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The Catholic Mirror

MAY/JUNE 2026
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INSIDE

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Hope and healing for divorced Catholics

Shepherd's Call shares love & joy of faith

Plus: Deacon Stan Asjes to be ordained a priest

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR



With the Easter season comes all sorts of family celebrations centered around faith like weddings, baptisms, and First Holy Communions. There are other family-centered celebrations, too, like graduations and Mother's Day. Perhaps it's apropos, then, that our magazine's focus this issue is on the family.

In these pages, you'll find stories about family faith formation initiatives in our parishes. We have stories on efforts to welcome family and loved ones to church. We know there are struggles in families, and so we bring you information on the spread of a program that offers hope and healing to those who've experienced divorce. And, we have tips for families that are making end-of-life plans.

At every stage of life, the Catholic Church can accompany you. Your faith community walks with you through the joys and challenges of life, always knowing that God is our constant companion.

Peace,
Anne Marie Cox

INSIDE



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Another sort of blue oval

The last weekend in April in central Iowa is customarily Drake Relays weekend, where track-and-field fans converge on the blue oval at Drake Stadium to witness high school, university and world-class professional athletes compete in their specialties. While the weather is always a precarious proposition, records are sure to be broken, even in a non-Olympic year, and the winners go home with the signature pennant marking their champion status.

I never competed in the Drake Relays. In high school, I had excellent hurdling form but mediocre footspeed, and more than once, as fatigue set in toward the end of the 400-meter hurdle race and my steps shortened, I could not switch lead legs and stumbled over the last hurdle and fell.

As April transitions into May, our performances as disciples of the Risen Lord quicken as we draw inspiration from a "teammate" in the life of grace who is not competing against us but interceding always for us. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is entrusted to the Apostle John on Calvary as his spiritual mother and our mother as well. A few days after this year's Drake Relays, April 28, is the memorial of St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, who popularized True Devotion to Mary: With Preparation for Total Consecration. Many of the faithful in our Diocese will make a Marian consecration in the month of Mary, along with more intent praying of the mysteries of the rosary. I heartily commend both spiritual practices to you.

It is not primarily because both of my two main rosaries have navy blue beads, but because of Mary's perfect innocence and proximity to her Divine Son that I might refer to it as another sort of "blue oval." Starting the joy-filled mysteries of Jesus' conception, birth and early life lifts our spirits and propels us in our own childlike lane of life. The Sorrowful Mysteries, centered on Christ's Passion, including his stumbles and falls as he bears his cross, become familiar to us through the setbacks and sins that beset us. Our trajectory toward death must be rerouted or — better — enfolded by the entire Paschal Mystery, where sorrow yields to glory in the wake of Jesus's Resurrection and the Pentecost sending of the Holy Spirit.

The monastic Church Father St. Basil describes the mysteries of the Easter initiation sacraments by referring — with a nod to St. Paul the Apostle — to the sport of track and field: "We imitate Christ's death by being buried with him in baptism." "We have to begin a new life, and we cannot do so until our previous life has been brought to an end. When runners reach the turning point on a racecourse, they have to pause briefly before they can go back in the opposite direction. So also when we wish to reverse the direction of our lives there must be a pause, or a death, to mark the end of one life and the beginning of another."

Praying the rosary accustoms us to the process of dying and rising spiritually so that it is not a jarring, whiplash-inducing affair, even as it deepens our attentiveness, our stamina, our agility to turn quickly to God and abide with his Son and Mother. St. Louis-Marie challenges us, "To pray well, it is not enough to give expression to our petitions by means of that most excellent of all prayers, the rosary, but we must also pray with real concentration for God listens more to the voice of the heart than that of the mouth." "How can we expect him to be pleased if, while in the presence of his tremendous majesty, we give in to distractions just as children run after butterflies?"

Yet alas, how often I succumb to distractions while praying the rosary as I drive across our Diocese, work out at the gym, walk to an appointment or meeting or wait in the confessional for the next penitent! Mary, Mother of God, implore your Son's mercy on my behalf, praying for this weak soul so that when I falter, you who are full of grace will draw me upright and link me ever more securely to the mysteries initiated in your Son's Incarnation.

Allow me and all those for whom I pray to experience what St. John Paul II, himself a devotee of St. Louis-Marie's motto, "totus tuus," as he gave himself totally each day to Jesus and Mary, experienced: the true encounter of friendship that the rosary cultivates. As Father Peter John Cameron, OP elaborates, "As in the case of all true friendships, through the rosary we are enabled 'to share Christ's deepest feelings' … The concrete intimacy we experience through the rosary impels us to enter into its 'inner journey' that brings us into 'living contact with the mystery of Christ and Blessed Mother.'"

Most of us will never win a Drake Relays first-place pennant. But whether we are in a care center, driving in traffic, in our favorite chair or kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament in adoration, all of us have access to a blue oval by which our spiritual journey is hardly going in circles. As we ask Mary to "'pray for us now and at the hour of our death,' she is the channel of grace enabling us to trust that her Son remains well disposed to us." His love "is always present, powerful, drawing us forward," even as he does not take away our weakness. For just as for Mary, his grace is sufficient for us.



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

Otro Tipo de Óvalo Azul

El último fin de semana de abril en el centro de Iowa es el fin de semana tradicional de los Drake Relays, en donde los fanáticos del atletismo se reúnen en el óvalo azul de Estadio de Drake para presenciar la competencia de atletas de preparatoria, universitarios y profesionales de clase mundial en sus respectivas especialidades. Aunque el clima es siempre una proposición precaria, es una garantía que se romperán récords, incluso en años no-olímpicos, y los ganadores regresan a casa con el galardón característico que marca su condición de campeones.

Yo nunca competí en los Drake Relays. En la preparatoria tenía una excelente forma en los obstáculos pero una velocidad mediocre en mis pies, y no era raro que conforme el cansancio me dominaba hacia el final de la carrera de 400 metros y mis pasos se acortaban, no podía cambiar la pierna predominante y estaba en riesgo de tropezar y caer en el último obstáculo.

Conforme los fines de abril se adentran hacia mayo, nuestros esfuerzos y desempeños como discípulos del Señor Resucitado se aceleran conforme nos inspiramos en un "compañero de equipo" en la vida de gracia que no está compitiendo contra nosotros, sino que siempre intercede por nosotros. María, la Madre de Jesús, se confía al Apóstol Juan en el Calvario como su madre espiritual y también como nuestra madre. Algunos días después de los Drake Relays de este año, el 28 de abril, es el memorial de San Luis María Grignion de Montfort, quien popularizó el Tratado de la Verdadera Devoción a María, el cual iniciarán muchos de los fieles de nuestra Diócesis en mayo, el mes de María, junto con oraciones más intencionales de los misterios del Rosario. Les recomiendo ambas prácticas espirituales de corazón.

No es necesariamente porque los dos rosarios que más utilizo tienen cuentas color azul marino, sino por la importancia espiritual del rosario dada la inocencia perfecta de María y proximidad a su Divino Hijo que me refiero a este como otro tipo de "óvalo azul." A la vez que los misterios llenos de gozo de su concepción, nacimiento, e inicio de su vida que eleva nuestros espíritus y nos motiva en nuestra propia vida infantil, la Pasión de Cristo, incluyendo sus tropiezos y caídas cuando carga con la cruz, familiarizándose con nosotros mediante los retos y los pecados que nos esperan. Nuestro camino hacia la muerte debe volver a trazarse—o mejorarse aún—descubierto por todo el Misterio Pascual, en donde los lamentos nos llevan a la gloria en la madrugada de la Resurrección de Jesús y el Pentecostal envío del Espíritu Santo.

El sacerdote monástico, Padre San Basilio describe los misterios de los sacramentos de iniciación en Pascua refiriéndose—con un guiño al Apóstol San Pablo—al deporte del atletismo: "Imitamos la muerte de Cristo al ser sepultados con él en el bautismo." "Debemos comenzar una vida nueva y no podemos hacerlo hasta que hayamos terminado con nuestra vida anterior. Cuando los corredores llegan a una curva en la ruta, deben hacer una pausa breve antes de poder entrar en dirección opuesta. De igual forma, cuando deseamos cambiar la dirección de nuestra vida debemos hacer una pausa, o morir, para marcar el final de una vida y el inicio de otra."

El rezar el rosario fortalece y suaviza el proceso de morir y resucitar espiritualmente de modo que esta no sea un asunto estridente y traumático, incluso cuando acondiciona y profundiza nuestro nivel de atención, nuestro vigor, nuestra agilidad para poder voltear rápidamente hacia Dios y permanecer con su Hijo y con su Madre. Así como nos reta San Luis María, "Para rezar bien, no es suficiente el expresar nuestras peticiones a través de la más excelente de todas las oraciones, el Rosario, sino que debemos rezar con una concentración real ya que Dios escucha más la voz del corazón que la de la boca. El ser culpable de distracciones voluntarias durante la oración sería una gran muestra de falta de respeto y reverencia." "¿Cómo podemos esperar complacerle si, cuando estamos en presencia de su tremenda majestad, nos distraemos al igual que los niños persiguen mariposas?"

Y aún así, ¡qué frecuentemente caigo en distracciones mientras rezo el Rosario mientras manejo a través de nuestra Diócesis, en el gimnasio, al caminar hacia una reunión o una junta, o esperando al próximo penitente en el confesionario! María, Madre de Dios, ruega por la misericordia de tu Hijo hacia mí, orando por esta débil alma para que, cuando falle, tú que eres llena de gracia me endereces y me conectes más firmemente a los misterios que comenzaron con la Encarnación de tu Hijo.

Permíteme a mí y a todos por quienes hago oración, que experimentemos lo que San Juan Pablo II, él mismo un devoto del lema de San Luis María, "totus tuus" entregándose a sí mismo completamente cada día a Jesús y a María, experimentó: el verdadero encuentro de amistad que cultiva el rosario. Como lo dice el Padre Peter John Cameron, OP,

Continued on page 30



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

OFFICIAL PASTORAL APPOINTMENTS

BISHOP WILLIAM JOENSEN HAS MADE THE FOLLOWING ASSIGNMENTS:



THE REV. DANIEL ADJEI
from Chaplain of St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Student Center Parish in Des Moines to returning to his home Diocese of Sekondi-Takoradi in Ghana, effective July 9, 2026.



THE REV. MICHAEL ANTOH
from Canonical Administrator of Our Lady of Fatima, Portsmouth, St. Mary of the Assumption, Panama, and St. Boniface, Westphalia, to returning to his home Diocese of Sekondi-Takoradi in Ghana, effective July 9, 2026.



THE REV. MR. (DEACON) STAN ASJES
upon completion of seminary formation and ordination to the priesthood to be assigned as Parochial Vicar of St. Patrick Parish, Council Bluffs, effective July 9, 2026.



THE REV. GEORGE BOACHIE-NYARKO
from Parochial Administrator of Holy Trinity of S.E. Warren Co., Lacona/Milo, and Immaculate Conception Parish, St. Mary to be assigned as Pastor of St. Joseph Parish, Winterset, and St. Patrick, Irish Settlement, effective July 9, 2026.



THE REV. MAXWELL CARLSON
while continuing to serve as Chaplain at St. Albert Catholic School, Council Bluffs, and Assistant Diocesan Vocation Director, will move from part-time Parochial Vicar at St. Patrick Parish, Council Bluffs, to part-time Pastoral and Sacramental Assistance at St. Peter Parish, Council Bluffs, effective July 9, 2026.



THE REV. THOMAS DOOLEY
from Pastor of St. Joseph Parish, Winterset, and St. Patrick Parish, Irish Settlement to be assigned as Pastor of St. Patrick Parish, Audubon, and Holy Trinity Parish, Exira, effective on July 9, 2026.



THE REV. JAMES DOWNEY
from weekend Pastoral Assistance at St. Boniface Parish, Waukee and faculty at Dowling Catholic High School, West Des Moines, to graduate theology studies at the Pontifical Angelicum University, Rome, effective July 9, 2026.



THE REV. RODRIGO MAYORGA LANDEROS
from Parochial Administrator of Christ the King Parish, Des Moines, to Pastor, effective July 9, 2026.



THE REV. RAYMOND MCHENRY
from retirement to temporary Parochial Administrator of Holy Trinity Parish in Des Moines, effective July 6, 2026, through Nov. 24, 2026.



THE VERY REV. P.J. MCMANUS
from Pastor of Christ the King Parish, Des Moines, and Vicar of Hispanic Ministry to be assigned as Pastor of St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Student Center Parish and Vicar of Evangelization and Mission for the Diocese of Des Moines, effective July 9, 2026.



THE REV. MARK NEAL
Pastor of Holy Trinity Parish in Des Moines, is granted a five-month study and renewal sabbatical (July 6, 2026, through Nov. 24, 2026). Upon completion of the sabbatical, Father Neal will return to Holy Trinity Parish for the remainder of his tenure as Pastor.



THE REV. DAVID NKRUMAH
from Pastor of St. Patrick Parish, Audubon and Holy Trinity Parish, Exira, to be assigned as Pastor of Holy Trinity of S.E. Warren Co., Lacona/Milo, and Immaculate Conception, St. Mary, effective July 9, 2026.



THE REV. SETH OWUSU
from Parochial Administrator of St. Mary, Avoca and St. Patrick, Walnut, to be assigned Parochial Vicar of St. Luke the Evangelist, Ankeny, and Chaplain to the Diocesan Teens Encounter Christ (TEC) Ministry, effective July 9, 2026.



THE REV. ROSS PARKER
from Pastor of St. Mary Parish and Holy Cross Parish in Elkhart and Diocesan Director of Vocations and Seminarians to be assigned as Pastor of St. Augustin Parish, Des Moines, and Diocesan Director of Seminarians effective July 9, 2026.



THE VERY REV. CHRISTOPHER PISUT
from Pastor of St. Augustin Parish, Des Moines, to be assigned as Pastor of St. Mary's Parish and Holy Cross Parish in Elkhart, effective July 9, 2026. Father Pisut will continue his assignment as Diocesan Judicial Vicar and Coordinator of the Traditional Latin Mass Community.



THE REV. BRAD ROBEY
from Parochial Administrator of Ss. Peter and Paul Parish in Atlantic, St. Mary's Parish in Anita and St. Timothy's Parish in Reno, to be assigned as Pastor effective July 9, 2026.



THE REV. NICK SMITH
while continuing to serve as Pastor of St. Patrick Parish, Perry, is assigned as Diocesan Vocation Director, effective July 9, 2026.



THE REV. THOMAS THAKADIPURAM
from Diocesan Pastoral and Sacramental Assistance to be assigned for full-time Pastoral and Sacramental Assistance at Christ the King Parish, Des Moines, effective July 9, 2026.



THE REV. EZE UMUNNAKWE
from temporary Diocesan Pastoral and Sacramental Ministry to full-time Diocesan Pastoral and Sacramental Ministry Assistance, effective July 9, 2026.

Faithfully in Christ,

Most Rev. William Joensen, Ph.D.
Bishop

Jason Kurth
Chancellor

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FAMILY FOCUS:
Lilly Grant will assist parents in raising children in the faith

BY ANNE MARIE COX


Parish representatives talk in a small group with consultant Kathie Amadei.


Shannon Nye, center, of St. Patrick Parish in Neola, talks with other faith formation leaders.


Deacon Dan Maxcy, of St. Mary of Nazareth, shares with other faith formation leaders.

Imagine if your parish had a clearly defined plan for how it will approach faith formation at any point between birth and graduation from high school.

About eight parishes are actively in the midst of a five-year process to develop a family-focused faith formation program that addresses all stages of childhood.

"Each parish, according to their own needs, gifts, resources, and culture, will create a plan that accompanies parents on an ongoing basis from the birth of their child to when the child leaves the nest," said consultant Paulette Chapman.

She's the diocesan contact for parishes participating in a pilot project including about 20 dioceses that's hosted by the National Community of Catechetical Leaders. The NCCL received a grant from the Lilly Foundation, which funds projects related to community, development, education, and Christianity.

Parishes in the pilot project are leaning into family faith formation. Others are interested in it. Each parish is in a different place with it, Chapman said.

Some parishes in the pilot program were beginning to see the importance of involving parents more in the faith formation of their children prior to 2020, but the pandemic nudged them into it. For example, St. Theresa had tried some family faith formation events for several years before the project came along.

Some parishes have what might be termed "stop-and-go" catechesis wherein they might have a great baptismal preparation program, but struggle in the interim years until a child becomes school age. Or, they might see families preparing a child for First Holy Communion, but not again until it's time to prepare for confirmation.

The continuous plan provides for greater consistency.

A core part of the work involves consulting parents.

"As things are implemented, parishes need to be intentional in getting feedback," Chapman said. Not only do parishes need to seek feedback from current parents, but they should be aware that as children age, conversations with parents will change and there are always new parents involved.

Ultimately, the hope is that the eight pilot parishes are able to create customized plans for their faith communities thereby inspiring other parishes in the Diocese of Des Moines to create plans, too.

FAMILIES LEARN TOGETHER: PARENTS ATTEND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CLASSES

St. Patrick Parish in Neola is transitioning its faith formation model slowly with the idea that a stronger faith within families begins with supporting parents.



Youth in the faith formation program at St. Patrick Parish in Neola made blankets for New Visions, which offers services to the homeless in Council Bluffs.

"You can't get any better than Mom and Dad," said Shannon Nye, faith formation coordinator. "Mom and Dad are the go-to people. We need to make them feel supported, that we have their backs."

St. Patrick Parish is working on doing this as one of the pilot parishes creating a formation plan for the breadth of childhood.

At a parent meeting, she asked what they wanted from the parish.

Fewer information sheets sent home, parents said. Those end up on the floor of the car or on a junk table at home.

Instead, they want to be a part of the learning process.

Parents want to learn with their kids, and one of the first topics they suggested was a look at why Catholics do what they do during Mass.

The sessions are successful because there faith sharing, and there's community building as families enjoy a meal together.

Nye credits consultants Paulette Chapman and Kathie Amadei for their encouragement.

"They have been everything for us. They have been so helpful in leading us to resources," Nye said.

In particular, they emphasized that faith formation programs should adapt to local parish needs. A plan for a city parish may not work for a rural parish where the youth help run the family farm.

The parish is moving slowly to more of a community-based, intergenerational approach.

Grandparents want to be a part of the process. "They have so much to share," Nye said. "We'll include the elderly in catechizing the moms and dads. They know it and who better to share it than someone who's lived it?"

She has high hopes for the family-based model of sharing the Catholic faith.

"I really want families to know that faith formation is us reminding them that we're here to back them up. They are the first and most important formers of their children's faith," she said. "It takes a village to raise good, strong, Christian children and we hope to be that village."

MORE WAYS TO MEET: PARENTS SPEND TIME TOGETHER AT ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA



With ice cream and backpacks, children enjoy an evening gathering at which they filled backpacks with school supplies for students who are refugees.

With a solid, intergenerational, family-friendly faith formation program in place, St. Catherine of Siena Student Center Parish considered how it might benefit as a pilot parish in the process for developing a formation program for all children.

How could it grow?

The parish began with surveys for parishioners and a session for parents to share what more they'd like from their church.

The response was clear. The parish can deepen its faith formation program by supporting parents as the primary teachers of the faith.

"The parents wanted a place where they could talk with other parents about current challenges and parenting, especially regarding outside influences on our families like busyness, social media and technology," said faith Formation Director Laura Catherine Carruthers-Green. "We all want our kids raised in healthy environments."

The parents wanted "more help on how we translate that to conversations at home about faith. How do we move this great community into our everyday lives," she said.

The parish already had a strong foundation of trust among families after having many community-building activities like ice cream socials, dinners together, and service projects. "We found ways to give parents more ways to talk to each other," Carruthers-Green said.

One session focused on how to incorporate reading Scripture into family life. Another small faith-sharing parent group talked about topics weighing on their minds.

"The grant has given us opportunities and a longer time to talk about what our community needs and to hone in on that," Carothers-Green said. "At the end of the day, people feel this longing to be in community and to lean on each other, support each other,and turn to each other as we raise our kids. It helps that we all have faith in common. People might be at different points in their faith journeys, but it's a priority for them to make faith present in their families' lives."



A couple prepares for marriage using the Invited to Joy process.

ENGAGED COUPLES ARE

Invited to Joy

BY ANNE MARIE COX
PHOTOS BY JAKE SHAMA

When an engaged couple prepares to marry in a Catholic Church, they get a special invitation.

Come, let's talk about marriage as a sacrament, marriage as a covenant, marriage as a lifelong commitment, says the Church.

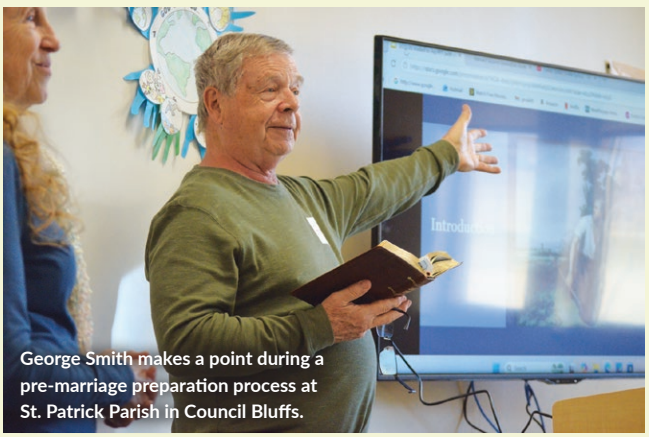
This is typically a sacramental preparation process prior to their marriage, also called validation. It involves attending a sacramental marriage preparation workshop (Invited to Joy) and also meeting with a sponsor couple who facilitates discussions on everything from finances and in-laws to conflict resolution, the role of prayer in a marriage and being open to new life.

"It's so, so important that they know what they're getting into and what they're saying, 'Yes' to," said Kris Smith, of St. Patrick Parish in Council Bluffs. "It's not just a piece of paper that can be ripped up. It is lifelong. We want them to know that God is a part of that; the three of them: God, the husband and the wife are united in marriage."

Kris and her husband of 47 years, George, have been involved in preparing engaged couples for marriage for more than 10 years.

"It's very rewarding for us," he said. "We do this together. We complement each other. We help these young couples who take this big step become as ready as they can be."

The Invited to Joy process takes about six months to complete without rushing through various components. There's a six-hour workshop that's designed to let the couple set aside time just for themselves without technology or other interruptions. The workshop focuses on putting God in the marriage through prayer, chastity, natural family planning, and more.



George Smith makes a point during a pre-marriage preparation process at St. Patrick Parish in Council Bluffs.

Information is presented and discussed.

"It's really a good time for them to discuss their vision of marriage and how it fits with what the Church's vision is," said Kris.

She and George sprinkle in some personal stories to help the couples see the Church's vision of marriage. Then there are meetings with a sponsor couple, natural family planning classes and more.

The Smiths first got involved when their parish needed sponsor couples. Sponsor couples facilitate discussions between the two who are engaged based on a questionnaire they complete.

"The whole idea is to show perhaps some differences and it becomes a springboard to ask questions and get them to talk a little bit more about what they're really getting into and how they can help each other," said Kris.

After a few years as a sponsor couple, the pair was asked to coordinate the program for their parish.

"George and I felt like God was directing us to do it at this time," Kris said.

They share their own experiences as examples for the engaged couples.

"You don't understand 'For better or for worse' until you spend decades with someone," said George.

"We want them to know that difficult days are normal," Kris added. "There are people who can help them so their marriage will last."

They've worked with 150 to 200 couples over the years.

The Diocese's marriage preparation program Invited to Joy offers not only sacramental formation but also community support.



Connor Lenihan and Emma Eickholt, of St. Patrick Parish in Council Bluffs.



Kris Smith co-facilitates a pre-marriage preparation process.

"The most important part is we really want couples to understand God's love for them and their marriage," Kris said. "As a community, we pray a novena for our couples every month. They have a whole community of the church to help support them in their marriage."

The purpose of the marriage is to learn about the Church's vision of marriage and its sacramentality.

George said, "This process is to help (engaged couples.) There's a reason for this and it's all about them in the end. It's all about helping them."



Kaitlyn Goetsch and Jonathan Mattern are preparing for marriage with St. Pius X Parish in Urbandale.

FAMILIES

Christian Family Movement accompanies families

BY ANNE MARIE COX



Stefany and Hector Bautista enjoy gatherings of the Christian Family Movement.

Eighteen years ago, Ana and Jose De La Cruz were having problems as a couple and in their family.

Friends invited them to be a part of Christian Family Movement, a Catholic organization of families and individuals who gather in small groups to strengthen marriage and family life through faith, friendship and service.

Today, Ana and Jose, of Our Lady of the Americas Parish in Des Moines, lead the diocesan Christian Family Movement group with Emma and Sergio Colin with the goal of supporting other families.

"We grew as a couple and as a family, and we now help the church and teams," Ana said. "We learned so much in this group, and we are really happy with that. We want every family to be in this group. It's not just a group. It's a family, a big family."

The Christian Family Movement was founded in the United States in the 1940s and has grown to become an international effort to support Christ-centered families rooted in faith.

Mayra and Antonio Banuelos, of St. Ambrose Cathedral Parish in Des Moines, set up a local chapter in 2008. Now, it has about 60 families from Council Bluffs to Des Moines in groups.

Every other week during the school year, five couples who form one group meet at one of their homes for prayer, a song, a lesson using a workbook as a guide and a meal. Over four years, they complete the program.

On June 21 at 6 p.m., Bishop William Joensen will celebrate Mass with the families and hand certificates of completion to couples who completed the series of four books and lessons, said Jose.



Emma and Sergio Colin, and Ana and Jose De La Cruz are leaders in the Hispanic Christian Family Movement.

Stefany and Hector Bautista, of Our Lady of the Americas Parish in Des Moines, have been in a group for about a year.

"I like it a lot. It's something we're not forced to do, but something we think we have to go to," she said.

At a recent gathering, the discussion was on the difference between communication and dialogue.

"Dialogue is putting yourself in the other person's position and understanding him and communication is more like 'I'm telling you this' or 'I'm doing this,'" she learned.

"The groups help families with communication and the relationship of the couples," said Sergio.

Victoria Calderon, of Our Lady of the Americas, likes Christian Family Movement because it teaches her and her husband how to be good Catholic Christian parents.

"It's a big help for parents to learn how to lead a Catholic family," she said.

It also offers a chance to meet new people. In Calderon's group, there are families from Perry, Grimes and Des Moines.

The groups also build a stronger Church and provide service to the community, too, said Sergio.

At a recent meeting with Father Fabian Moncada Benavides, pastor of Our Lady of the Americas, they discussed reconciliation.

"This work with married couples and families is very helpful to improve our pastoral approach," he said. "The real goal is to understand the diversity of faith and the diversity of backgrounds in family life."

The family gatherings offer a good opportunity to find individuals or couples who are looking for consolation or for someone to listen to them.

"Sometimes, we don't have time for listening to people," said Father. "The Christian Family Movement is a great opportunity to be really good listeners in a pastoral manner and support each other."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

or to join the Christian Family Movement, speak to your parish priest or call Ana at 515-771-9037.

An Act of Witness:
THE PILGRIMAGE FOR THE UNBORN

BY BENJAMIN SHANE EVANS

The idea for The Pilgrimage for the Unborn came to AJ Brown while praying the rosary.



AJ Brown will walk more than 67 miles in June while praying for the unborn.

Late last year, the St. Pius X parishioner began the Exodus 90 St. Michael's Lent program, a 40-day, Lent-like period of prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and daily walks. One day while walking, listening to the Bible, and praying the rosary, he became inspired to do something more with his routine.

The idea became a plan, the plan became a route, and after discussing it with his wife and family, word spread. The pilgrimage became a reality.

"From that point, there was no going back," Brown said.

The Pilgrimage for the Unborn will be a 67.8-mile, over 33-hour walk, beginning with a 5 a.m. Mass at St. Boniface in Waukee on Saturday, May 30, and ending with a grill out in St. Pius X in Urbandale at 3 p.m. on Sunday, May 31. The pilgrimage will include stops at each church along the route to dedicate a rosary to the unborn.

"I didn't even realize when I planned it that it would end on the same day as the Feast of the Visitation," Brown said.

Though not initially an effort to raise money, Brown felt called to dedicate this pilgrimage to Innervisions HealthCare (IVHCare), a nonprofit pregnancy clinic with a stated mission to educate, empower, and encourage women with unplanned pregnancies by connecting them with the care, support, and information they need to make a fully informed decision.

"I thought doing something like this would be a great way to sacrifice for our Lord and raise awareness for an organization. What better way than to pray to Mary for our unborn, this is where I thought of IVHCare," Brown stated on the walk's website, ivhcare.org/pilgrimage. "When I heard a stat that 28 percent of my children's generation had been aborted, I was so saddened. We need to help people make the right choices."

The donor-funded medical clinic has two locations in West Des Moines and the south side of Des Moines and relies on its staff to provide pregnancy testing, pre-abortion consultations, limited obstetrical ultrasound, abortion pill reversal, and other potentially lifesaving care to its patients. In addition to health care, the clinic also seeks to remove the common financial obstacles to continuing the pregnancy—food, clothing, housing, and medical—by connecting mothers with over 150 partners in the community to address their seemingly insurmountable challenges.

Bryan Gonzalez, IVHCare's director of development, said that from his interactions with patients, clinics that provide abortions do not provide all the facts, and that the primary mission of InnerVisions is to give women as much information about their situation as possible to let them make that decision.

"The culture is going to say, 'Get the abortion because that's going to make you feel better,'" Gonzalez said. "For the mother, we know that it's not the case. We have personal experience from patients who have come to us, leave the clinic, take the abortion pill and come back to us and say, 'I regret it.'"

The staff at IVHCare is conscious that for the 21 percent of mothers who chose to proceed with an abortion, all they can provide is an act of witness to the unborn child.

"It is a sobering thought," Gonzalez said. "Sometimes, there are patients who have their minds set that they are going to terminate, and they don't look at the baby [on the ultrasound]. So, the only eyes outside of God's who are seeing that this baby ever lived are our nursing staff."

For Brown, The Pilgrimage for the Unborn is another of those acts of witness that seeks to recognize the children who have not yet been born or who have passed through this world unnoticed and unseen, with only the eyes of God to welcome them.

BROWN ASKS ALL THOSE WHO ARE ABLE, TO JOIN HIM.

If readers wish to sign up for the walk or to contribute, visit https://www.ivhcare.org/pilgrimage.

"Walk a little, walk a lot, walk it all," he said.

This is an abbreviated version of the story that first ran in The Catholic Mirror *digital newsletter. To see the full story, go to dmdiocese.org/news/pilgrimage-for-the-unborn-*

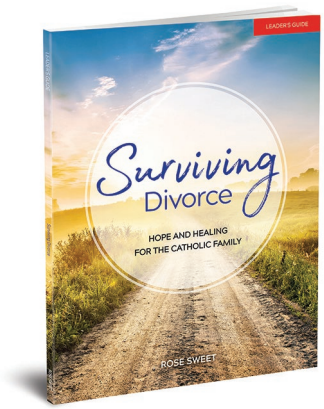
Bringing *hope* and *healing* to divorced Catholics

BY ANNE MARIE COX

A program offering hope and healing to those coping with divorce is growing in the Diocese of Des Moines.

"Our goal here is to provide a safe space to come and share what's going on in their journey right now," said Ann Moore of St. Theresa Parish in Des Moines. "We want somewhere for them to share and feel comfortable, help them through this part of their journey and faith life."

The program, originally called The Catholic Divorce Survival Guide, began with Deacon Tony and Eileen Valdez in the Des Moines metro area in 2013. They handed it over to Bill and Ann Moore, who lead a 12-week session every fall that supports divorced individuals in letting them know they're not alone.



Pat Tinley, of St. Patrick Parish in Council Bluffs, recently led a group on the west end of the Diocese based on a book now called *Surviving Divorce: Hope and Healing for the Catholic Family* by Rose Sweet, available through Ascension Press.

His hope is to encourage someone to continue offering it there while he expands it to other areas of the Diocese, such as Harlan and Red Oak. Tinley is in the process of becoming a deacon and sees this as ministry that's needed based on his own experience with divorce.

"Understand that it is a process and you are going to find your way through it," he said. "There will be a new normal. I think that's the biggest thing. Your life is not what it was anymore, but that doesn't mean there won't be a feeling of normality, happiness, fulfillment and joy. You can still find that. You've just got to go through that process of recovering from the emotional trauma."

Ann and Bill also lead from personal experience. Bill was divorced and used the program to find his way again. Ann was widowed before meeting Bill and speaks of the profound loss when one loses a spouse.

"When you get divorced, you grieve what you thought you were going to have for the rest of your life. When you don't have your spouse anymore, you lose your dinner partner, your yard guy, your dancing partner, your financial adviser, your biggest cheerleader," she said. "It's really hard when you're just by yourself."

And that's where Surviving Divorce comes in, said Bill, of Holy Trinity Parish in Des Moines. It helps people realize they're not alone. Groups talk about the practical aspects of divorce, about misconceptions on what the Catholic Church teaches about divorce, about sharing children during the holidays and more. They become a tight-knit group in which members respect each other's privacy while being open to sharing concerns, hurts, and their desire for healing.

Creating a safe, comfortable environment for people to open up is key, said Tinley.

Those who come to Surviving Divorce range from young adults to those in their 70s, from those who were divorced decades ago to those who are completing the process.

"I made my first retreat eight to 10 years after the fact," said Tinley. "I thought I had completely moved on. I went on that retreat and discovered I hadn't quite closed the door on that relationship. I had pushed it shut, but I hadn't completely latched it shut emotionally."

In addition to accompanying those healing from divorce, Tinley accompanies people on a path seeking to determine the validity of their marriage, commonly called an annulment.

FOR MORE INFORMATION **on Surviving Divorce on the east side of the Diocese, contact the Moores at moorefamilydsm@gmail.com. For more information on the process on the west side of the Diocese, contact Tinley through St. Patrick Parish in Council Bluffs.**

HEALING FROM DIVORCE

- **Rely on God.** Use the time to develop a relationship with God. Know he will never leave you.
- **Be patient with yourself.** You're going to experience a range of emotions that may pop up when you don't expect them.
- **Understand that healing is a process** and you'll find your way through it. There will be a new normal.
- **Give yourself time.** Life gets better; you just have to be patient.

– *Tips from Pat Tinley and Ann and Bill Moore, who lead Surviving Divorce groups in the Diocese of Des Moines.*

Sharing the love:

PARISH MOBILIZES TO INVITE CATHOLICS HOME

BY ANNE MARIE COX

Jan. 25, 2025, is burned in the mind of Jeanette Kenny.

During her pastor's homily that Saturday evening, she heard Father Joel McNeil share that her growing parish of St. Patrick in Council Bluffs had 4,000 registered members. But only 800 were coming to church.



Leaders of Holy Happenings, the social events team of Shepherd's Call, are Dave and Shana Craven, and Cathy and Ryan Mardesen.



Parishioner Ryan Mardesen presents to Father Joel McNeil the names of 1,400 people St. Patrick parishioners want to hold in prayer. The box was placed in the parish adoration chapel.

"For me, that was like a kick in the stomach," Kenny said. "I knew we had been growing in registrations, but we were not growing in attendees."

So the original five members of the parish's Legion of Mary got to work and started a grass-roots movement called Shepherd's Call that grew to 72 members, their original goal. Its mission: increase the number of registered parishioners attending Mass and receiving the sacraments.

"We're trying to help one another bring back our sons and daughters," she said. "It's the subject nobody wants to talk about."

FIRST STEPS

People respond to statistics. That happened to Kenny that January evening. "But what really moves people is when you affect them personally on an emotional level," she said.

At a Mass a few weeks later, parishioners wrote down on slips of paper the names of loved ones who are no longer practicing the faith. The slips were collected, put in a see-through box, blessed by Father McNeil and placed in the adoration chapel.

Eight hundred people attended Mass that weekend — and 1,400 names were dropped into the box. It became a beacon for those who attended adoration and wanted to pray for the "lost lambs."

Prayer cards with a Good Shepherd prayer are used before every Shepherd's Call meeting.

Next, the tech team sponsored a workshop on how to use a free app called Laudate. Parishioners were shown how to put the app on their phone so they had a wealth of Catholic information with them: stories on saints, daily prayers, the Liturgy of the Hours, the rosary and Chaplet of Divine Mercy and links to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the Bible and Vatican documents.

A LEAP FORWARD

The Shepherd's Call team then divided into several teams, each in friendly competition with each other to attract more members. The Holy Happenings team puts on social events for community members,

Continued on page 18

Continued from page 17

whether Catholic or non-Catholic. A recent event was a Trivia Night.

Kenny stepped back to listen to what parishioners said they wanted. As a result, the Bible study team began Jeff Cavin's "Unlocking the Mystery of the Bible" series. One hundred people enrolled and attended the seven-week course.

"The response has been very positive," Kenny said. "We did an evaluation and they said they want to continue with some other type of Bible study."

Shepherd's Call also has a small but mighty team of technology experts who created a website and a Gmail address, and it is creating training videos so new members can learn about the mission and vision of the evangelization effort.

SHARING THE LOVE

If you want to welcome someone to be more involved in the Church, Kenny said, starting with "I didn't raise you this way" or another confrontational method isn't likely to be successful. Young adults will say, "I'm a good person," "I'm spiritual" or "I don't have time for church."

A better approach is to share why you embrace your faith.

"We've been working on 2-minute testimonies of why we love being Catholic" and Shepherd's Call is training parishioners to be able to articulate their reasons in concise, thoughtful ways. In short, Shepherd's Call is teaching people how to evangelize.

"If you can share the love and joy of your faith with the people you love most," your effort will be more successful, Kenny said. "If you can't articulate why you love being Catholic, our children aren't going to be satisfied. They need to know it's integral to our lives."

PILGRIMS OF HOPE

Shepherd's Call is crucial to a conversion of heart in people, said Father McNeil in a video testimony: "Until (people have) had that personal encounter with Christ, he seems just another historical figure from long ago, rather than their friend and Savior."

One year into the effort, Kenny is pleased with the progress and hopes to see even more people participating in the future.

"I've heard people say, 'Jeanette, it will never change. My kids are just done — they're gone.'"

But she's hopeful.

"I said, 'No, we're pilgrims of hope. This whole last year we've been pilgrims of hope. We have to be hopeful.'"



Sarah Madsen, Marie Knedler, Denise McNitt, and Jodie Boswell organized a Jeff Cavins Bible Study for 100 parishioners of St. Patrick Parish in Council Bluffs as part of Shepherd's Call.

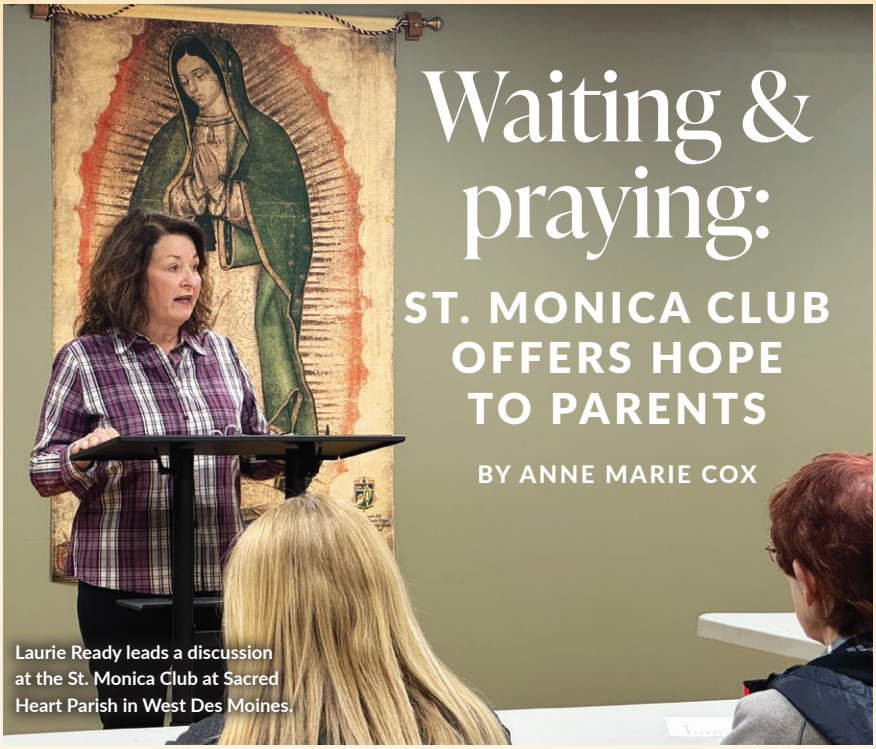


Jeanette Kenny prays in the St. Patrick adoration chapel near a box of names of friends and loved ones. Parishioners identified 1,400 friends and family for whom they want to pray.

"IF YOU CAN'T ARTICULATE WHY YOU LOVE BEING CATHOLIC, OUR CHILDREN AREN'T GOING TO BE SATISFIED. THEY NEED TO KNOW IT'S INTEGRAL TO OUR LIVES."

TO GET MORE INFORMATION

on Shepherd's Call, go to their website: stpatrickshepherdscall.weebly.com. To learn how to begin a Shepherd's Call ministry in your parish, contact Jeanette Kenny at 402-490-7983 or email stpatrickshepherdscall@gmail.com.



Waiting & praying:

ST. MONICA CLUB OFFERS HOPE TO PARENTS

BY ANNE MARIE COX

Laurie Ready leads a discussion at the St. Monica Club at Sacred Heart Parish in West Des Moines.

While praying that their loved ones, family and friends return to the Church, a group of friends decided to form a book club and support group to serve others coping with the same sense of loss.

It turned into so much more.

"I did not expect this," said Sue Reichart, of Sacred Heart Parish in West Des Moines. "Yes, we want our children to come back. But the most important thing is to be a joyful witness of our faith, and to be a joyful witness of our faith we have to have a more intimate relationship with Christ so we have to work on ourselves.

"I mean it starts with us, literally," she said. "I did not expect that. That has been a blessing."

The transformation happening at Sacred Heart Parish began when Debbie Chalik read the book *The St. Monica Club: How to Wait, Hope and Pray for Your Fallen-away Loved Ones* by Maggie Green. The book is based on St. Monica of the fourth century, who prayed that her son would return to the Church. He did and became St. Augustine.

"We should do a group on this," Chalik told friends. They agreed.

She, Reichart and Cathy Fuller studied the book, found reflection questions and began the St. Monica Club about two years ago.

The discussions go beyond the content of the book. Members of the St. Monica Club struggle with feelings of loss, of sadness, of frustration and of guilt.

"I think as parents of kids who are not going to church, you're always thinking what could I have done differently, or what didn't I do?" Reichart said. "We came to the conclusion that we did the best with what we had at the time and that is life. We try to keep that at the forefront. It's about joy. We want to be joyful witnesses of our love of God, of our love of our Catholic faith.

> **"It's about joy. We want to be a joyful witnesses of our love of God, of our love of your Catholic faith."**

Chalik said, "It was a real relief to not feel guilty that you did something wrong."

The first group that met in the fall of 2024 included 40 parents and grandparents. They reflected on chapters of the book, shared their stories and then went to the 5:30 p.m. rosary in the church. In the spring, they gathered weekly to hear a guest speaker.

In the fall of 2025, they read *Nudging Conversions: A Practical Guide to Bringing Those You Love Back to the Church* by Carrie Gress. Though the parish rosary session moved, the St. Monica's Club prays a decade of the rosary after every meeting. This spring, they've brought in guest speakers to talk about healing, reconciliation, listening and the Blessed Virgin.

Laurie Ready has stepped in for Fuller, who has moved on to other ministries in the parish.

Everyone is on a journey, including young adults, Chalik learned.

"You have to let them be on a journey," she said. "They have to come to (the faith) on their own. You have to let adult children be adult children and then put God and Mary in charge of it."



St. Monica

Getty Image/FierceAbin



Leaving a legacy

BY ANNE MARIE COX

TO GET A COPY OF THE PLANNING GUIDE,
go to catholicfoundationiowa.org/CFPG

Some of us are planners. We have a list of what we need from the grocery store. We keep a calendar of upcoming events so we can prepare ahead of time. It brings comfort and some reassurance to us when we have a clearly defined path to get where we want to go.

Creating that plan can be challenging when it's about the end of life. Maybe your spouse or loved ones don't want to talk about it or don't make time for it.

For Catholics, preparing for the end of this life goes beyond medical directives and financial planning. It gives us an opportunity to reflect on the dignity of the human person and on the hope promised by the Risen Christ that we could spend all of eternity with our merciful God.

"The Catholic Church offers profound and sacred traditions of various rites in the wake of death, providing solace and support to those who mourn and the privilege of remembering you at the altar of the Lord," said Bishop William Joensen in the Catholic Funeral Planning Guide collaboratively created by the Diocese of Des Moines and the Catholic Foundation of Southwest Iowa.

As you prepare for the final leg of your pilgrimage on earth and your journey into eternal joy with Jesus and the saints, the trustworthy guide can be an impetus to have conversations about your wishes with family and friends. In doing so, you let them know what you'd like so they can honor your wishes, and you gift them with plans to follow for a time when they're grieving and it's difficult to make decisions.

End-of-life medical care plans include creating an advance directive, which names someone who can make health care decisions for you if you cannot. Be sure the person you name understands Catholic teaching, including the sacredness of human life, and that Church teaching does not always require every possible treatment or extraordinary measure be pursued depending on your health status. Be sure they know your wishes.

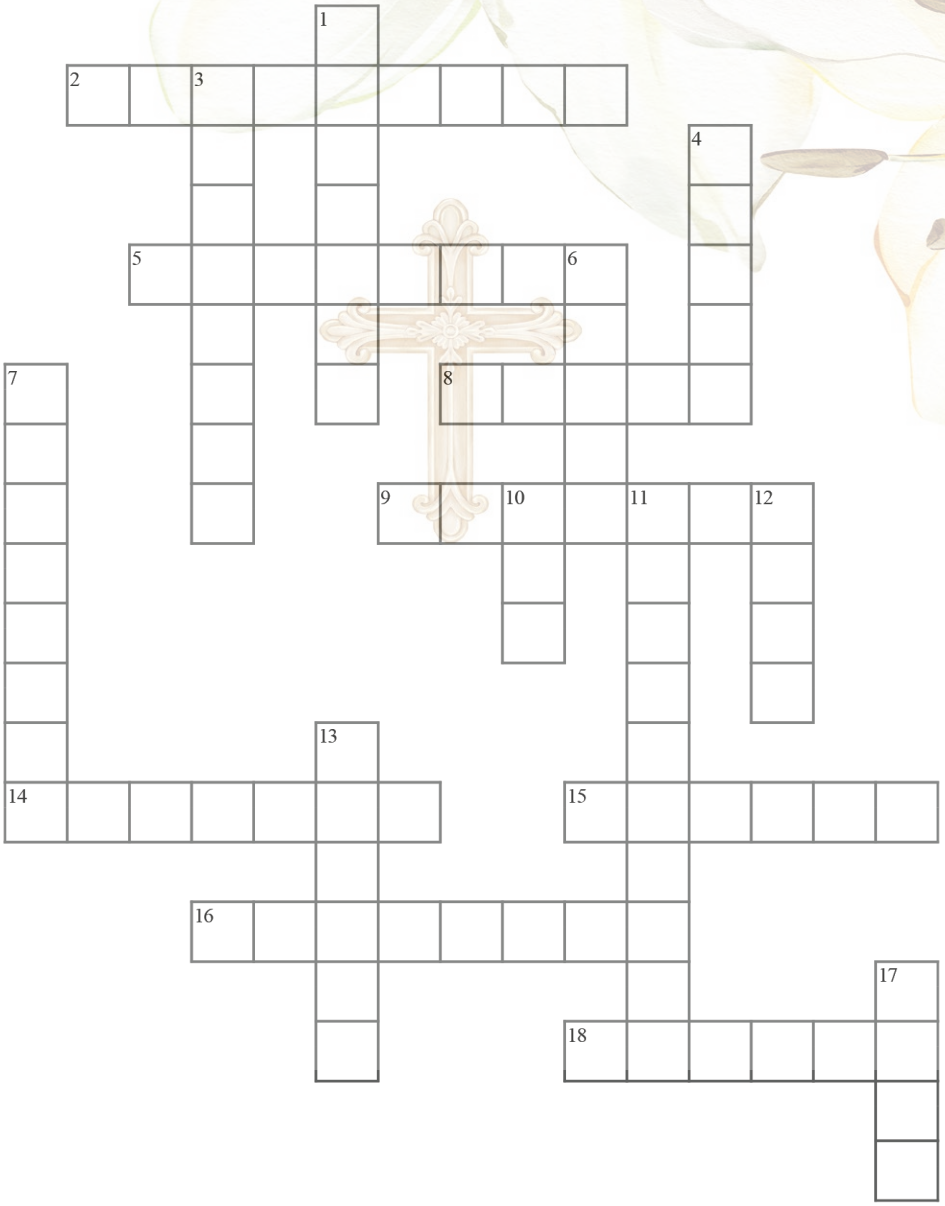
Financial planners will help you create or update your will, which tells your executor how you want your material possessions distributed. Many Catholics choose to remember their parish, Catholic school or favorite charity in their will as an expression of gratitude and assurance that their values live on. Keeping your important documents organized and in a place that your executor can find reduces stress and anxiety at a later time.

Include your parish in your planning process. When you enter hospice or understand death is imminent, your priest can celebrate the sacraments with you, answer questions of the family and clarify Church funeral rites. Do you have a favorite song or favorite reading that you'd like at your funeral?

With the funeral planning guide, you can gift loved ones with an outline of your preferences, easing their minds as they grieve. At the same time, you bless those who remain by enabling them to lift you up to the Lord in prayer, giving God thanks for the gift of your life.

Getty Image/Jacob Wackerhausen

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE



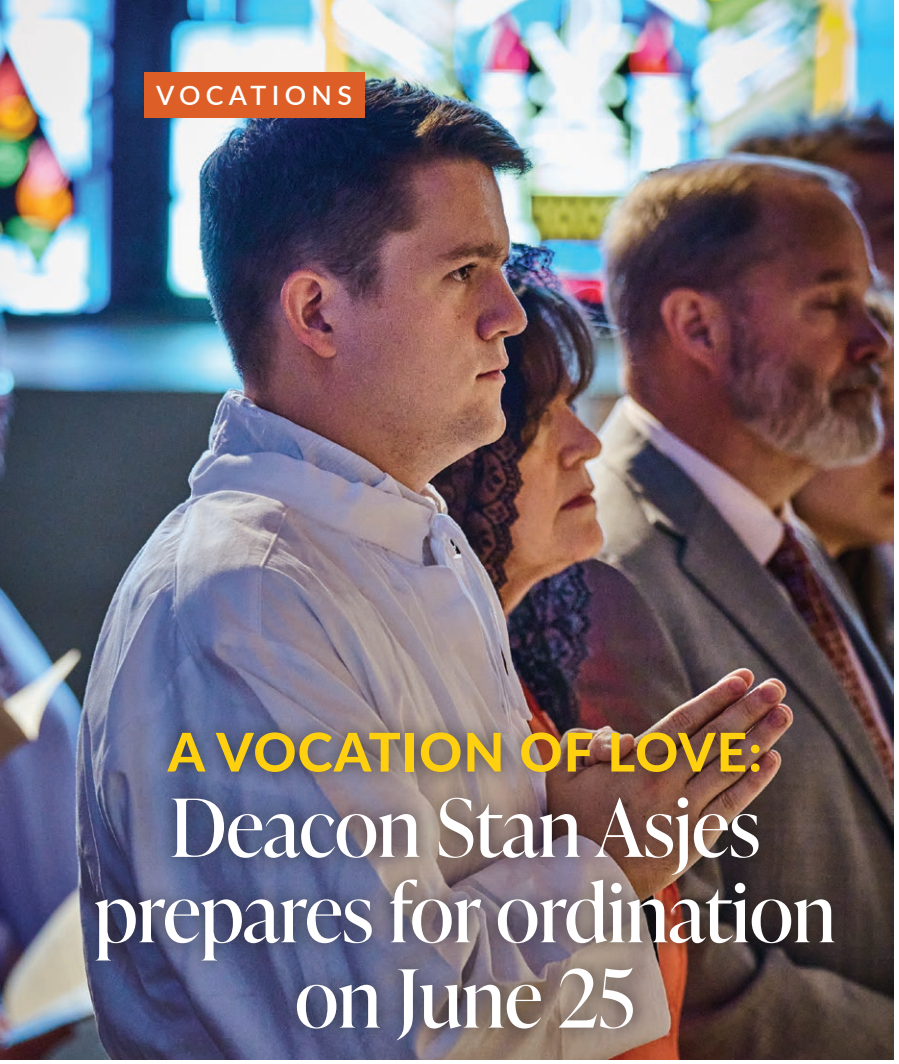
ACROSS

2. This longest river in Western Asia has a Tigris for a sister
5. A “learner” as opposed to “a messenger” or apostle
8. This adjective for Christ should brighten your day
9. A “plunging” into Christ’s death and rising up a new creation7. She is the saint of impossible causes
14. When your action causes or becomes an occasion for someone else to sin
15. You won’t find her book in Jewish or Protestant scriptures
16. Divinely conferred talent or gift
18. St. Damien of Molokai was their “apostle”

DOWN

1. This saint was “preacher to the birds”
3. Prayer form that asks, pleads and even cries out
4. Expands bread; can have good or bad results based on what Jesus said
6. Numeric symbol of regeneration, resurrection, start of a new order
7. John lost his head over this sister-in-law to Herod
10. Most likely place to encounter a hymnal outside the choir loft
11. Mary’s, not Jesus’, conception
12. These travelers three gifts did bring to the newborn King of Kings
13. Son of Ham, father of Heth and Sidon
17. Things got “hairy” with this first-born son of Jacob

Getty Images/Evgeniia Kimasova



A VOCATION OF LOVE: Deacon Stan Asjes prepares for ordination on June 25

Deacon Stan Asjes says his faith journey began before he was born, when his family lived in Norway while his dad was stationed there with the U.S. Navy.

His Mom, a Catholic, and his Dad, who was not Catholic, experienced a deeper conversion.

"I grew up in a family where the faith was very important from that time on," he said.

The early days of the Asjes family laid a strong faith foundation that will see fruit on June 26 at 5 p.m. when Bishop William Joensen ordains Deacon Asjes a priest at St. Ambrose Cathedral.

Deacon Asjes and his five siblings were homeschooled, with a very intentional practice of incorporating faith in their schoolwork.

"The faith was always something present because it was built into our life," he said.

It wasn't until he was a high school junior when he started to own his faith.

One day, he was meditating on the cross "and experienced the love of Jesus personally. It was more of an experience of a deeper truth," he said.

He thought maybe he ought to take the idea of priesthood a little more seriously.

In the meantime, he found inspiration from his pastor, Father Aquinas Nichols of the Basilica of St. John in Des Moines.

"I could see the way he celebrated Mass with such reverence. It was very inspiring," said Deacon Asjes.

He also admired Father Richmond Dzekoe of the Archdiocese of Dubuque, who is filled with joy and a great witness.

Deacon Asjes liked to tinker with computer equipment and thought he'd be a computer programmer.

But after reading *To Save a Thousand Souls: A Guide for Discerning a Vocation to Diocesan Priesthood* by Father Brett A. Brannen, he approached his parents and told them he wanted to apply for college seminary.

They may have been a little surprised, he said. They were supportive.

It wasn't easy. Public speaking seemed scary. And he learned that, with a vocation to the priesthood, one needs to fall in love with God and to love people as God loves them.

"Over time in the seminary, year after year, I was coming to understand what love is, what it means to love the way a priest does," he said.

In retrospect, he's "glad God got me in the door" at St. John Vianney Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Now, he says, "I'm looking forward to actually being in a parish full time and being able to say these are my people in a very concrete way."

And he's looking forward to living out a vocation of love, especially through the Mass, through preaching, and through celebrating reconciliation.

As he prepares for ordination, he looks back and sees "God is good and he has a plan for our lives. He's with us. When he seems far away, he's most with us."

For young men considering whether God is calling them to religious life, he says "Don't be afraid to take risks. If you think you might have a call to the priesthood, seminary is a good place to discern that. Don't be afraid."

FOR MORE INFORMATION
on vocations, email vocations@dmdiocese.org.

YOU ARE INVITED

Transitional diaconate ordination of Luke Mohan on Friday, June 19 at 5 p.m. at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in West Des Moines.

Priestly ordination on Friday, June 26 at 5 p.m. at St. Ambrose Cathedral in Des Moines.

All are invited.

Faith, fun and formation:

WHY BOYS NEED SUMMER CAMP MORE THAN EVER

BY CARSON GREGORY





The world our youth live in is not designed with their growth and development in mind.

Multi-hour screen use, constant cultural pressures, and the pace of modern life have created an environment that often works against the very essence of what it means to be human. These challenges can affect boys in particular ways, especially in their social development and sense of identity and purpose.

This is combined with a crisis of faith in the United States wherein men are more likely than women to drift away from the Catholic Church as they mature into adulthood. Boys today require opportunities that support their human and spiritual development.

Catholic Youth Camp offers a rare and profound experience. It gives boys and girls the chance to ditch their screens, step into nature and rediscover what it means to encounter the glory of God in being fully alive. Whether hiking in the woods, soaring down the zipline, canoeing for the first time or gazing up at the stars during night chapel, campers are invited into real experiences which foster confidence, wonder, and discipleship.

Just as importantly, CYC creates an environment where friendships are rooted in faith and where boys encounter joyful, authentic male role models who live out a Christ-like life.

If you're looking for a meaningful way to support youth in your life, consider Catholic Youth Camp.

It's more than just a week at camp on Lake Panorama near Panora in the north central part of the Diocese of Des Moines. It is an investment in who God created children to be. CYC helps anchor our young people in faith, truth, and community.

Registration is still open for summer camp. Girls spots are filling up but there is room for more boys to register. Our hope and prayer is that boys and girls from the Diocese of Des Moines and beyond will leave camp not only with great memories but as joy-filled missionary disciples of Christ.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

or to register your child for Catholic Youth Camp this summer, go to https://stmcenter.com/

CARSON GREGORY
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Getty Image/Silvia Kienesberger

LET'S GET PSYCHED

LIVING A LIFE WELL-LIVED … THE SORROWFUL MYSTERIES



OH, TO BE HAPPY. It isn't a constant, but it sure feels good when we feel it. For some, happiness comes easily, but this is not true for all.

I love being a dad. My kids' joy and happiness matter more to me than my own happiness. When my kids are in a good place, I am in an even better place. When they are suffering, I am in an even heavier place. God gave us an attribute of himself that is the "lifeblood" of all relationships: empathy.

There is no aloneness like that of deep suffering. Whether it is from fear, grief, abandonment, betrayal, violation or rejection, they all feel alone. If a person has not yet had these experiences, then they do not know this suffering personally; they only know of it.

A life well lived is not a life free of pains and traumas; it is a life lived well with all pain and trauma. When we are close to another and IF we watch carefully, we can see whether they are in a state of happiness or suffering before they even say a word. We know it immediately. It is as though we can hear it even in their breath.

At times, we are afraid to face our pain, let alone admit our wrong-doings and fears. We need the empathy of others when we are in the midst of our personal "sorrowful mysteries." We need to be seen and known fully, especially in our sufferings.

When we reflect on the Sorrowful Mysteries of the rosary, we see and know Jesus more fully. We see him facing a future of agony beyond human imagination in the Garden of Gethsemane. "Seriously, Father, this is your will for me?" We have all expressed this prayer at some point.

We might not ever experience the brutal suffering of human torture like Jesus did, but many have. It is a privilege to ask the Lord if our suffering may join his suffering as well.

We love to laugh, but we all hate to be laughed at. This is humiliation. The thorns of humiliation wound our identity. At times, we are afflicted by these thorns: Jesus was afflicted with a whole crown of thorns.

We have heard it said that trials are our cross to bear. Perhaps the cross is more than this. Perhaps it is being you. Your life is your cross to bear. This was the cross Jesus had to carry, to be the Savior of the world. Mine is to be Randy; that is hard to carry. Yours is to be you; that is hard to carry also. So hard that we fall many times. It is not wrong that we fall. It is understandable to God. He knows that crosses are heavy. He has empathy for us all.

Of course, we are deeply saddened for the sufferings Christ went through, even unto crucifixion, yet may we pray, "Thank you, Jesus, for being with me in the midst of *my* sorrowful mysteries."



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The beauty of family life



Getty Image/Lisa Haney

Beauty is not merely what pleases. It also allows reality to be received as meaningful, ordered and worthy of love. For that reason, beauty does more than attract; it draws us beyond ourselves and awakens reverence. It reminds us that not everything exists for use, control or consumption. Some things are given to be received, contemplated and cherished.

In the Catholic vision, marriage and family are beautiful. They are not beautiful simply because they are emotionally fulfilling or socially beneficial, but because in them love takes visible form. What is otherwise invisible becomes embodied. Fidelity, fruitfulness, sacrifice, tenderness and communion are made present in the ordinary moments of life. And because beauty opens us toward transcendence, the beauty of marriage and family does not end in itself. It points beyond itself to the very life of God.

The beauty of marriage lies in the fact that it asks to be beheld, not merely used. In marriage, one person stands before another not as an object of appetite or utility, but as someone to be reverenced and loved for his or her own sake. Marriage is beautiful because it trains husband and wife to receive one another as gifts rather than possessions, and as mysteries entrusted to their care. In this way, marriage becomes a school of wonder, reverence and faithful delight.

That is why marriage is a covenant of self-gift. A man and a woman bind themselves to one another in a shared life marked by fidelity, permanence and openness to life. Its beauty lies not only in romance, but in the vows by which love takes on a durable and embodied form. Through those vows, husband and wife are bound to remain with one another through hardship, joy, sacrifice and time. For this reason, the Church sees marriage as sacramental: a created reality elevated by grace so that divine love is made present through human love.



JOHN HUYNH, D.MIN.,
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Indeed, marriage and family life can be understood as a created reflection of Trinitarian communion. God is not solitude but communion: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As St. John Paul II writes in Mulieris Dignitatem, man and woman are called to live "in a communion of love," and thus "mirror in the world the communion of love that is in God." Marriage reflects this because its unity is a communion of distinct persons joined in self-gift. Their oneness is not sameness, but unity formed by love. And when that communion becomes fruitful in family life, it reveals something essential to love itself: love does not close in on itself but makes room for another and becomes life-giving.

In short, the family is beautiful in the hidden and repeated acts by which love becomes enfleshed: the meal prepared, the burden shared, the forgiveness offered, the child welcomed, the spouse borne patiently in weakness and loved still. Here beauty is not ornamental but revelatory. Marriage and family show that love has a form, that communion is possible and that transcendence is not beyond our reach but has taken up residence in our home.



Opening the drawer:

TURNING TO ST. ANTHONY FOR GUIDANCE IN PRAYER

I currently find myself chest deep in totes and boxes full of cards, various kinds of memorabilia and clippings I did not know existed in my parents' home. Following the decision to sell my childhood home came the whirlwind of emptying closets and opening drawers I had not opened since I was a child.

"Tell me about all these things in your nightstand, Mom," I wish I could say. Instead, I have been given the opportunity to discover things I never knew about my Mom, Dad and extended family. It has kind of been like I am on a treasure hunt for lost things I did not know still existed.

St. Anthony of Padua is the saint most often recognized as the patron of lost things. He intercedes as people ask him to look around and find what has been lost. He lived his life as an exemplary teacher and preacher performing a few miracles, devoted to baby Jesus, and fervently praying to seek God's will for his life. His work and writings earned him the title of Evangelical Doctor of the Church. We can also turn to him to learn about prayer.

St. Anthony taught that prayer with God includes opening our heart, having affectionate conversation, presenting our needs and giving praise and thanksgiving. To him, prayer was not just reciting words, but having a loving interaction where we come to deeply know God's affection. He taught that persistent prayer brings four spiritual fruits of brightness, agility, subtlety and immortality giving transformation to our souls. St. Anthony believed prayer, coupled with humility and the sign of the cross, was a powerful weapon against temptation. Putting off prayer is a temptation to always guard against.

Prayer is the disposition of turning to God in loving familiarity and intimate conversation.

But how does this loving familiarity happen? As I have grown in wisdom and understanding of God, I have discovered he knows everything about me, even the things I have not discovered about myself yet.

Opening drawers in my mom's dresser was something I did as a child out of curiosity, without permission. But as a grown adult, it seemed no longer appropriate to see what she treasured without permission. I have so many questions now. I am discovering the answers by myself, more than likely with inaccuracies. Even in conversation, I could not have known the innermost thoughts of my mom's heart.

But this is not true with the Lord in prayer. We enter into prayer and allow him to look inside the deepest drawers and tucked away treasure boxes in our heart. In prayer, we give him access to our inner most thoughts and desires. And then, it is there where we learn he already knows us. He knows all the good and the bad things we hope to hide away forever. Opening our souls in prayer is acknowledging our minds and thoughts towards God's grace and good will.

In prayer as his children, he comforts us, guides us, heals us and gives all the things meaning as he gently closes the drawers with his love.



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

Getty Image/lechatnoir

On not being stingy with God's mercy

Shortly after my ordination, doing replacement work in a parish, I found myself in a rectory with a saintly old priest. He was over 80, nearly blind, but widely sought out and respected. One night, alone with him, I asked him:
"If you had your priesthood to live over again, would you do anything differently?"

From a man so full of integrity, I had fully expected that there would be no regrets. So, his answer surprised me. Yes, he did have a regret, a major one. He said: "If I had my priesthood to do over again, I would be easier on people the next time. I wouldn't be so stingy with God's mercy, with the sacraments, with forgiveness. You see what was drilled into me in the seminary was the phrase: *The truth will set you free.* So, I believed it was my responsibility always to give a hard challenge, and that can be good. But I fear that I was too hard on people. They have pain enough without me and the Church laying further burdens on them. *I should have risked God's mercy more!"*

This struck me because, less than a year before, as I took my final exams in the seminary, one of the priests who examined me gave me this warning: "Be careful," he said, "never let your feelings get in the way. Don't be soft, that's wrong. Remember, hard as it is, the truth sets people free!" Sound advice, it would seem, for a young priest.

However, after 50 years in ministry, I'm more inclined to the old priest's advice: We need to risk more of God's mercy. The place of justice and truth should never be ignored, but we must risk letting the infinite, unbounded, unconditional, undeserved mercy of God flow more freely. The mercy of God is as accessible as the nearest water tap, and so we, like Isaiah, must proclaim a mercy that has no price tag: *Come, come without money, without virtue. Come, drink freely of God's mercy!*

What holds us back? Why are we so hesitant in proclaiming God's inexhaustible, prodigal, indiscriminate mercy?

Partly our motives are good, noble even. The concern for truth, justice, sound orthodoxy, proper morality, public form, proper sacramental preparation and fear of scandal are not unimportant.

But sometimes our motives are less noble and our hesitancy arises more out of timidity, fear, legalism, the self-righteousness of the Pharisees and an impoverished understanding of God. Thus, no cheap grace is dispensed on our watch!

In doing this we are, I fear, misguided, less than good shepherds, out of tune with the God that Jesus incarnated. God's mercy, as Jesus revealed it, embraces indiscriminately, like the sun that shines equally on the good as well as the bad, the deserving and the undeserving, the initiated and the uninitiated.

One of the truly startling insights that Jesus gave us is that the mercy of God cannot not go out to everyone. It's always free, undeserved, unconditional, universal in embrace, reaching beyond all religion, custom, rubric, political affiliation, mandatory program, ideology and even sin itself.

For our part then, especially those of us who are parents, ministers, teachers, catechists and elders, we must risk proclaiming the prodigal character of God's mercy. We must not dispense God's mercy as if it were ours to dispense; dole out God's forgiveness as if it were a limited commodity; put conditions on God's love as if God needs to be protected; or cut off access to God as if we were the keeper of the heavenly gates. We aren't. If we tie God's mercy to our own timidity and fear, we limit it to the size of our own minds. A bad game.

It is interesting to note in the Gospels how the apostles, well-meaning of course, often tried to keep certain people away from Jesus as if they weren't worthy, as if they were an affront to his holiness or would somehow taint his purity. So, they tried to send away children, prostitutes, tax collectors, known sinners and the uninitiated of all kinds. Always, Jesus overruled their attempts with words to this effect: "Let them come to me. I want them to come."

Things haven't changed. Perennially, we, well-intentioned persons, for the same reasons as the apostles, continue trying to keep certain individuals and groups away from God's mercy as it is accessible in Christian word, sacrament and community. Jesus managed things then; I suspect that he can manage them now. *God doesn't need our gatekeeping.*

What God wants is for everyone — regardless of age, religion, culture, personal weakness or lack of Christian practice — is to come to the unlimited waters of divine mercy.



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BY RACHEL ESPINOZA,
Senior Editor, FAITH Catholic

PHOTOGRAPHY AND STYLING BY
SHANE EDWARD PHOTOGRAPHY

CHARRO BEANS



INGREDIENTS:

- 2 15 oz. cans pinto beans, rinsed and drained
- 1/2 lb. bacon, diced
- 4–5 plum tomatoes
- ½ yellow or white onion, chopped
- 1–3 chipotles in adobo from can, chopped (based on heat preference)
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 c. chicken stock (or water)
- ½ t. Mexican oregano
- ½ t. salt
- freshly cracked black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

Rinse tomatoes, roast in the oven at 400° for approximately 20 minutes. Roughly chop when cooled.

- Cook bacon in a large pot over medium-high heat until lightly browned.
- Add onion to bacon, stir to combine. Cook until tender, stirring frequently.
- Reduce heat to medium. Add garlic and cook briefly, 30-60 seconds.
- Add tomatoes to the pot. Add beans, chipotles, oregano, salt, pepper, stock. Combine well, simmer until liquid has reduced slightly and beans get saucy (15 min).
- Taste and adjust seasoning if desired.
- Delicious in a rice bowl with avocado and a fried egg, or in tacos and nachos.

CELE



A TIME TO BRATE!

Ah, May! This is the time of year when in many parts of the northern United States, the weather *finally* starts to get nicer – that blessed time when restaurants pull out their patio furniture for al fresco dining. After a long winter, there's nothing as nice as enjoying a meal in the open air.

Back in our newlywed days, my husband and I were regular patrons of a local Mexican restaurant in our neighborhood that had a large outdoor patio with gorgeous painted murals and traditional decor. We learned quickly, though, to check the calendar and avoid this spot around Cinco de Mayo (May 5). While a very minor observance in some Mexican communities, this day seemed to bring everyone out of the woodwork in search of good Mexican food!

Aside from other holidays such as Mother's Day and Memorial Day, May is packed with faith-filled reasons for celebration. We're still in the Easter season, which, the Church reminds us, lasts for 50 days. (Our challenge is to keep the *fiesta* (party) going all the way to Pentecost!) Other feasts that help us keep up the spirit of celebration this month include St. Joseph the Worker (May 1), Ascension (May 14/17), Pentecost (May 24) and Trinity Sunday (May 31).

On May 21, we also commemorate St. Christopher Magallanes and his 24 companions, martyrs of the Cristero war (1926-29). Despite violent anti-Catholic persecution, they continued to minister in secret to the faithful, mostly in Jalisco and Zacatacas, Mexico, ultimately giving their lives in service to God and their brothers and sisters in Christ.

In honor of St. Christopher Magallanes and his fellow companions, we offer this charro beans recipe. Named after the charros (traditional Mexican horsemen or cowboys) who would cook these beans over an open campfire, may this tasty side dish spice up your next celebration!



DEACON GENE JAGER died April 17. Deacon Jager was ordained in 1983. He served many years at Our Lady of the Americas and St. Peter Vietnamese Catholic Community, both in Des Moines, and in leadership as the diocesan director of the Permanent Diaconate Office. In addition, he mentored other deacons as he and his wife, Diana, were co-directors of the deacon formation program for more than 14 years. His visitation and Memorial Mass were April 28 at St. Peter Church in Des Moines.



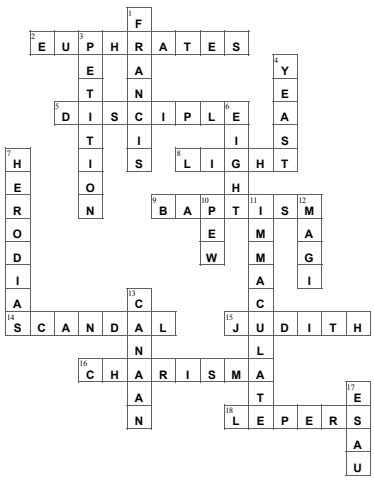
HUMILITY SISTER MARIAN SMITH, 97, died April 11. She entered the Congregation of the Humility of Mary in 1948, professing first vows in 1951. In the Des Moines Diocese, she taught at St. Anthony and St. Theresa in Des Moines and served as principal of St. Anthony School from 1968-1975 She moved to Bishop Drumm Retirement Center in Johnston in 2022. Her Mass of Christian Burial was April 18 followed by internment in Mt. Calvary Cemetery in Davenport.

Continued from page 5

"Como en el caso de todas las amistades verdaderas, por medio del Rosario se nos permite 'compartir los sentimientos más profundos de Cristo'.... Entonces el Rosario es la 'verdadera puerta a las profundidades del Corazón de Cristo'. La intimidad concreta que vivimos a través del Rosario nos impulsa a entrar en su 'caminar interno' que nos lleva a 'un contacto viviente con el misterio de Cristo y la Santísima Madre.'"

La mayoría de nosotros nunca ganaremos un premio de primer lugar en los Drake Relays. Pero así estemos en un centro de cuidado, atorados en el tráfico, en nuestra silla favorita, o arrodillados en adoración ante el Santísimo Sacramento, todos tenemos acceso al óvalo azul por el cual nuestro camino espiritual difícilmente está solamente dando vueltas. Le pedimos a María que "'ruegue por nosotros ahora y en la hora de nuestra muerte,' ella es el canal de gracia que nos permite confiar que su Hijo permanece plenamente a nuestra disposición." Su amor "siempre está presente, poderoso y empujándonos hacia adelante," a la vez que no nos quita nuestras debilidades. Porque al igual que para María, su gracia es suficiente para nosotros.

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MAY 24
PENTECOST! COME, HOLY SPIRIT!

JUNE 3
Corpus Christi Concert
All are invited to a concert in honor of Corpus Christi starting at 7 p.m. at St. Augustin Church in Des Moines performed by St. augustin Choir with members of the choirs of the Basilica of St. John and the Diocese of Des Moines. Free-will offering.

JUNE 5
DES MOINES
Join Young Catholics of Des Moines for First Friday Mass and fellowship. Mass is at 5:30 p.m. at Christ the King Catholic Church in Des Moines, followed by dinner. All young adults are welcome.

JUNE 7
Corpus Christi Procession
Join us beginning at 4 p.m. for a Corpus Christi procession with dinner to follow at St. Augustin Church in Des Moines. All are invited as we process through the neighborhood. All Knights of Columbus are invited to dress in their regalia and First Communion classes are invited to come in their First Communion attire. Golf cart assistance will be available for those with difficulty walking.

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. Chart a course of meaning, purpose and greatness, while hearing Father Reed Flood, chaplain at Dowling Catholic High School; Father Max Carson, chaplain at St. Albert Catholic School; Katie Hopping, campus minister at St. Albert Catholic School; and more. Get more information at dmdiocese.org/events

JULY 22-26
CORALVILLE
For the first time in its 122-year history, the national biennial convention of the Catholic Daughters of the Americas will be in Iowa July 22-26. The convention at the Coralville Hyatt Regency Hotel and Conference Center in Coralville is an opportunity for the CDA sisters to pray together, celebrate, conduct organizational business and highlight activities and sites of Iowa.

AUG. 15
ANKENY
Invited to Joy marriage preparation workshop will be at Our Lady's Immaculate Heart in Ankeny from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Gain a deeper understanding of the sacrament of marriage. For more information, contact Justin White at 515-237-5098 or jwhite@dmdiocese.org.

SEPT. 26-27
CHRIST OUR LIFE CATHOLIC 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.

NOV. 21
DES MOINES
Join Pulse Life Advocates at their annual Christmas gala featuring actor Jim Caviezel from 5 p.m.-9 p.m. at the Iowa Events Center in Des Moines. Tickets can be purchased at PulseLife.org. For more information call 515-255-4113.

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

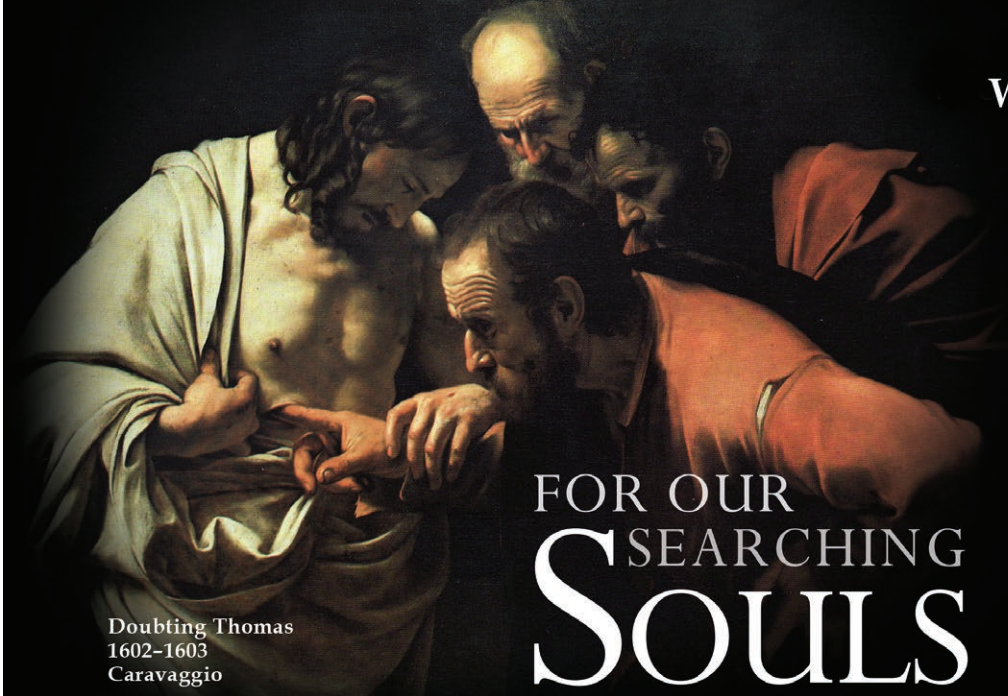


The Catholic Mirror
601 Grand Ave.
Des Moines, IA 50309

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

CHRIST OUR LIFE

September 26 & 27, 2026 • Casey's Center (formerly Wells Fargo Arena) • Des Moines, Iowa



Doubting Thomas
1602–1603
Caravaggio

FOR OUR SEARCHING SOULS

World-Class Speakers:

Father Robert Spitzer
Bishop Joseph A Espaillat
Sister Medhin Tesfay
Chris Stefanick
Gabriel Castillo
Crystalina Evert
Charbel Raish
Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow
Bishop William Joensen
Steve Angrisano

All-Weekend Pass/In-Person and Livestream Tickets:
Adults: $30 Youth: Ages 23 and under FREE
(All attendees must have tickets from COL website
or from the back of your parish)
ChristOurLifeIowa.com 866-319-0616

Spanish language headsets will be available on-site.