiento de estas verdades evidentes es el marco interior sobre el cual aún se sostiene nuestra República a pesar de los períodos tumultuosos que hemos vivido—incluyendo la cultura social y política tan áspera y antagónica en la que vivimos actualmente.



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

El difunto jesuita, Padre John Courtney Murray, identificaba famosamente estas verdades como el tejido del experimento americano. Como lo resumió el autor y teólogo George Weigel, éstas incluyen los siguientes componentes: (1) Dios es soberano sobre de todas la naciones así como sobre los individuos; (2) La persona humana tiene la capacidad otorgada por Dios para autogobernarse; (3) El gobierno justo se logra, por medio y con el consentimiento de los gobernados; (4) Hay un sentido inherente de justicia en las personas por el cual tienen el poder de juzgar, dirigir y corregir los procesos del gobierno; y finalmente (5) solamente la gente virtuosa puede ser libre (referencia a Murray en el libro de Weigel, *Año Centésimo: La Arquitectura de la Libertad, págs. 19-21).*

Celebramos y defendemos estas verdades al celebrar la solidez de nuestra nación en la cual, "de los muchos, uno," ha perdurado una forma de gobierno democrático por 250 años. También meditamos sobre la vulnerabilidad y fragilidad que surgiría si prevalecieran las voces que claman negando estas verdades.

Podremos protegernos contra cualquier incursión de tiranía solamente si reconocemos que todos somos hijos amados del Dios cuya sabiduría y bondad es el porqué de nuestra existencia, cuyo reclamo por nuestra devoción y obediencia tiene precedente sobre cualquier autoridad política. Solamente moldeando y refinando nuestro sentido de justicia inherente a la naturaleza humana, podremos ofrecer un consentimiento válido los seres razonables que participamos en la propia ley eterna de Dios que nos guía a la plenitud. Solamente entonces podremos ofrecer juicios objetivos a las acciones de nuestros oficiales electos y designados, corrigiéndoles y redireccionándoles cuando sea necesario.

Porque cada uno de nosotros que estamos asolados por el interés propio, tendemos a aminorar nuestro deber para con nuestro prójimo y convirtiendo supuestos 'derechos' en privilegios y beneficios que disminuyen la oportunidad de otros para buscar la felicidad. Todos nosotros necesitamos una conversión continua—tal vez ahora más que nunca—en donde permitimos que la Buena Nueva revelada por Dios con la intención de salvarnos para sí mismo a que primero convenza nuestras consciencias y luego nos lance a encuentros profundos y personales con el rostro y corazón misericordiosos de Jesús en los sacramentos y con nuestros conciudadanos y nuestro prójimo. Es solamente por la gracia de Cristo que podemos hacernos agentes virtuosos que pueden verdaderamente ser capaces de vivir, amar, y promover una sociedad en donde la libertad resuena, más allá de cualquier esfuerzo moral, disciplina de autoayuda o régimen terapeuta.

En junio, los obispos católicos de nuestra nación expresaron esta necesidad de una dependencia y una confianza profunda en la abundante misericordia y gracia de Dios. Por eso, Unidos como un solo colegio de obispos, consagramos a los Estados Unidos al Sagrado Corazón de Jesús y hemos exhortado a todos

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The Quiet, Daily Work of Evangelizing Love

BY JOHN GAFFNEY

To invite encounter is to participate in God's own initiative. Evangelization never begins with us; God always moves first:

- Stirring hearts
- Creating openings
- Preparing the soil long before we arrive.

God works through ordinary people in ordinary moments, with extraordinary impact when we invite a friend, a family member, or a coworker into an encounter with God. We desire to help another person experience the nearness of Jesus, sometimes explicitly, often subtly. The places where these people exist are in the unnoticed corners of our daily lives.

Pope Francis describes evangelizers as those who take the first step, who go out, who accompany, who rejoice (*Joy of the Gospel*, p. 24). This work is not reserved only for father, deacon, sister, or the parish staff. It is the quiet work of parents and fellow parishioners who allow Christ's mercy to shape his presence in the world.

Our parish communities work hard to

- Be known by their joy
- Be attentive to real human needs
- Be intentional in personal contact.

But these communal values are lived one person at a time:

- A parish becomes joyful because its people choose joy
- A parish becomes welcoming because its members practice welcome
- A parish becomes missionary because its individuals embody mission in the small, hidden ways that rarely make announcements or bulletins

Inviting encounter often looks like small acts of mercy, the kind that seem insignificant but carry the fragrance of Christ.

- It is the parishioner who notices the newcomer sitting alone and offers a warm greeting before Mass.
- It is the young adult who texts a friend who has drifted from the Church simply to say, "Thinking of you today."
- It is the parent who blesses their child with holy water before school, quietly teaching that God is near in every moment.
- It is the retiree who prays by name for the catechumens preparing for Easter, unseen but deeply participating in their journey.

These gestures are not accidental. They flow from a heart that has first encountered Jesus. When Catholics cultivate daily prayer, receive the sacraments with openness, and allow the Holy Spirit to shape their curiosity and imagination, they naturally become people who invite encounter without forcing it. Their presence becomes a quiet witness — steady, joyful, attentive.

In a culture marked by loneliness, hurry, and fragmentation, the smallest acts of Christian love become luminous. A sincere question, a patient conversation, a moment of listening without judgment, these are seeds of encounter. They communicate, often with few words, that every person is seen and loved by God.

Inviting encounter is a way of being. It is the daily or hourly decision to let Christ's mercy flow through the ordinary rhythms of our day. When individual Catholics embrace this call, parish culture shifts. Evangelization becomes not a program but a habit. And the Church becomes what she is meant to be: a community where people meet Jesus through the quiet fidelity of his disciples.



JOHN GAFFNEY
Diocesan director of the Evangelization and Mission Team.

Getty Image/Mascot

COVER STORY

At Home in the Parish



The Diocese of Des Moines' sixth class of Hispanic Lay Formation students graduated recently. They numbered 26 students in Des Moines, 10 in Council Bluffs, and 20 in Omaha.

BY DAVID DUFEK



Jacqueline Lemus, of Omaha, with Maria Clara Gonzalez Lemus.

How do you form lay ministers who make Hispanic Catholics feel, not as guests, but at home in their own parishes?

Getty Images/

“The Hispanic Lay Formation program is a great opportunity for lay persons to take the course to deepen their understanding of the faith and fall in love with Christ eve more, and be able to share that with others in a very meaningful way.”

Luz Estrella Haro and Claudia Santoyo, of St. Joseph Parish in Des Moines, make a presentation in their Hispanic Lay Formation class.



For over a decade, Mayra Moriel de Banuelos has been answering that question one class at a time. If they don't come, she said, "go and look for them."

“Recognize that they are there,” she said. “Invite them to participate. Include them in the table where the decision is being made.”

Banuelos is the Diocese of Des Moines' coordinator of Hispanic Ministry, and she has shepherded the Diocese's Hispanic Lay Formation program through its first six classes. The program began with a request from then-Bishop Richard Pates: form Hispanic men for the diaconate. She found no diaconate formation in Spanish available to the Diocese, but the University of St. Mary of the Lake, in Mundelein, Illinois, offered a two-year lay-ministry program in Spanish instead.

As she remembers it, Bishop Pates replied: “If we don't have deacons in formation, we [can] have people formed to do ministry.”

This year, the program crossed a state line. In partnership with the Archdiocese of Omaha, faculty now travel for a second monthly weekend serving the Council Bluffs and Omaha students together. The current class that just graduated, the Diocese’s sixth, numbered 26 students in Des Moines, 10 in Council Bluffs, and 20 in Omaha. A grant secured by Father Litto Thomas, parochial vicar of St. Anthony Parish in Des Moines, covered the parish share of tuition this year, a contribution Mayra said had at times been hard for parishes to carry.

The heart of the program is the pastoral project. Through a workshop Banuelos calls The Analysis of the Reality, students study their own parish, name a real need, and match it to gifts they have to offer. Each student is encouraged to share that analysis with their pastor, a conversation Banuelos calls “an aha moment” for both. Every graduate then implements that project for two years.

This year’s projects, Banuelos said, span the Diocese. At Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart in Ankeny, a parishioner is working alongside the parish's religious-education team to welcome Spanish-speaking families more intentionally, gathering them each year to affirm that they belong. That parishioner, Jen Cakinberk, calls her project Seed of Faith. “The church is for all,” she said. “Nobody's going to be a prosthetic leg in the body of Christ.” She points to feast days as the place where the parish becomes one community: “We have feast days that we can share together as a community, and we can have our rosaries as a community. Bringing a little bit of that passion of our faith into the church will be a way to bring them together.”

At Christ the King in Des Moines, Diego Garcia is taking on a different kind of work: digitizing decades of parish sacramental registries, books going back to the founding of the parish, many entries written in cursive that, he said, “might as well be scribbled,” and that the office can take hours to search. He frames the project as lowering a barrier. “If the sacraments aren't readily



Andrea C. Calderon and Diego Garcia Orellana, of Christ the King Parish in Des Moines, work with volunteers Eduardo Correa, Fatima Rodriguez, and Cinthya Correa to digitize decades of parish sacramental registries going back to the founding of the parish. "If the sacraments aren't readily available to people or if we make things harder than they need to be - these little things affect the community in a positive or negative way. Being in order here makes us in order everywhere else. It makes approaching the church a lot easier," said Garcia.

available to people or if we make things harder than they need to be — these little things affect the community in a positive or negative way," he said. "Being in order here makes us in order everywhere else. It makes approaching the church a lot easier."

In Council Bluffs, a graduate plans to plant a chapter of the Christian Family Movement, a fellowship that meets in Des Moines and Omaha. Another graduate has built a grief ministry, which Banuelos called a parish response to something the parish itself was missing. Other current projects include sacramental preparation, hospitality, Marian devotion, parent formation, and outreach to the homeless and to women in pregnancy crisis.

The program's first course is *Encuentro*, encounter with Christ. The class asks students to recall every encounter with God they have had since childhood, and to carry one daily question into prayer:

"Pray and ask God every single day," Banuelos said. "How do you want me to serve you, God?"

In the years since, the Diocese has found a source for forming men for the permanent diaconate. Three of those men (Jose Santos, Marco Balmaceda, and Ernesto Lemus) came through this program first. The Diocese has retained the lay formation program nonetheless, on the strength of its fruits.

The fruits of the program, Cakinberk said, run beyond the projects themselves. "It's a great opportunity for lay persons to take the course to deepen their understanding of the faith and fall in love with Christ even more," she said, "and be able to share that with others in a very meaningful way."

THE SEVENTH CLASS BEGINS IN SEPTEMBER.

Pastors can nominate candidates; interested Catholics can speak with their pastor or contact the diocesan Office of Hispanic Ministry at 515-237-5011

Volunteers Eduardo Correa, Fatima Rodriguez, and Cinthya Correa help with a project at Christ the King Parish in Des Moines.

Pastoral Projects — 2025–2026 Hispanic Lay Formation Class

- **Open Hands —** Responding to basic and pastoral needs of the poor and homeless
- **Power of Prayer —** Helping people to pray
- **Marriage Preparation**
- **Grieving Project —** Accompaniment during the grieving process
- **Seed of Faith —** Integration of Hispanics in the parish
- **Marian Project —** Helping the parish with all Marian festivities
- **Bible for Families —** Helping families to pray with the Bible
- **Serving at Mass —** Serving and inviting others to serve
- **Walking with Mary —** Celebrating the different advocations of Mary at the parish
- **Hearts Filled with Faith, Love, and Hope —** Helping crisis pregnancy centers and pregnant women in need
- **Welcome and Hospitality Project**
- **Faith Formation for Parents and Families**
- **Men's Group**
- **Prayer and Fasting —** Guiding people in prayer and fasting
- **Christian Family Movement (Council Bluffs) —** Helping the Des Moines Federation of the Christian Family Movement organize Spanish-language chapters in the Council Bluffs area
- **Ministry of the Sick**

VICTIM ASSISTANCE ADVOCATE

The Diocese's Victim Assistance Advocate, Sam Porter, is a staff member at Polk County Victim Services. Through a complaint process he helps people who are or were minors when they were victims of abuse by the clergy. He also helps them seek support and counseling services. Porter can be reached at 515.286.2024 or Sam.Porter@polkcountyiowa.gov.



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From Juilliard to Des Moines: Talented Musicians Lead Parish Music

BY ELIZABETH WILLIAMS

The Diocese of Des Moines is blessed with talented, accomplished professional musicians, leading and accompanying parish choirs. Combining their love for music and the sacred liturgy, they have felt a call from God to use their talents to bring others close to God.



MARION SCOTT, PH.D.

Scott grew up in northern Florida, received his undergraduate degree in piano performance at the famed Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, and then went to graduate school at The Juilliard School in New York City. There, he met his wife, Rosa, also a professional pianist. Scott earned his doctorate in Miami where he and his wife performed concerts, formed music groups, and led church choirs for 13 years.

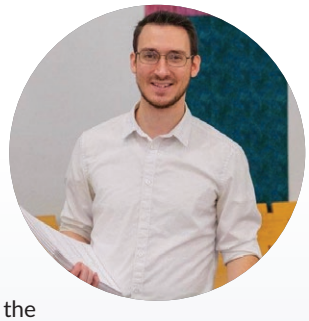
However, "we got a strong feeling in our hearts that God was calling us to serve in a different place," Scott said. "So, my wife looked online and saw that St. Augustin's in Des Moines was looking for a pastoral music director."

Neither of the two had been to Iowa before.

"We took a leap of faith, and almost four years ago, we moved to Des Moines," he added. "We felt we could breathe for the first time when we moved here. The community is very strong, and the cooperation is great."

Music and worship intertwine.

"I think it's important for the director to pray with the choir," Scott said. "I believe strongly to begin and end rehearsals in prayer. Our goal is to glorify God."



NATE SPARKS

The music director at Sacred Heart Parish in West Des Moines since 2023, Sparks, also went to The Juilliard School to study music. The native of Runnells, Sparks played trumpet and became involved in the New York City jazz scene. But God used the Covid pandemic to call Sparks back to Des Moines.

"I came back here in 2020, returned to the faith, met my wife, and we just had our first child [in May] when God pointed me in this direction," Sparks said.

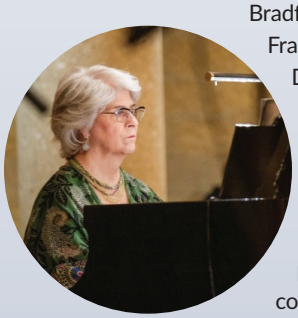
He feels a deep sense of the sacred in their music.

"I always start with what is called for in the liturgy: to closely align the music with the liturgy," Sparks said.

Sparks emphasized that the Church gives the faithful clear instruction on music in the liturgy.

"Gregorian chant is called for with pride of place in the *novus ordo*, with sacred polyphony, hymns and modern sacred music also given mention, and all come under the umbrella of active participation," he said. "As a music director, I try to revive and incorporate Gregorian Chant and polyphony (an early form of harmony) in proper balance with what our parish is used to, because those former styles belong to a huge treasure trove of music literature dating back to the first millennium, which we're still called to maintain to this day."

JANET BRADFORD



Bradford, who is a piano accompanist at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in West Des Moines, also took a circuitous route to her current vocation.

"I started at age five. My parents and Grandma recognized my musical talent so my dad, an engineer, installed a vacuum cleaner motor in an old pump organ my parents inherited so I could play it," Bradford said.

Bradford played organ for Mass every Sunday in junior and senior high school in her rural Illinois hometown.

"But when I went off to college to pursue a music degree, I met my now husband, who was Protestant, and played piano and organ at Protestant services for 15 years," Bradford said. Also during that time, Bradford pursued a double masters in Piano Performance and Pedagogy, and eventually landed at Drake

Getty Images/halmio

University as a staff accompanist for vocalists and instrumentalists, which honed her collaborative skills.

When Bradford and her family moved to Iowa she longed to be back in the Church. She, along with her husband and daughter, joined St. Francis of Assisi Parish, where she has been playing ever since.

"I started to understand the liturgy and music's role in glorifying God," Bradford said. "I don't just play the piano during Mass. I lead from the keys uniting the music with the words praying for the Holy Spirit to transform the souls in the congregation so they worship God in song."

TOM QUINER



Back in 1981, when Quiner converted to the Catholic faith, he started going to Mass at Holy Trinity Parish in Des Moines, which had a piano-driven schola with a contemporary drive.

"At that time, I was really attracted to the Holy Trinity music. I never, ever dreamed I would get involved in music ministry there," he said.

In 1994, friends asked him to play the piano at their wedding. He became a fill-in accompanist at Masses for almost 20 years, mentored by his good friends Bob and Janice Weast. When the Weasts could no longer play music, the parish asked Quiner to be the music liturgist for the 4:30 p.m. Saturday and 8:30 a.m. Sunday Masses.

Worship music is prayerful.

"It's the best form of prayer for me and I think for a lot of people. It's a real joy," he said.

It's also a method to bring about unity.

"I'm thanking God every time I'm up at Mass. It unites us. In a world where people are so divided, including within the Catholic Church and at parishes, we come together singing these beautiful hymns. That's a really powerful thing. Music is healing."

His pastor, Father Mark Neal, says Quiner continues Holy Trinity's long reputation for excellent music.

"Growing up, I used to go to a particular Mass when I knew Bob Weast would be playing because it was always so good," said Father Neal. "Tom has continued providing that level of excellence for Holy Trinity. His dedication to liturgical music plays a big part in the reverence and dignity of our liturgies here at Holy Trinity."

Quiner expanded his gift of music by composing about 10 faith-based musicals like "Pope of the People," and "Fire and Mercy," an operetta called "We Need a Savior" and two non-musicals focused on faith. He calls it evangelization through entertainment. His compositions have been performed in just about every Catholic church in the Des Moines metro area, which fostered deep friendships within the larger Catholic community.

Reflecting on how his music intersects with faith, he said, "I feel blessed that I've had this opportunity."

Photos of Dr. Marion Scott provided by Dr. Marion Scott, taken by Victoria Bettis, communications director at St. Augustin Catholic Church. Photos of Janet Bradford provided by Phillip Grothus, communications coordinator at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church.



MARK THOMAS, PH.D.

From an early age, Thomas liked church music.

"It's a wonderful form of prayer. I was drawn to the sound of the organ in particular. There's just something very powerful about it," he said.

As he grew in his faith, he saw an analogy in that the organ reflects the full range of God from the majestic sounds to the soft and gentle voice in the Book of Kings.

He grew up playing the piano and initially taught himself how to play the organ before studying it in college. At the University of Notre Dame he majored in music and philosophy, in which he holds a doctoral degree.

Now a philosophy professor at Central College in Pella, he spotted an opportunity to play the organ at St. Ambrose Cathedral.

"I really love being part of the music for the big liturgies like the ordinations, Christmas, and holy week at the cathedral. It's so beautiful," he said.

The cathedral's rector, Father Nivin Scaria, appreciates the gifts Thomas brings to the faith community.

"What I appreciate most is his inclusive spirit and love for the Church," said Father Scaria. "He has welcomed members of our refugee communities into special liturgical celebrations and helped begin the Children's Choir with Maggie Parker. Mark's ministry continues to enrich the faith and worship life of our cathedral community."

Anne Marie Cox contributed to this article.

YOUR PARISH MUSIC PROGRAM

Marion Scott, Ph.D., of St. Augustin Parish in Des Moines, encourages parishes to dedicate time, effort, and resources into their parish music program.

He offered this advice on how to improve a parish's music ministry:

- Enthusiasm is very contagious.
- Lead by faith.
- Be sincere. Meet people where they are. Encourage them.
- Build community. Celebrate birthdays. Have an end-of-the-year party.
- Don't be afraid to get people outside their comfort zone. Engage choir members in sight-singing. Try something different such as Gregorian chant or polyphony with organ.

There are also resources available for parishes in the Des Moines Diocese through the Des Moines chapter of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians, which has a Facebook page (facebook.com/npmdsm).

FEATURE STORY

PLAYING FOR GOD: A LIFETIME OF FAITH AND MUSIC

BY RYAN JOHNSON



Back row left to right: Tami, Theresa, Tonya
Front: Deacon Reinhold, Troy, Sandy Kunze

When Sandy Kunze first sat down at the organ bench at St. Brendan Parish in Leon, Iowa, in 1973, she had never played an organ before.

The pastor at the time, Father James Kiernan, needed someone to provide music for Mass, and he encouraged her to try. So, she did.

For the first month, Sandy played just one hymn — "Immaculate Mary" — at each Mass. Slowly, she learned how to navigate the instrument's pedals and rhythms.

"By the grace of God, my feet just started going," she said. "I just kind of taught myself."

That simple beginning led to 45 years of serving the Church through sacred music.

A CONVERSION STORY

Sandy's story is not simply about playing the organ. It's also a story of conversion, devotion to family life, and a lifelong commitment to the Catholic faith that she embraced as a young woman.

Raised Mennonite, Sandy said she did not originally envision becoming Catholic. After meeting the man who would become her husband, Reinhold "Reiny" Kunze, she was deeply moved by his commitment to the faith.

"When I met Reiny, he never missed a Sunday Mass," she said. "And he would never miss Mass on a holy day. That really attracted me to the Catholic Church."

Reiny grew up on a small farm in North Dakota, and his Catholic faith was rooted deeply in his upbringing. St. Mary's Catholic Church was just a mile from the Kunze farm.

"I heard the Angelus bells every day at noon," said Reiny. "We prayed every night as a family, and my parents sent my siblings and me to a Catholic high school in Valley City, a 20-mile drive."

Those early experiences, he said, created a lifelong foundation for his Catholic faith.

After attending Mass regularly with Reiny and taking instruction classes, Sandy entered the Catholic Church with encouragement from Father Jim Kiernan.

Faith quickly became the center of family life for Sandy and Reiny as they raised their four children in Leon. The couple prayed together with their children. They often knelt around a table with a candle lit in the center as they prayed the rosary.

"We always prayed as a family," she said. "We ate meals as a family. We always went to Mass as a family."

LIVING THE FAITH

Their Catholic faith shaped family priorities, even when it came at a cost.

Sandy remembers occasions when holy days conflicted with school athletics. Her children still attended Mass, even if it meant losing playing time in sports.

"One of the coaches told my daughter, 'You need to get your priorities in line,'" Sandy recalled. "And our daughter said, 'I do have my priorities in line. I'm going to church.'"

Today, Sandy and Reiny see the fruits of that witness in their children and grandchildren.

"We have 15 grandchildren, and they all practice the faith,"



> **“It was rewarding to play music to God. It was rewarding to share my talents with the people in my parish.”**
> **—Sandy Kunze, of St. Brendan Parish in Leon.**

she said. “We are very blessed.”

Throughout the decades, music remained one of the primary ways Sandy expressed her faith and served the parish community.

“It was rewarding to play music to God,” she said. “It was rewarding to share my talents with the people in my parish.”

For many years, she played nearly every weekend at Mass. Later, another musician joined the parish, allowing piano and organ music to complement one another during the Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter seasons.

“It was beautiful and peaceful,” she said. “Our parish was blessed to have that much music.”

She especially loved Marian hymns and still remembers “Immaculate Mary” fondly as the first song she played on the organ more than five decades ago.

To Sandy, sacred music has always been about more than melody.

“When you sing, you praise,” she said. “If you read the words as you’re singing them, they all have a story.”

Even after retiring from ministry, Sandy says she still misses serving at the organ. “When I hear music, it’s prayerful to me.”

Getty Images/Pikusisi-Studio





SUPPORT

The Catholic Mirror

A MINISTRY TO HELP YOU CULTIVATE CONNECTIONS IN CHRIST



The Catholic Mirror **magazine is designed to equip Catholics in the Diocese of Des Moines to grow as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ. It is more than a communications vehicle — it is a ministry that educates, informs, inspires, and reflects the profound faith of our community.**



The Catholic Mirror serves a unique purpose to help us teach and support the people of God in our Diocese. Please consider a gift to help this ministry flourish and fulfill its mission!

— Bishop William M. Joensen

SUPPORT THIS FAITH FILLED MINISTRY!

Continued on page 31

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BISHOP JOENSEN INVITES READERS TO SUPPORT *THE CATHOLIC MIRROR*

***The Catholic Mirror* is the primary communication tool used by the Diocese to share inspiration, information, and news with more than 30,000 registered Catholic households in central and southwest Iowa. Bishop William Joensen is asking parishioners to consider a donation to this crucial ministry so that every Catholic home can cultivate new connections in Christ!**

Q. *The Catholic Mirror* previously was a monthly diocesan newspaper and is now a bimonthly magazine. What prompted this change and how does it benefit the Diocese?

A. We launched our new, colorful, bimonthly magazine as a direct response to the feedback we heard from parishioners through listening sessions, surveys, and interviews resulting in a new diocesan mission and vision. You told us you want us to boldly and clearly share the teachings of the Catholic Church, and our new publication enables us to do that most effectively.



Q. How does *The Catholic Mirror* act as a ministry to help people cultivate new connections in Christ?

A. By sending *The Catholic Mirror* to every registered household, we are able to offer encouragement and education to Catholic families across our Diocese. This is in direct response to what our people asked us to do — help you better understand the Gospel and its place in your daily life. Your support for this ministry helps to assure that we are able to continue widespread distribution of our magazine, connecting even those who are not engaged with their parish in a special and profound way.

Q. How can parishioners stay informed about Church news and events?

A. In addition to the magazine, our team also produces *The Catholic Mirror* e-newsletter, a biweekly email to keep you in the know on local, national, and international news. You can sign up to receive it at dmdiocese.org/newsletter.

Q. Why are you asking parishioners to give their financial support to *The Catholic Mirror?*

A. By sending *The Catholic Mirror* to every registered household, we are demonstrating that this ministry is vital for all Catholic families. My hope is that people will help us offset the cost of this enormous effort and assure that every family has the opportunity to grow in faith and connect or reconnect with Christ and his Church. Any gift is appreciated!

YOU CAN MAKE A GIFT
by going to https://www.dmdiocese.org/giving/diocesan-special-collections/catholic-mirror



FEATURE STORY

BABY BOX INSTALLED IN NORWALK AND WINDSOR HEIGHTS

BY ANN PIERSON

A new resource for surrendering a baby is available to those in the Des Moines Metro.

A Safe Haven Baby Box, a non-contact surrender option, has been added to the Norwalk and Windsor Heights Fire Department. Safe Haven Baby Box is a nonprofit organization that promotes Safe Haven laws, or the legal right to surrender a child with "no shame, no blame, no names." They also provide resources to parents in crisis and offer their baby box technologies.

These boxes make up two out of three boxes in the metro area, with the third box located at MercyOne Des Moines Medical Center. St. John the Apostle in Norwalk and St. Augustin in Des Moines led fundraising for their community's projects.

The baby box in Norwalk was dedicated in November of last year after St. John the Apostle's Altar and Rosary Society and Knights of Columbus donated funds to start and upkeep the baby box. After a firefighter and fellow Knight proposed the idea, the parish community was eager to help, especially after the Norwalk community suffered from tragedies with infants.

"We're heavily invested in the concept of the box and what it takes to keep it going," Matt Elliott, Grand Knight of St. John the Apostle's Knights Council said. "This helps us commit to the community. The box is there for everyone."

The Altar and Rosary society used the funds from their craft auction and the Knights of Columbus held a pancake breakfast for the cause. Elliott said the Knights intend to hold a pancake breakfast annually for the upkeep of the box.

Shelli Sherer, the co-president of Altar and Rosary, appreciated the project's life-affirming message: God has a plan for that infant, and the baby box gives the caregivers of a child the opportunity to let that plan unfold.

"I'm just incredibly pleased we are part of this," Sherer said.

Mike Kulik, a Knight at St. Augustin, first learned of the baby box while reading an issue of *Columbia*, the monthly magazine of the Knights of Columbus.

"As Knights, we are concerned about the dignity of life," Kulik said. "And I thought, 'this can apply to all political spectrums. Who doesn't want a baby to live and have a safe place to grow up, to thrive?'"

When Kulik brought the idea to his Knights council, they responded with great enthusiasm for the project. The council



presented the idea to the Windsor Heights Fire Department who were eager to assist in the project.

"We are service providers to the community, and when we can implement something we think will be of valuable service [we try to do so]," Jim Mease, Fire Chief of the Windsor Heights Fire Department, said. "[The baby box] can pay huge dividends for both the mother and potential parents who want to adopt."

The Knights collected donations from the St. Augustin community, as well as individuals of Windsor Heights and Sacred Heart Parish in West Des Moines. The baby box will be available for use this summer.

To use the box, caregivers open the door on the box, which sends a preliminary alert to first responders. Then, parents place the child inside a bin and close the door, triggering a second alarm. The baby boxes are climate-controlled and rigorously tested, and first responders arrive within minutes to bring the child to medical providers.

Each baby box also has a resource packet for caregivers for after they surrender their child. The box, available 24/7, is completely anonymous.

"There was always this stigma of going to a fire station to surrender a baby, meeting someone face to face," Mease said. "[This] provides someone that anonymity."

The baby box is meant to be a resource to those in the larger community, and supporters of the box hope its presence spreads awareness.

"This is perfect for people who are concerned about how to preserve life," Kulik said. "Everyone wants to save the life of a baby."

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT SAFE HAVEN BABY BOX,
please visit https://www.shbb.org.

FEATURE STORY

A Place to Call Home: Habitat for Humanity Creates Pope Leo Village

BY CLARE HEINRICH



Bishop William Joensen blesses land where the Pope Leo Village will be built.
Photos by Benjamin Shane Evans

Since 1986, the Greater Des Moines Habitat for Humanity has served the central Iowa community. This year is also Habitat for Humanity's national anniversary, celebrating 50 years of service across the United States. As they launch into another 50 years, they already have big plans to address the needs in their local communities.

On Friday, April 24, Bishop William Joensen blessed the grounds of the Greater Des Moines Habitat for Humanity's future Pope Leo Village, a site for new homes in central Iowa. The Pope Leo Village is one of 20 communities across the United States, with six new homes soon to be established in Des Moines. An anonymous donor, inspired by Pope Leo XIV's "commitment to serving others, peace, and unity," provided the means to establish a two-story duplex for the River Bend area.

"This is a real opportunity for faith in action," said Lance Henning, CEO of Habitat for Humanity. "It is the root of Habitat's mission. We get to be Christ's hands and feet."

Habitat for Humanity works out of three key program areas. The first, and likely the most well-known, is building homes for low income families and individuals. They partner with volunteers, sponsors, and donors to build houses (literally) from the ground up. The second program area is home preservation. When community members are in need of aid to make their homes safe and secure, Habitat provides resources and personnel to take care of them. Thirdly, Habitat provides mortgage counseling. Individuals can meet with a counselor to determine their mortgage readiness, and then they continue to meet as they move forward in the process.

Habitat for Humanity addresses the high need for affordable housing across the nation, and particularly in central Iowa, with a spirit of compassion and fellowship. While Habitat is not the only solution, it strives to meet the growing need in local communities. Through the Pope Leo Village, they will serve those who need their aid the most, right here in Des Moines.



"This is a way for people to come together," said Henning. "We want to energize people to get involved."

In particular, Habitat is looking to youth and young adults to take the lead in this new endeavor and invite encounters with Christ through mission and service. Ministry is a community effort, inspiring others to look outside themselves. In order to do so, they are calling upon generous volunteers and donors to reach out a hand to those in need. Whether it is through time, financial resources, or shopping at the ReStore, every effort makes a huge difference.

"We are uplifting service and uplifting the Catholic community to get involved and engaged. It is exciting to be involved and be part of a great community opening up. We can't wait to see what comes next!"

Volunteer opportunities to construct the Pope Leo Village will open in October, with the goal to have spaces move-in ready by 2027.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE GREATER DES MOINES HABITAT FOR HUMANITY,
please visit https://gdmhabitat.org to volunteer, donate, or learn more about active services.

SPECIAL REPORT



Magnifica Humanitas

CNS photo/Lola Gomez

INSIDE POPE LEO'S ENCYCLICAL ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

From the moment of Pope Leo XIV's election, a papal encyclical on artificial intelligence (AI) has been imminent. The Holy Father has made no secret that his papal name, Leo, stems from his belief that the world needs a renewal of Catholic social teaching in light of this new "industrial revolution," much like the one his predecessor, Pope Leo XIII, faced when he wrote his landmark social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* ("Of New Things") in 1891.

On May 15, 2026 – exactly 135 years later – Pope Leo XIV signed *Magnifica Humanitas* ("Magnificent Humanity"), his first encyclical and the first major papal document on safeguarding the human person in the age of artificial intelligence. The pope released the 42,000-word encyclical on May 25.

HERE ARE FIVE THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW:

Pope Leo doesn't oppose AI, but ...

Artificial intelligence must be placed at the service of human flourishing, the Holy Father writes. As the *res novae* – or revolution – of our time, the possibilities and risks associated with AI, robotics and digitization are real and imminent, representing an "epochal change" for humanity. While the technology should neither be feared nor rejected, the questions it poses for humanity challenge the conscience, he writes: "We must ask God for the wisdom to interpret the great trends of our time, particularly technological advances." (*MH* 4)

Drawing upon biblical themes and Christian thinkers such as J.R.R. Tolkien, Dorothy Day and St. Augustine, as well as his papal predecessors, Pope Leo underscores the need to wisely discern and apply the Church's social teaching in every age.



Humanity is at an inflection point

As is custom, the encyclical's title – Latin for "Magnificent Humanity" – comes from the document's opening words. But it's also a fitting theme for Pope Leo's vision woven throughout. While artificial intelligence promises exponential leaps in efficiency and productivity, it must not come at the expense of the human person, who is uniquely made in God's image, the pope says. "Technology is not simply a tool. When it becomes the standard by which everything is judged, it begins to dictate what matters and what can be discarded, reducing creation to an object of exploitation and human beings to mere cogs in a system driven toward ever greater efficiency." (*MH* 92)

The pace of technological advancement places humanity at a crossroads, Pope Leo writes. Comparing the moment to the biblical Tower of Babel, which humans constructed as a way to sideline God, Leo challenges today's leaders to avoid "Babel syndrome," which he describes as "the idolatry of profit that sacrifices the weak" (*MH* 10) and uses people as means to be optimized, instead of divinely created ends. "The primary choice is not between a 'yes' or 'no' to technology, but rather between constructing Babel or rebuilding Jerusalem; between a power that claims to dominate the heavens and a people who work together in the presence of God to rebuild the walls of fraternal coexistence." (*MH* 9)

Like all things, human dignity comes first


CNS photo/Vatican Media

As AI rapidly advances into nearly all corners of society, it's critical for leaders, governments, families and industries to consider its impact on human dignity, flourishing and freedom, the pope writes – even if it means slowing down. The specter of widespread unemployment – which would be a "true social calamity" – is even more insidious when "innovation is often pursued solely for reducing costs and increasing profits," he writes (*MH* 151).

Magnifica Humanitas discusses the impact of AI and technology on education, parenting, psychological wellbeing, communication, imagination, economic security, the environment and more. It contains warnings about digital addiction and "new forms of slavery," including sexual exploitation and human trafficking – and even a historic apology for the Church's role in tolerating forms of slavery in the past. The word "dignity" appears in the document 105 times: "If technology promises emancipation, yet produces new forms of global subordination, it stands in contradiction to the fundamental principle of human dignity." (*MH* 173)

Prudence and responsibility go a long way

Regarding AI, Pope Leo writes that "three aspects in particular deserve careful consideration: the ease with which results are obtained, the impression of objectivity and the simulation of human communication." (*MH* 100)

- While AI can make complex tasks vastly simpler, it risks weakening human creativity and judgment – and even diluting objective truth – if excessively relied upon, the document states.
- While AI systems might seem objective, it's easy to "overlook the fact that they reflect the cultural assumptions of those who designed and trained them." (*MH* 100) Artificial intelligence cannot be considered "morally neutral," the pope adds, when "that morality is determined by a few." (*MH* 107)
- AI also poses a special risk to the vulnerable – particularly young and emotionally distressed individuals – who, in engaging with chatbots in simulated conversations, "may gradually lose the very desire to form genuine human connections." (*MH* 100)

For these reasons, it's incumbent upon all who develop, regulate and use the technology to set limits, act with prudence, and safeguard the common good, he writes.

AI and modern warfare

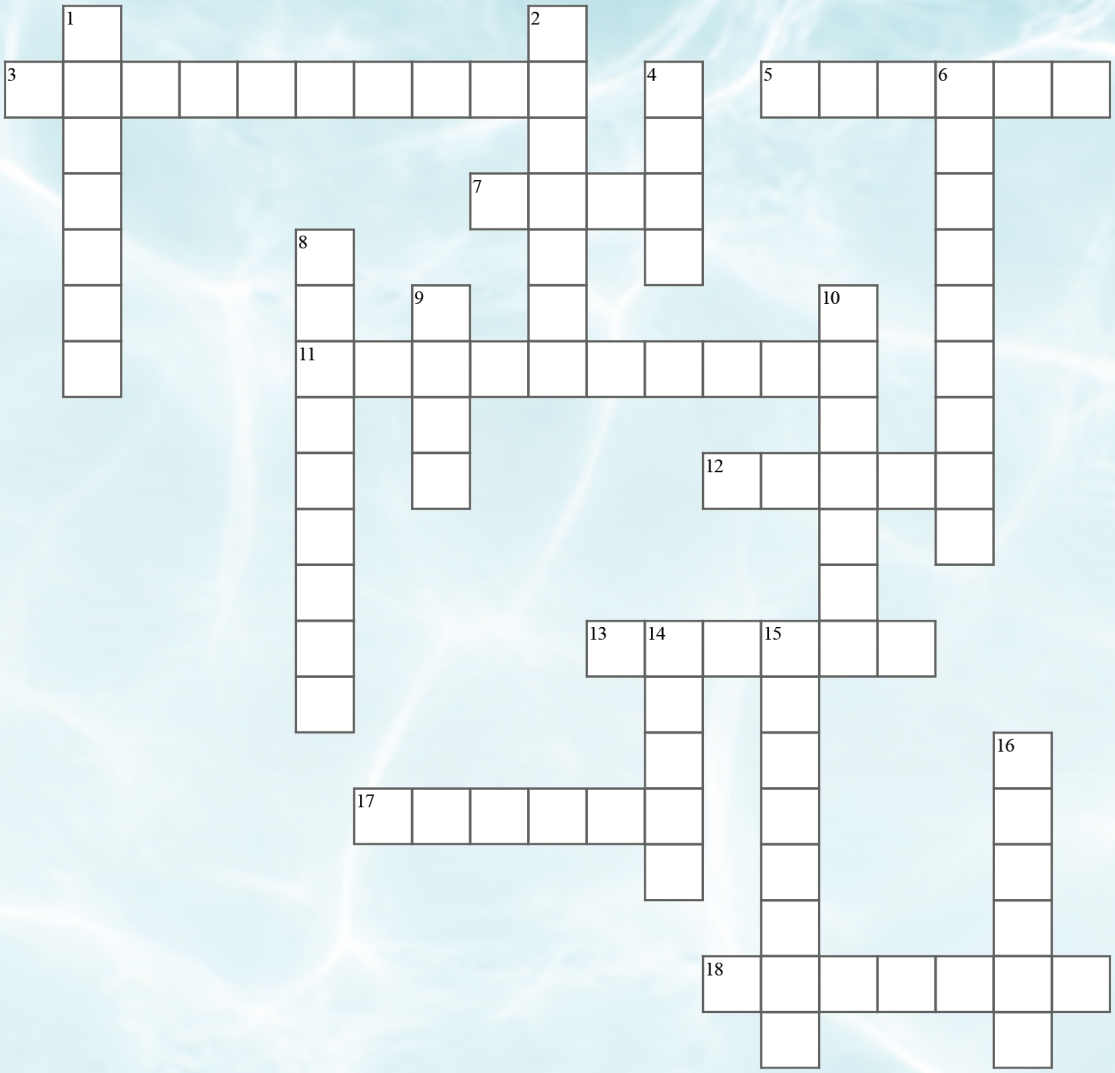


MICHAEL STECHSCHULTE
is the director of digital media for the Archdiocese of Detroit and editor-in-chief of its digital publication, *Detroit Catholic*.

Pope Leo devotes the entire fifth chapter of *Magnifica Humanitas* to the clash between "the culture of power and the civilization of love," which reaches a crescendo when technology enables new and dangerous forms of warfare. Drones, autonomous weapons and AI-powered weaponry can reduce moral judgment to "calculation," he writes, blurring the human consequences of war and "transforming defense into threat prediction and thus reducing victims to data." (*MH* 198)

The deadly efficiency with which machines can kill – and the temptation to use them to amass control – has given way to a "culture of power" in which moral judgment is replaced by strategic expediency, the pope writes. For this reason, apart from strict self-defense, he writes that the "'just war' theory, which has all too often been used to justify any kind of war, is now outdated" (*MH* 192); "no algorithm can make war morally acceptable." (*MH* 198)

In contrast, Pope Leo calls on Christians to "build the civilization of love," emulating Christ and the saints in promoting peace through dialogue, justice and love. "The civilization of love will not arise from a single or spectacular gesture, but from the sum total of small and steadfast acts of fidelity that serve as a bulwark against dehumanization." (*MH* 213)



ACROSS

3. First Native American to be declared a Saint
5. One of two names for Moses father-in-law
7. Biblical sign of permanence, fidelity, value, and purification
11. The guiding hand of the Divine
12. These plants did not receive a favorable response from Jesus
13. Great or small, a break in communion affects us all
17. The form of prayer that most directly delights in God as God
18. A priest, _____, king

DOWN

1. When Mozart "faced the music," he left this piece unfinished
2. Literally, "my messenger," he wrote the last book in the Old Testament
4. No mere "babe", she was greatgrandmother to King David
6. A burnt offering
8. Fishing village on the Sea of Galilee
9. Peter was the ____ upon which Jesus would build His Church
10. This book started it all
14. "I believe"
15. Substituting creature for creator
16. Philadelphiaborn saint who worked with African and Native Americans

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

Answers on page 31

Getty Images/Pakin Songmor

Let's Get Psyched... Ever Feel Stuck? A Reflection on the Glorious Mysteries

BY DEACON RANDY KIEL



While on vacation, I become a rock-hound, a sort of amateur geologist. Not only are rocks the most inexpensive souvenir, they also represent the memories and places from where our family has traveled. For me, collecting rocks is a form of remaining connected. I also just think rocks are really cool.

One of the coolest and heaviest rocks I own is hematite. It weighs about three times as much as a basic quartz. But the heaviest rock discovered is not from earth; it is from a meteorite. It weighs up to three times more than even hematite because of its dense iron composition.

Now, just as an FYI, I'm not really that much of a rock-geek-guy as it may sound, but I am far more of a theology-type-geek-guy. When putting the two topics of rocks and theology together, I see abundant evidence of God's existence.

"If God is so powerful, then can he make a rock so heavy that he can't pick up?"

For years, we have heard this feeble attempt to invalidate the existence of God. God can neither be proven nor disproven. He is a matter of faith with a specific set of characteristics. God cannot act outside of his character. He is neither a muscle man nor a super-hero. He is divinity; he is not human strength.

But this silly question does come close to describing something about God, and that is his glory. The word "glory" comes from an old word that describes an immense weight so heavy that it emits light. This word represented the core of a person's reputation. This word eventually made its way to become the biblical Hebrew word for glory. It refers to God as the overwhelming, tangible presence and majesty of the divine. What God's character emits is a weight of radiance so tangibly heavy that its brilliance is called pure glory.

Within the study of the word "glory," we discover that God's power and beauty transcend all human words to describe the core of who God is. He is pure glory.

The five Glorious Mysteries of the rosary allow us a glimpse into this glory. In the resurrection, we see his glory in power over death. Jesus was not stuck in a grave. In his ascension, his glory is consumed in a mighty cloud enrapturing him to the heavens. He was not stuck on this earth. The descending of the Holy Spirit is the glory of a promise fulfilled. We are never stuck without him. And in the final two mysteries, Mary's assumption and coronation, God's mother was not stuck in a realm of abandonment by the Father. He took care of his mother.

We understandably give praise to people for a job well done as well as give honor to heroes, whether fallen or alive.

But it is only to God that we give glory. Glory is who he is! For whatever reasons we may feel stuck, may we allow these Glorious Mysteries to consume our hearts and minds. With God, there is always a way through.

"May all glory, honor, and praise be yours, Almighty Father, forever and ever."



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THEOLOGY 101



An Inviting Church: The Mirror of Charity

BY JOHN HUYNH, D.MIN.

We often think of an encounter with Christ as something personal and interior: prayer, the sacraments, silence before the Lord, or a moment of grace throughout the day. These are essential to the Christian life. Yet, the Gospel also teaches that Christ is encountered in and through our relationships with others. The Lord who meets us in prayer also meets us in the neighbor, the stranger, the one searching, and the person whose burdens remain unseen.

Karl Rahner once reflected that God sends us out from the comfort of being alone with him into the lives of our brothers and sisters. Faith, then, cannot remain enclosed within private devotion. Love of God and love of neighbor belong together since the Church is a communion sent into the world so that others may come to know Christ through the witness of her members.

Jesus gives this command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Mt 22:39) In those words, he places before us a kind of mirror. We know, in nearly every circumstance, how we wish to be treated—with patience, empathy, and mercy. It's also important to notice what Jesus does not say. He does not tell us to treat others as they treat us. That would only mirror the logic of retaliation, a form of "an eye for an eye." Instead, he asks us to live according to a deeper measure: intentionality and charity.

This commandment sheds light on what Christian love truly is. We often think charity means charitable works: feeding the hungry, assisting the poor, visiting the sick. These works are indispensable. Yet, before beneficence there must be benevolence; before doing good there must be the willing of another's good. It is entirely possible to be outwardly generous for reasons that fall short of love. For this reason, the Church insists that charity must be sincere, rooted in a heart genuinely turned toward the good of another.

At the same time, sincere love must not become an excuse for inaction. The one who sees a person in need cannot be content with good intentions alone. Love of neighbor seeks both the right heart and the concrete deed. Thus, interior charity and outward service belong together.

For me, this has practical implications for parish life. When we speak of being an inviting Church, we should mean more than friendliness, though friendliness is necessary. An inviting Church means becoming a people who recognize that every person who comes to worship is someone loved by God and worthy of genuine attention. Some arrive with strong faith. Others come uncertain, wounded, skeptical, or carrying long absences from the Church. Some may not yet know why they came at all.

To receive such persons well requires more than efficiency or outward warmth. It requires the kind of attentiveness that sees another person as a beloved child of God. More importantly, we should also realize that we do not bring God to people as though he were absent from their lives. More often, we discover that God has preceded us, and we soon realize there are times when Christ comes to us quietly, clothed in the ordinary presence of another human being on a Sunday morning.



JOHN HUYNH, D.MIN.
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Getty Image/benkrs

A Rightly Ordered Heart: How We Flourish in Prayer

BY MONICA PUGH



On my desk in my office sits a small piece of art in clear sight. I first experienced this image in a chapel at the University of Mary. It is the only breathtaking image I have ever seen that makes me feel the depth of God's love and mercy with every glance. It depicts Mary Magdalene in front of the tomb on her knees gazing up into the face of the risen Christ. He has her chin cupped gently in his hand as he gazes back.

The love of Christ and his mercy balanced by her humility can be felt by anyone pondering the image. It portrays the deep love given to us from God and what we give back when we simply show up and enter into prayer.

Prayer flourishes in a heart that is rightly ordered. But how do we rightly order our hearts? It begins in our homes, the domestic church.

Mary Magdalene was the first to announce Christ's resurrection. In the domestic church, parents are the first to announce the gospel to their children. Mary Magdalene's life was restored as she received grace and mercy. In our domestic church families, we offer graces and mercy to one another to restore relationships. Mary Magdalene knelt at the foot of the cross through Jesus' suffering. In the domestic church, families bond together as they experience suffering in life.

It is in the domestic church where our hearts learn to be rightly ordered through loving God, loving others, being open to forgiveness, learning to have interior freedom from sin, and surrendering to God's will in prayer. Our domestic church is the first place where parents model God's love, children learn how to rightly order their hearts by example, and as a family they all learn to pray.

At the point in Mary Magdalene's life depicted in the art, her heart was rightly ordered. She encountered the healing mercy and forgiveness of Jesus, became a disciple of Christ, and witnessed his death from the foot of the cross. Her life was transformed through Christ and his love. Every day, parents have the opportunity to model this path as they cup their children's chin gently with their hand, look into their eyes, and express their love. Jesus did not love Mary Magdalene because of her transformation, but she was able to know his love because of her transformation and forgiveness through God's mercy.

When a home is centered on Christ, everyone learns to seek a rightly ordered heart. With a rightly ordered heart, the desire for regular prayer becomes a sacred rhythm, and our lives, no matter the trials, sufferings, or mistakes, rests under God's loving heartbeat.

St. Mary Magdalene's feast day is July 22 every year. If you have not experienced God's love through daily prayer, perhaps this beautiful saint who walked with Christ before and after his death and resurrection might be your example to start. Pray for her intercession to help you rightly order your heart and simply begin or begin again. May you feel God's hand gently touching your chin expressing his love and simply gaze back in prayer.



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

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SPIRITUAL FITNESS

Inviting Each Other to Our Better Selves



BY RON ROLHEISER

I grew up in a rural area where most everyone was either a first- or second-generation immigrant. Most of us were just above the poverty line, struggling economically and struggling to speak English properly. We were also struggling to access higher education, both because a lot of my peers had to end their schooling after the eighth grade to help support the family and because the idea of university education was not yet part of most families' ethos.

In our community there was one family for which this wasn't true. They were comfortable economically and a number of them had gone on to higher education and were now professionals in different fields. They were a privileged family.

But they wore it well. There was no snobbishness, flaunting, or superiority complex. The opposite. They used their gifts to try to help the community. One of their sons became a teacher and taught in one of the local schools, and for a number of years the family set up a curling rink every winter for the community. They were both admired and respected.

One day one of their sons was sitting with a group of young men who were sharing a beer, sharing stories, and enjoying some healthy banter, when the son of this much respected family made a blatantly racist remark. There was an awkward silence. Then one of the men, in a gentle voice, said this to him: "You know, it surprises me that you would say something like that. Your family is so classy. We all look up to you. This doesn't sound like you."

The man's reaction was immediate and contrite: "You're right. I'm sorry. I don't know why I say things like that. That was stupid."

I can imagine a very different reaction had he been challenged with hard words like: "*You're a racist! How can you say something like that!*"

When we challenge each other in harsh words, the effect often serves to make us more defensive and freezes us in our view. We are being scolded, rebuked, shamed, and that can work just as easily to re-entrench as to persuade. It also serves to harden the space between us rather than invite us to what's best and highest in ourselves.

We need to invite and challenge each other to what's best and higher inside us.

And what is best and higher inside us?

Some of our early Christian writers (the Church Fathers) suggested that each of us has a double personality and heart. In each of us, they submit, there is a big, generous, noble, altruistic heart. But, inside each of us there is also a wounded, petty, and selfish heart, and at any given time, we can be operating out of one heart or the other. We can be big-hearted and we can be petty, and this can change from one hour to the next depending on what's meeting us in life.

Here's an example: Imagine you wake up some morning feeling altruistic and noble of heart. At that moment, you have the mind and heart of Jesus. In that holy frame of mind, you go to work and there someone is cold and sarcastic with you. In one minute, everything can switch; you no longer have the mind and heart of Jesus, nor the mind and heart of what's best in you. The wounded petty heart in you trumps the big heart, warmth and understanding leave you, and you now feel cold and bitter.

Now imagine this in reverse: You wake up some morning feeling paranoid, misunderstood, and nursing old wounds. At that moment you don't have the mind and heart of Jesus, nor are you attuned to what's better and higher in your own mind and heart. You go to work in that unholy state and there, unexpectedly, some co-worker greets you warmly and shares how much she appreciates your work and your friendship. In one minute, the noble mind in you surpasses the petty mind and all that's best and generous in you rises to the surface. You want to be a better person. You flip from bitterness to graciousness in one minute.

We live in a polarized world today where so many issues bitterly divide us and invite us not to what's noble and best in us, but rather to what's wounded, paranoid, and defensive. We need a new tone in our discourse, one of invitation and respect, one that recognizes what's noble and big-hearted in the other and then challenges the other to own what's best in him or her.

Instead of name-calling and assaulting each other with slogans, we need to say to each other: "*You know, it surprises me that you would say something like that. You're so classy! We all look up to you. This doesn't sound like you.*"

That kind of invitation can help thaw some of the coldness that for all kinds of reasons perennially besets the human heart.



OBLATE FATHER RON ROLHEISER
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Continued from page 4-5

enjoy peace and happiness; may broken relationships be reconciled, injustices repaired, and the wounds of our land be healed."

Among the virtues essential for America to realize its founding promise and enable all persons to flourish in freedom and faith is the virtue exhibited in the relationship of Adams and Jefferson, the virtue of civic and spiritual friendship that overcomes all rivalry, pride, and dissent. Providentially, in his recently released encyclical Magnifica Humanitas (MH), Pope Leo XIV sets forth the grandeur of humanity as intended by God in light of the rising influence of AI, artificial intelligence. He calls us to redouble our sense of solidarity and concern for real persons who live alongside us. The Pope encourages us:

"I invite everyone to contemplate, in the face of the Son of God, the grandeur of humanity, that shines a light also on the era of AI. In Christ, we are called to cooperate in the work of creation, rather than be disinterested observers of technological processes that limit our freedom and responsibility. The dignity inscribed in each of us by the Holy Spirit can also be seen in our capacity to reflect critically, choose and love freely, and form authentic relationships" (Leo, MH n. 233). "What saves humanity is not enhanced self-sufficiency, but a relationship that liberates, a communion that transforms…. A person's future is not calculable, but depends on one's freedom — elevated by the inexhaustible grace of God — and on the relationships cultivated" (MH n. 128). Isn't that already our mission right here in the Diocese of Des Moines, to cultivate connections in Christ?

I strongly encourage you to explore Pope Leo's message engaging the intersection of human identity and artificial intelligence, perhaps making it part of your summer spiritual reading: https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/encyclicals/documents/20260515-magnifica-humanitas.html. Use this QR code to read the document.

In the summer-long celebrations connected with our nation's 250th anniversary of its founding, no doubt there will be plenty of choruses of "God Bless America" sung at ballparks, historic sites, parades, and churches. For me, I will find particular delight and hope for this Republic in singing these stanzas from "America the Beautiful:"

America, America, God mend thine every flaw, Confirm thy soul in self-control, thy liberty in law. America, America, May God thy gold refine, Till all success, be nobleness, And ev'ry gain divine.

Getty Image/Simpelmages

los párrocos y parroquias de la Diócesis de Des Moines a hacerlo con ustedes, el pueblo de Dios. En el espíritu de San Juan Pablo II y el Papa Francisco reconocemos, "En unión con Cristo, a pesar de las ruinas que hemos dejado en este mundo por nuestros pecados, estamos llamados a construir una nueva civilización de amor." "A pesar de la devastación creado por el maligno, el corazón de Cristo desea que cooperemos con él para restaurar la bondad y la belleza de nuestro mundo" (Francisco mencionando a Juan Pablo II, *Dilexit nos*, no. 182).

Nuestra oración de consagración misma es una "**Declaración de Interdependencia**" espiritual, donde damos gracias a Dios por los abundantes dones que ha dado a esta nación, pero también imploramos humildemente a Dios, "Que nuestros corazones se unan al tuyo, para que nuestras familias y comunidades gocen de paz y felicidad; que las relaciones dañadas se reconcilien, las injusticias se reparen y las heridas de nuestra tierra se sanen."

Entre las virtudes esenciales para que los Estados Unidos consigan su promesa fundacional de que todas las personas puedan prosperar en libertad y en fe es la virtud que demuestra la relación entre Adams y Jefferson, la virtud de la amistad civil y espiritual que se sobrepone a toda rivalidad, orgullo y disentimiento. De forma providencial, en su encíclica recién publicada *Magnifica humanitas* (MH), el Papa León XIV pone por delante la grandeza de la humanidad como lo dispone Dios de frente a la creciente influencia de la IA, inteligencia artificial. Él nos llama a redoblar nuestro sentido de solidaridad y preocupación por personas reales que viven a nuestro alrededor. El Papa nos exhorta:

"Invito a contemplar en el rostro del Hijo una *magnífica humanidad* que también ilumina la época de la IA. En Cristo comprendemos que el hombre está llamado a ser colaborador en la obra de la creación, y no espectador resignado ante los procesos tecnológicos que limitan su libertad y su responsabilidad. La dignidad que el Espíritu Santo esculpe en cada uno de nosotros se reconoce también en la capacidad de reflexionar críticamente, de elegir y amar gratuitamente, y de establecer relaciones auténticas" (Leo, MH no. 233). "Lo que salva lo humano no es la autosuficiencia potenciada, sino una relación que libera, una comunión que transforma.... El futuro de una persona no es calculable, sino que está confiado a su libertad —elevada por la inagotable gracia divina— y a las relaciones que cultiva" (MH n. 128). ¿No es acaso ya esa nuestra misión aquí en la Diócesis de Des Moines: "cultivar conexiones en Cristo"?

Les exhorto vigorosamente a que exploren el mensaje del Papa León tratando sobre la intersección de la identidad humana y la inteligencia artificial—tal vez haciéndolo parte de sus lecturas espirituales de este verano: https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/es/encyclicals/documents/20260515-magnifica-humanitas.html. Utilice este código QR para leer el documento.

En las celebraciones veraniegas relacionados con el 250 aniversario de la fundación de nuestra nación, no cabe duda que habrá numerosos coros de "Dios Bendiga a América" que se canta en los estadios, en los lugares históricos, desfiles e iglesias. Para mí, encuentro un gusto y esperanza particular por esta República cantando estas estrofas de "América la Hermosa":

"América, América, que Dios remedie todos tus defectos; Confirma tu alma en autocontrol, tu libertad en la ley." "América, América, que Dios refine tu oro, hasta que todo éxito, sea nobleza, y toda ganancia divina."

CULTURE

Thankful for the bounty

"O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties,
Above the fruited plain!
America! America!
God shed his grace on thee…"

—"America the Beautiful"

Katharine Lee Bates wrote these words in 1893 after visiting Pikes Peak in Colorado, inspired by the breathtaking mountain vistas and expansive fields she saw before her. Her references to the "amber waves of grain" and "fruited plain" are poetic homages to the nation's rich agricultural bounty. This time of year, even the most casual backyard gardeners are often in awe at the abundance of tomatoes, zucchini, and cucumbers the earth provides. With purple-stained fingers and a couple of buckets filled to the brim with blueberries at my favorite pick-your-own spot, I'm also overflowing with gratitude for the land's generous yield!

It's not a coincidence, perhaps, that so many of our patriotic songs were written about the land. For thousands of years, Native Americans cultivated and celebrated this land's fruitfulness, receiving the gifts of mother earth with reverence. St. Kateri Tekakwitha, the first Native American saint whose feast we celebrate on July 14, also bore witness to a deep love for and care for the land in her own life. She often spent time praying in the woods, and fashioned crosses out of simple sticks. Her faith and her love of nature were inseparably intertwined. For this reason, she has been given the designation of patron of ecology, indigenous peoples and care for creation.

As we celebrate our nation's 250th birthday, we also have a moment to consider and give thanks for the great abundance provided by our beautiful homeland. This month's recipe features several ingredients that are indigenous to the United States and which are staples in a number of Native American cuisines: blueberries (found across North America), wild rice (known in Ojibwe as *manoomin*), and corn. As you savor this tasty salad (a perfect side for Fourth of July picnics), offer up your own poetic words of thanksgiving for this beautiful land we are blessed to call home. ✝



St. Kateri Tekakwitha

of the land



Corn Blueberry Wild Rice Salad

INGREDIENTS

- 6 ears sweet corn, husked (or 1½ cup frozen corn)
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and finely chopped
- ¼ cup finely chopped red onion
- 1 small cucumber, finely diced
- 1 cup fresh blueberries
- 1 cup cooked, cooled wild rice (or wild rice blend)
- ¼ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup lime juice
- 2 TBSP honey or maple syrup
- ½ tsp ground cumin
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ cup fresh cilantro, chopped

INSTRUCTIONS

- In a large pot, bring salted water to boil. Add the ears of corn. Blanch 3 min., and then dunk the ears into ice water to stop cooking and preserve crunch. Drain and cut the corn from cobs.
- In a serving bowl, combine the corn, pepper, onion, cucumber, blueberries, and rice.
- In a screw-top jar, make the dressing by combining the lime juice, oil, honey, cumin, and ½ tsp salt. Cover and shake well to combine.
- Add the dressing to the salad and mix well.
- Cover the salad and refrigerate for one hour minimum. The flavor is best when it is chilled overnight or up to 24 hours. Add the cilantro just before serving.

BY RACHEL ESPINOZA,
SENIOR EDITOR, FAITH CATHOLIC
PHOTOGRAPHY AND STYLING BY
SHANE EDWARD PHOTOGRAPHY

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Donations can be sent to:
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Or go to our website to give online at:
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CALENDAR

JULY 17-18
DES MOINES

Ad Astra (meaning "to the stars") Catholic Youth Conference for high school students, presented by Serva Fidem, will be at Grand View University in Des Moines. Get more information and tickets at dmdiocese.org/adastra.

JULY 26
WAUKEE

In an effort to create a welcome and inclusive environment, there is a sensory-friendly Mass on the fourth Sunday of the month at 5 p.m. at St. Boniface Parish in Waukee. The Mass will have lower lights and instrumental music, the availability of picture schedules and other accommodations will be available.

AUGUST 15
EARLING

Join us for 9 a.m. Mass followed by a diocesan Eucharistic procession, adoration, and Benediction at St. Joseph Church in Earling.

AUGUST 27
DES MOINES

Mary's Meals, an international children's feeding program, will hold its 10th annual concert at Jasper Winery from 5:30-8:30 p.m. Funds raised will go to Mary's Meals, which is currently feeding more than 3 million children in 16 of the poorest countries in the world. The life-changing meals they provide make it possible for hungry children to go to school.

SEPTEMBER 20
DES MOINES

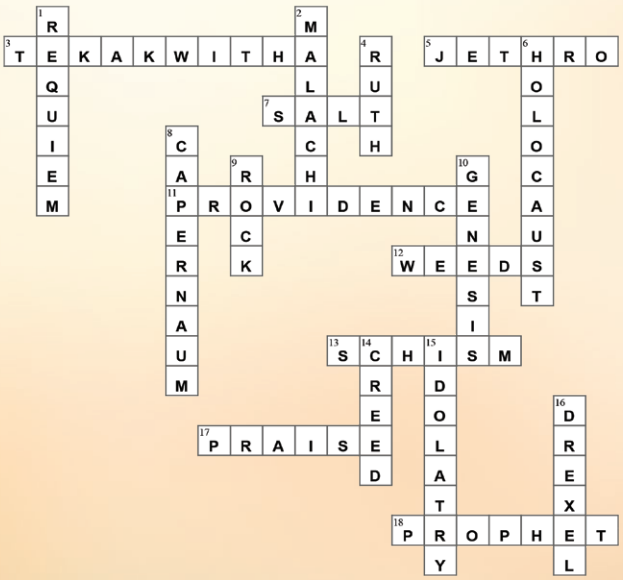
St. Catherine of Siena Dialogue Series continues at 2 p.m. at Sheslow Auditorium at Drake University with Diana Butler Bass, Ph.D., an award-winning author, historian, speaker, and theologian known for her insightful commentary on religion, spirituality, and culture. Her most recent book, *A Beautiful Year* was published in November 2025. Her address will focus on the liturgical year as a spiritual guide of resistance and wisdom in difficult times.

SEPTEMBER 26-27
DES MOINES

Christ Our Life Catholic Conference will be at the Casey Center. Be part of faith sharing, faith building, and praise featuring world-renowned speakers focused on bringing Catholics together. Learn more and get tickets at christourlifeiowa.com.

RESPECT LIFE MASS AND PRAYER SERVICE

OCTOBER 18
St. John Church in Adel is hosting a Respect Life Mass at 11 a.m. followed by a prayer service in the parish's Memorial Garden for the Unborn. All are invited to the dedication and placement of memorial stones in remembrance of unborn children and infants lost too soon. Learn more at stjohnsadel.org/memorial-garden-for-the-unborn.



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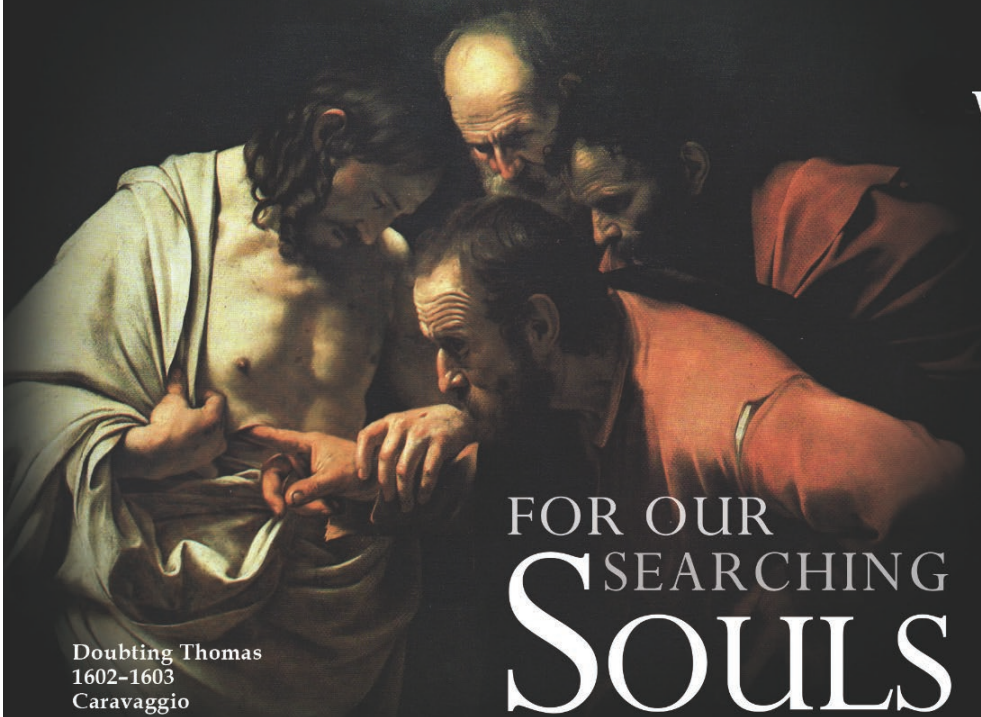
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