Support Catholic Religious in Their Mission, Ministries, Pope Says

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

During the Year of Consecrated Life, all Catholics are called to thank God for the gifts members of religious orders have given the Church and the world, to join them in prayer and find practical ways to support them and their ministries, Pope Francis said.

“Let them know the affection and the warmth which the entire Christian people feels for them,” the pope said in a letter issued for the special year, which opened Nov. 30 and will close Feb. 2, 2016, the feast of the Presentation of the Lord.

The Apostolic Penitentiary, a Vatican court, issued a note Nov. 28 specifying that both lay and consecrated people can receive an indulgence for participating in events related to the Year of Consecrated Life, going to confession, receiving the Eucharist and offering prayers for the intentions of the pope.

In his letter, Pope Francis also offered greetings to Orthodox communities of monks and nuns, and to members of Protestant religious orders, who also take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and are “expressions of fraternal communion and service.” Dialogue between Catholic religious and those of other traditions “can prove helpful for the greater journey toward the unity of all the churches,” he said.

The bulk of the pope’s letter and video messages he sent for a Nov. 29 prayer vigil in Rome and the year’s opening Mass the next day in St. Peter’s Basilica were addressed specifically to the world’s more than 900,000 Catholic religious priests, brothers, sisters and consecrated virgins.

“Leave your nests and go out to the peripheries,” he told those at the vigil in the Basilica of St. Mary Major. “Live on the frontiers” where people are waiting to hear and understand the Gospel.

“Wake up the world, enlightening it with your prophetic and countercultural witness,” he said in the message to those at Mass in St. Peter’s the next morning.

“Being joyful,” he said in the message, “being courageous” and “being men and women of communion” are the common traits of the founders of religious orders and are the key to their future.

More MISSION, page 11

Pope Prays in Istanbul Mosque, Rallies Local Christians

By Francis X. Rocca
Catholic News Service

A day after hearing Turkish leaders demand the West show more respect for Islam, Pope Francis prayed alongside a Muslim cleric inside Istanbul’s most famous mosque.

At the Blue Mosque, Istanbul’s grand mufti Rahmi Yaran led Pope Francis to the mosque’s “mihrab,” a niche indicating the direction to the holy city Mecca. He explained that the name is related to that of Jesus’ mother, Mary, who is revered by Muslims.

Then, as the grand mufti continued speaking, the pope fell silent and remained so for several minutes, with head bowed, eyes closed and hands clasped in front of him.

More ISTANBUL MOSQUE, page 10

Celebrating Advent

Advent began on Nov. 30, as shown with the lighting of the Advent Wreath at Our Lady of Mercy Church in Roaring Creek, where Bishop Ronald Gainer celebrated Mass. See photos from the Mass on page 2, and find The Catholic Witness’ continuation of Advent resources on page 7. You can also find daily postings of ornaments for a Jesse Tree on the diocese’s Facebook page, www.facebook.com/DiocecesoHarrisburg, and additional Advent resources at www.hbgdiocese.org.
Bishop Makes Pastoral Visit to Roaring Creek to begin Advent

By Emily M. Albert
The Catholic Witness

Bishop Ronald Gainer celebrated Mass with the community of Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Roaring Creek on Nov. 30, the first Sunday of Advent. Concelebrating the Mass was the parish’s pastor, Father Thomas Mannion, who will celebrate 50 years as a priest this coming spring and has been with Our Lady of Mercy Parish for 25 and a half years.

On the first Sunday of Advent, in his homily, Bishop Gainer encouraged the faithful to refrain from treating Advent like a precious gem or a museum piece that we admire at church, but to use it and be open to the grace of the season. We need to not just see the value of Advent, but actually use it.

During Communion, the bishop was introduced to Nicholas Jessick, a parishioner who was celebrating his 17th birthday. At the end of Mass, Bishop Gainer commented that the song “Happy Birthday” is 90 years old this year, and invited Mr. Jessick forward as the congregation bellowed a joyful song of “Happy Birthday.”

The parish is observing Advent with its annual Advent Giving Tree to benefit the CHAS program of Columbia, Montour, Snyder and Union counties. Donated gifts will include personal care items and cleaning supplies. The goal of the program is to assist individuals with behavioral health to acquire daily community living skills which make treatment in the least constrictive setting a reality, not an ideal.

The services that the CHAS program provides are to house, support, assist, teach, train and motivate individuals using recovery-based initiatives, obtain the necessary skills to live independently.

Our Lady of Mercy Parish is also conducting its annual Holiday Food Drive of non-perishable items through Dec. 21. All contributions will be given to local families and food banks for the needy.

Members of Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Roaring Creek gather for Mass on the first Sunday of Advent, celebrated by Bishop Ronald Gainer.

Bishop Ronald Gainer greets longtime parishioner Catherine Hanley, 88, after Mass.

Bishop Ronald Gainer greets parishioner Nicholas Jessick during Communion.

Organist Frank Delucca lends his musical talent to the celebration of Mass on the first Sunday of Advent.

Emily M. Albert, The Catholic Witness
Retirement Fund Benefits 35,000 Religious
Collection Set for December 13 and 14

The 27th national collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious will be held December 13-14 in the Diocese of Harrisburg. The annual, parish-based appeal is coordinated by the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) in Washington and benefits more than 35,000 senior Catholic sisters, brothers and religious order priests.

Last year, the Diocese of Harrisburg contributed $63,122.86 to this collection. In 2014, the Sisters of Sts. Cyril and Methodius received financial support made possible by the Retirement Fund for Religious. Additionally, the Diocese of Harrisburg, in conjunction with the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Allentown, also distributes funding to local religious communities to support retirement needs.

The 2013 appeal raised nearly $28.4 million, enabling the NRRO to distribute $23 million in financial assistance to 424 religious communities. Additional funding is allocated for communities with the greatest needs and for retirement planning and educational resources.

Catholic bishops in the United States initiated the collection in 1988 to address the significant lack of retirement funding among U.S. religious communities. Proceeds are distributed to eligible communities to help underwrite such needs. Since the collection began, Catholics have contributed $726 million. Over 93 percent of donations directly support senior religious and their communities.

Despite the overwhelming generosity to this fund, many religious communities continue to lack resources sufficient to support retirement and eldercare. Of 909 communities submitting data to the NRRO in 2013, fewer than eight percent were fully funded for retirement.

The financial crisis is rooted in low salaries and changing demographics. Traditionally, Catholic sisters, brothers and religious order priests—known collectively as women and men religious—worked for small stipends that furnished only the basics of daily living. As a result, many communities lack adequate retirement savings. At the same time, elderly religious are living longer and now outnumber younger, wage-earning religious. Sixty-eight percent of religious in communities providing data to the NRRO are past age 70, and the income of those engaged in compensated ministry cannot keep pace with the growing cost of eldercare. In 2013 alone, the total cost of care for senior women and men religious was over $1.2 billion.

“Despite the troubling statistics, many religious communities have made great strides in addressing their funding deficits, and contributions to the Retirement Fund for Religious have bolstered this progress,” said Precious Blood Sister Janice Bader, NRRO’s executive director. “Religious are humbled by the generous donations to this fund and determined to make the most out of every dollar.”

Visit www.retiredreligious.org to learn more.

Catholic Witness

December 5, 2014

BISHOP GAINER’S PUBLIC CALENDAR

• December 5 – Keynote Address for the National Association of Diocesan Directors Region III Assembly, Eden Resort, Lancaster, 8:30 p.m.
• December 6 – Celebrate Mass for the National Association of Diocesan Directors Region III Assembly, Eden Resort, Lancaster, 11 a.m.
• December 7 – Pastoral Visit to Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish, Marysville, 8:30 a.m.; Speak at Advent Day of Reflection for Deacons, Cardinal Keeler Center, Harrisburg, 2:30 p.m.
• December 9-10 – Pennsylvania Religious Leaders Gathering, Nittany Lion Inn, State College, Pa.
• December 11 – Preside at Parish Penance Service, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church, Mechanicsburg, 7 p.m.
• December 14 – Pastoral visit to Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Abbotstown, 11 a.m.
• December 15 – Preside at Parish Penance Service, Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Enola, 7 p.m.
• December 16 – Preside at Parish Penance Service, Holy Name of Jesus Church, Harrisburg, 7 p.m.
• December 19 – Evening Vespers and Dinner with Seminarians, Cardinal Keeler Center, Harrisburg, 5 p.m.
• December 21 – Pastoral Visit to St. Joseph Parish, Dallastown, 11 a.m.

Feast of the Immaculate Conception is December 8

On December 8, the Church observes the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This feast celebrates the fact that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, in order to be a most perfect vessel for the Savior, was herself conceived without original sin. This original sin, described in the book of Genesis, is the essential bereavement that comes with being human. It’s the fallen part of our nature that leads us into actual sin.

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception is a holy day of obligation.

There is no direct reference to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Scripture, however, Mary being conceived without original sin is something that the Church has believed from its earliest centuries. The writings of the ancient Fathers of the Church make many references to the Immaculate Conception. The celebration of a feast day in honor of the Immaculate Conception began in 1708, when Pope Clement XI promulgated the document Commissi Nobis Divinitus.

The Church received a formal declaration of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in the Constitution Ineffabilis Deus of December 8, 1854. In that document, Pius IX pronounced and defined that the Blessed Virgin Mary, “in the first instance of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace granted by God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin.”

The Church regards this feast as so important that December 8th is a Holy Day of Obligation, on which Catholics are obliged to participate in the sacred liturgy. This is particularly apropos in the United States, where Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception is our national patroness.

Holy light on earth’s horizon, Light of hope to those who fall, Light amid a world of shadows, Dawn of God’s design for all. Chosen from eternal ages, You alone of all our race. By your Son’s atoning merits Were we delivered from perdition, Hail, beloved of the Father, Mother of his only Son, Mystic bride of Love eternal, Hail, O fair and spotless one! (Hymn for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, from Magnificat)

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RETROUVAILLE

A program to Help Couples Heal and Renew their Marriages

Do you feel lost, alone or bored in your marriage? Are you frustrated or angry with each other? Do you argue....or have just stopped talking to each other? Does talking about it make it even worse?

Retrovaille helps couples rebuild their marriages. For information, or to register for the Harrisburg program weekend on January 16-18, 2015, please call 1-800-470-2230 or visit the Web site at www.retrovaille.org.
World Youth Day in Krakow

July 26-31 with Pope Francis

• Daily Mass and catechesis sessions
• Tours of historical sites, cultural programs and exhibitions

Local World Youth Day Events Open to All

World Youth Day Opening Mass
February 7, 2015, at the Cardinal Keeler Center in Harrisburg
Sacrament of Reconciliation at 9 a.m.
Mass at 10 a.m., followed by a gathering

Catechesis on the Holocaust
April 15 and 16, 2015 at Lancaster Catholic High School
Mass marking one year until the WYD
July 30-31, 2016

World Youth Day Catechesis Sessions
December 5, 2015
March 5, 2016
June 11, 2016

Cardinal Keeler Center in Harrisburg
Sacrament of Reconciliation at 9 a.m.
Catechesis sessions from 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

World Youth Day Send Off
July 16, 2016, at the Cardinal Keeler Center in Harrisburg
Sacrament of Reconciliation at 9 a.m.
Mass at 10 a.m., followed by a gathering

Stateside Vigil and WYD Mass
July 30-31, 2016
Location TBA

The Eucharist: Contemplation

By Sister Geralyn Schmidt, SCC
Special to The Witness

It never ceases to amaze me how infants can communicate with adults without ever uttering a word. Some time ago, I watched my niece begin to crawl out of sight of her brother-in-law. He looked over his Sunday paper to watch his nine-month-old daughter crawl out of the living room. He called to her, “Rachel, no!” She took two “steps” and sat up. My brother-in-law said, “Rachel, no!” With that, she looked down as if she was thinking about the meaning of his tone. Her brother-in-law cocked his head and raised his eyebrows. She looked at him, looked down at her hands and then began to wail, and I began to laugh. I was so amazed that as young as she was, she took the time to apparently think of what the word “no” actually meant. It seemed to me that she had been deliberating what his words meant for her. Her body language told me that this was the case, even if her cognitive abilities were only at nine months old.

I could not help of thinking about this when I came across a Chapter in The Eucharist: Our Sanctification, by Raniero Cantalamessa, (The Liturgical Press, 1993) entitled “The Eucharist makes the Church through Contemplation.” In this chapter, Cantalamessa notes that “Contemplation is the set course for passing from communion with Christ in Mass to the imitation of Christ in life.” (p. 54) So, if we have a universal call to holiness, we have a universal call to contemplation through our thoughts, our words and then by our actions. Let me explain.

For holiness is a lifelong process of seeking God through the person of Jesus Christ. (Wikipedia) The Catechism of the Catholic Church says it this way: “All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity. All are called to holiness: ‘Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.’ In order to reach this perfection the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ’s gift, so that... doing the will of the Father in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor.” (CCC, 2013)

As I type this, I can hear you asking yourself, “How do I do that?” Let us look to our blessed Mother Mary as our role model in the process of becoming holy. As a young Jewish woman, living in the first century of Israel, the word of God was very much a part of her life. How do I know that? Shortly after the angel announced to Mary of her call to motherhood, she ventures out to assist Elizabeth, her cousin, in the birth of John the Baptist. After these two women exchanged greetings, Mary proclaims the amazing prayer of thanks and praise which we call “The Magnificat.” This prayer contains allusions to scripture from the books of Isaiah, Job, Genesess as well as six different Psalms. This was no “fly-by” prayer, but a pronouncement of Mary’s personal faith. Reflecting on this, Augustine wrote, “Mary conceived the Word first in her mind and then in her body.” She pondered in her being all the events of her life that were surrounded by Jesus, her son. This “pondering” is, I believe, an example of profound contemplation.

Cantalamessa puts it this way: “To contemplate is to intuitionally fix the mind on the divine reality (this could be God himself, or one of his attributes, or a mystery of Christ’s life) and relish his presence.” (p 61) The pondering of Christ in our life leads us to Eucharistic contemplation. Through it, the Paschal mystery, the dying, and rising of Jesus, can seep into our life leads us to Eucharistic contemplation. Through it, the Pascal mystery, the dying, and rising of Jesus, can seep into our minds, our hearts and to the core of our being, our soul. This process changes not only our perspective of life, but also our behavior. Through it, we begin to embody the behavior of the Eucharistic prayer and to enshil the today’s world.

I encourage you to spend time, in silence, in front of the Blessed Sacrament, pondering not only the Eucharistic prayer, but also words of scripture. It is a process that takes a lifetime. But, one day, you can echo with Mary, “My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord.” (Sister of Christian Charity, Geralyn Schmidt, is the Wide Area Network Coordinator at the Diocese of Harrisburg and a member of the IT Department. An educator for 28 years, she is responsible for Professional Development Programs for every age learner. Through her presentations, she challenges her audiences to be the individual God has called them to be.)
Agenda for World Meeting of Families Doesn’t Shy away from Issues

Cardinal O’Malley, Father Barron, Professor Alvarez among Presenters

By Matthew Gambino

Catholic News Service

A glance at the topics to be presented at next year’s World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia, including premarital sex, homosexuality, infertility and celibacy, might give the impression that it’s all about sexuality and the Catholic Church’s teaching on it.

But Mary Beth Yount, a theology professor at Neumann University and director of content and programming for the World Meeting of Families, believes it is much more than that.

“It’s not all about sex,” she said. “We’re pulling in the larger context, not just human sexuality and not just family relationships. This is for all people in all walks of life: married, dating, single by choice, celibate.”

Organizers of the Sept. 22-25, 2015, meeting that is expected to draw some 12,000 individuals and families from around the world have posted the preliminary congress agenda on the Web site www.worldmeeting2015.org, displaying the daily schedule of official congress events held at the Pennsylvania Convention Center.

The congress will examine “how best to be in human relationships and to stand up for others,” Yount said.

“What are the ways we can live fruitful lives?”

Sexuality, she said, “doesn’t just mean people having sex. That is a fundamental expression that includes married people, but it also means engaging the world in other ways. It’s a self-giving love: married people, single people by choice, and celibacy.”

The congress doesn’t shy away from topics such as divorce, interfaith marriage, living with disabilities and addictions in families, and the emotional pain caused by damaged relationships.

In developing content for the World Meeting of Families, Yount believes it is important to acknowledge “the pain and brokenness of life” as well as to emphasize the positive message of Catholic teaching.

“We’re focusing on the positive, from the beginning,” she told CatholicPhilly.com, the Philadelphia Archdiocese’s news Web site. “Church teachings aren’t oppressive dictates. The focus is on the faith, [exploring] what is our ultimate relationship with God and its richness, and how do we live it out? How can we support each other to live the lives we want to live, in our family, our parish and our wider Church?”

Specific biographies of presenters and session descriptions were still being worked out. But already the lineup presents an impressive array of speakers, many of whom are well-known advocates for the topics they will address over the four days of the congress.

The first keynote address of the congress will be “Living as the Image of God: Created for Joy and Love,” delivered Sept. 22 by Father Robert Barron, the rector of the Chicago Archdiocese’s Mundelein Seminary and host of the landmark DVD series “Catholicism.”

Father Barron is one of the most popular Catholic speakers in America today.

The next day will begin a pattern to be repeated in each of the following days – two keynote sessions per day followed by a choice of 13 to 14 breakout sessions, each accommodating between 700 and 1,000 people. Yount estimated that 75 percent of the break-out sessions will offer practical skills related to the keynote’s topic.

Each hourlong keynote talk, translated for participants into at least four other languages, takes as its theme a portion of the World Meeting of Families’ preparatory catechesis, “Love is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive.”

The document was edited by Philadelphia resident Christopher Roberts and approved by the Pontifical Council for the Family at the Vatican. It presents Catholic teaching on the family and its vital role in society.

Boston Cardinal Sean P. O’Malley will deliver the keynote talk the morning of Sept. 23. His theme of “The Light of the Family in a Dark World” will draw from the catechism’s teaching of the family as “a school of love, justice, compassion, forgiveness, mutual respect, patience and humility in the midst of a world darkened by selfishness and conflict.”

At the same time in the convention center, Los Angeles Archbishop Jose H. Gomez will speak on poverty and immigration issues in “Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor …” and French author and theologian Yves Sempe will speak on his specialty of the theology of the body and its intersection with politics and economics in “Can Society Exist Without the Family?”

Meanwhile, a talk on the concerns of the family in the inner city will be delivered by the Rev. Terence D. Griffith, pastor of First African Baptist Church of Philadelphia and president of the Black Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity.

He is among the 24 percent of speakers at the congress who are not from the Catholic tradition – including Protestant Christian, Mormon, Jewish and Muslim – but who nonetheless offer experience and expertise to the congress’ content, even if many speakers are not household names.

One of the keynotes Sept. 24 – and many of the breakout sessions – will deal with the topic of sexuality, with such issues as the “hook-up” culture of premarital sex; a study of Blessed Pope Paul VI’s encyclical “Humanae Vitae” (On Human Life); infertility; and homosexuality.

The World Meeting of Families wraps up Sept. 25, when African Cardinal Robert Sarah of Guinea, president of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, will speak on “The Joy of the Gospel of Life.”

Register Now

Information and registration for the conference is available at www.worldmeeting2015.org. Information about the Festival of Families and the Papal Mass, as well as details on buses running from locations throughout the Diocese of Harrisburg will be published in The Catholic Witness as it becomes available.

A Nun’s Life’ Web site Becomes a Growing Vocations Ministry

By Mark Pattison

Catholic News Service

What started out as a blog at a time when few people knew about blogs and hardly anyone was familiar with Twitter is a living and growing ministry run by two women religious who are also Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Sisters Julie and Maxine Kollasch oversee their Web site “A Nun’s Life” from Toledo, Ohio, which is a quick drive from their order’s motherhouse in Monroe, Michigan.

Soon they will be joined by a third sister because the Internet ministry continues to expand. Blogs have been joined by podcasts and heart-to-heart question-and-answer message boards for women – the site has become a valuable resource for anyone. It was very small, with a free WordPress blog.

“A Nun’s Life came from a joint realization by Sisters Julie and Maxine along with their religious superiors that the order’s newest members had somehow found in the online world, and that their own order – and many others besides – could benefit from an online presence,” one was out there defining who we are as Catholic sisters,” she said.

“People are on the Internet,” it has been said, “and we need to be there with them.”

“A Nun’s Life” is a spin-off of the Web site “The Nun Project,” which itself was started by a sister. “You let me see that religious are people, and all the dumb questions,” she said he told A Nun’s Life.

Sisters Julie and Maxine were “both technically very small, with a free WordPress blog.”

“A Nun’s Life was ‘asking, ‘What’s it like to be a sister?’ and busting some stereotypes,” Sister Julie recalled.

“A Nun’s Life” has been their order’s ministry ever since.

In thinking of the missionary sisters “of today and yesterday, and all the things they had to do – build a house, find water” – it seems that what they are doing with A Nun’s Life is not all that different, she said.

She and Sister Maxine were “both technically savvy,” she added. “We were looking [online] for stuff on nuns, sisters, religious life. All we found were caricatures, very Setheitic, very fundamentalistic. It was very frustrating, so one was out there defining who we are as Catholic sisters.”

A Nun’s Life came from a joint realization by Sisters Julie and Maxine along with their religious superiors that the order’s newest members had somehow found in the online world, and that their own order – and many others besides – could benefit from an online presence.

“Facebook was just growing in 2006. Twitter started in 2006,” Sister Julie said. “We started small, very small, with a free WordPress blog.”

Back then, she added, the prevailing attitude was, “Oh! You’re Catholic sisters. Oh! You have computers! Oh! You’re using the Internet!”

“A Nun’s Life was saying, ‘What’s it like to be a sister?’ and bust[ing] some stereotypes,” Sister Julie said. “Then it became, ‘What’s it like to pray when God isn’t there?’”

She added that her favorite story from A Nun’s Life is that of a young man who took vows as a Dominican novice in the Netherlands. He gave much of the credit to A Nun’s Life for aiding his discernment. “You’re the ones who helped me, let me ask all the dumb questions,” she said he told A Nun’s Life. “You let me see that religious are people, and now I am one, too.”

Sister Julie herself had no access to any kind of online vocation or discernment Web site before she entered religious life in 1997. A native of Rochester, New York, she was working for a Catholic publishing house and studying theology in graduate school.

“I never imagined myself as a sister,” she told CNS, adding she thought all nuns fit the popular stereotype of women in full habits and teaching in schools.

In her studies, she said she found herself “captivated by the theology of [Father] Karl Rahner. … It got to the point, ‘Why is this affecting my prayer life?’”

When Sister Julie approached her professor about this, he said she might benefit from spiritual direction. “I said, ‘What?’” she remembered reacting. The spiritual director turned out to be an Immaculate Heart of Mary Sister. “After several months, I was listening to her … talking about my sisters’” with a warmth and love one would expect about blood sisters,” Sister Julie recalled.

“I encouraged her to explore religious life “to be faithful to who I am as a Catholic woman,” she said.

“I felt I had to do it, at least to cross it off my list.”

And now Sister Julie is helping others be faithful to themselves as they explore vocations.
Parishioner’s Response to Holy Spirit Results in Mission for Those in Need of Comfort

By Jen Reed
The Catholic Witness

“We must find the Lord who consoles us and go to conso- late the people of God. This is the mission. People today certainly need words, but most of all they need us to bear witness to the mercy and tenderness of the Lord, which warms the heart, rekindles hope, and attracts people to- wards the good. What a joy it is to bring God’s consola- tion to others!”

Pope Francis delivered this message during a Mass in July 2013 for people discerning their vocation. In it, the Holy Father exhorts the faithful to follow the invitation in Isaiah 40:1: “Comfort, comfort my people.”

It’s a message that has become a credo for Barbara Tritle and the Mission of Comfort outreach that she coor- dinates through Corpus Christi Parish in Chambersburg. The organization distributes new stuffed animals to people in need of consolation, offering the cuddly critters as a reminder of God’s unceasing and loving presence in their lives.

The plush figures are outfitted with a handmade scarf, an individual name tag, and a message that reads: “I have been sent by God to be your friend. I am here to hold your hand, give you a hug, and let you know that you are loved and never alone!”

Through the efforts of Mrs. Tritle and a dozen volun- teers, the Mission of Comfort has distributed more than 3,500 stuffed animals to men, women and children in 22 states and five countries. Recipients have included chil- dren at The Ronald McDonald House in Hershey, on- cology patients at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, nursing home residents, individuals grieving the loss of a loved one, pediatric AIDS patients in Africa, and wound- ed soldiers at the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany.

“There are countless wonderful missions, organizations and service projects out there, and mine is just one among many, but this outreach is my way of serving people in need. This is my response to what the Holy Spirit placed on my heart,” Mrs. Tritle said.

Her home in Chambersburg is “mission central” for the Mission of Comfort. Boxes of new stuffed animals that routinely arrive here are stored throughout the house. Some are donated by volunteers, while others are pur- chased with donated funds at local stores or through the mission’s account with the Ganz company.

All sorts of plush figures are lined up on desks and ta- bles, waiting to be individualized and distributed. Stuffed toys range from floppy white lambs and special Rosary bears, to neon frogs, posed teddy bears, and Disney char- acters.

“God doesn’t ever think small, so if I’m serving him, how can I think small?” Mrs. Tritle said, gesturing to the boxes of materials spread throughout her dining room.

Mrs. Tritle says she received the message from the Holy Spirit to begin this outreach after a life-changing event.

She had awoken on Good Friday, and, without warning, Mrs. Tritle says she received the message from the Holy Spirit that the Lord was telling her, “You are not alone. You will be the hands and feet of God. Your mission is to bring him to the hungry.”

“I had survived this horrific event, and the message I was getting — loud and clear — was to help console others.”

She selected stuffed animals as the carrier of comfort to send, and by Thanksgiving of that year had worked to give nearly 500 of them to people in need of support.

As her outreach effort began to grow, so did her desire to keep the mission running. “I’m not a theologian. I’m not a teacher. And yet, I feel the mission is spreading the work of the Church,” said Mrs. Tritle.

Mrs. Tritle and the volunteers are eager for the attention that it has brought the mission.

“I kept noticing that my dogs were following me every- where. They would never leave my side,” she said. “And then all of a sudden it dawned on me. Just as they are here for me, God is always here for me, too.”

“She reminded me of something I had forgotten about the Lord’s love and mercy,” said Mrs. Tritle.

At the time of her health scare, she had belonged to another Christian church, but wasn’t practicing.

“I started praying. Something had changed in my life. God was telling me he never left my side,” Mrs. Tritle said. “I had survived this horrific event, and the message I was getting — loud and clear — was to help console others.”

One Sunday at her former church, she took commu- nion, and tears rolled down her cheeks as she hungered for the Lord’s love and mercy,” said Mrs. Tritle.

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“The mission is going to be as big as God wants it to be,” Mrs. Tritle said.

“This effort has always been about serving the Lord,” she said. “When you serve the Lord with a pure heart, he will rain down blessings upon you.”

(For information on the Mission of Comfort, contact Barbara Tritle at 717-377-1738 or barbaratritle@gmail.com.)

Within half an hour, she had lost 40 percent of her blood supply, and was being prepped for emergency surgery.

In the months of recuperation that followed, Mrs. Tritle was nursed back to health by her husband and children, and found particular comfort in the presence of her two dogs, Bichon-Shih Tzu mixes.

“I kept noticing that my dogs were following me every- where. They would never leave my side,” she said. “And then all of a sudden it dawned on me. Just as they are here for me, God is always here for me, too.”

“Then they reminded me of something I had forgotten about the Lord’s love and mercy,” said Mrs. Tritle.

At the time of her health scare, she had belonged to another Christian church, but wasn’t practicing.

“I started praying. Something had changed in my life. God was telling me he never left my side,” Mrs. Tritle said. “I had survived this horrific event, and the message I was getting — loud and clear — was to help console others.”

One of those instances occurred the day before Ash Wednesday of this year. Mrs. Tritle had been asked to participate in the Sacrament of Re- onciliation for the first time. Mrs. Tritle went to the con- fessional of Father David Hillier at Our Lady of the Visi- tation Parish in nearby Shippensburg. The priest asked her about the Mission of Comfort, and told her, as part of her Penance, to pray about ways in which to help grow it.

Father Hillier died the next day. Mrs. Tritle knew im- mediately how to respond: comfort his parish. The Mis- sion of Comfort provided 200 stuffed animals to Our Lady of the Visitation Parish in honor of Father Hillier.

The mission is an outreach of Corpus Christi Parish, where Mrs. Tritle is now a member. A dozen volunteers work year-round to raise funds for the project — through sales of T-shirts, bracelets and stuffed animals — and to distribute the cuddly critters to people of all ages and need.

They see their effort as a method of evangelization.

“I’m not a theologian. I’m not a teacher. And yet, I feel that this mission is spreading the work of the Church,” said Mary Burkholder. “It’s a way to show that the Church cares, that we are responding to the call to care for others.”

“With this mission brought so much joy and comfort to my faith life,” she added. “I pray more now and go to Mass more often than I ever have.”

Special Rosary bears and various Beanie Babies are among the hundreds of stuffed animals waiting to be individualized and distributed by the dozen volunteers who give their time and talent to the Mission of Comfort project.
Celebrating Advent as a Family

Blessing of a Christmas Tree

In the home, the Christmas tree may be blessed by a parent or another family member, in connection with the evening meal on the Vigil of Christmas or at another suitable time on Christmas Day.

When all have gathered, a suitable song may be sung. The leader makes the sign of the cross, and all reply: “Amen.” The leader may greet those present in the following words:

Let us glorify Christ our light, who brings salvation and peace into our midst, now and forever.

R/. Amen.

In the following or similar words, the leader prepares those present for the blessing:

My brothers and sisters, amidst signs and wonders Christ Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea: his birth brings joy to our hearts and enlightenment to our minds. With this tree, decorated and adorned, may we welcome Christ among us; may its lights guide us to the perfect day.

With this tree, decorated and adorned, may we welcome Christ among us; may its lights guide us to the perfect day.

The leader says the prayer with hands joined:

Lord our God, we praise you for the light of creation: the sun, the moon, and the stars of the night. We praise you for the light of Israel: the Law, the prophets, and the wisdom of the Scriptures.

May the light and cheer it gives be a sign of the joy that fills our hearts.

May all who delight in this tree be a sign of the joy that fills our hearts.

We praise you for Jesus Christ, your Son: he is Emmanuel, God-with-us, the Prince of Peace, who fills us with the wonder of your love.

Lord God, let your blessing come upon us as we illumine this tree.

May the light and cheer it gives be a sign of the joy that fills our hearts.

May all who delight in this tree come to the knowledge and joy of salvation. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R/. Amen.

The lights of the tree are then illuminated.

The leader concludes the rite by signing himself or herself with the sign of the cross and saying: May the God of glory fill our hearts with peace and joy, now and forever.

R/. Amen.

The blessing concludes with a verse from “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”:

O come, thou dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by thine advent here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night
and death’s dark shadow put to flight.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

(—From “Catholic Household Blessings & Prayers” and www.usccb.org.)

Our Lady of Guadalupe

Feast Day December 12

Our Lady of Guadalupe is the patron saint of Mexico and the Americas. The feast in her honor dates back to the 16th century.

The Virgin of Guadalupe first appeared to Juan Diego on Dec. 9, 1531. The Aztec peasant was a widower, and he lived in a village near Mexico City. That day, he was walking by Tepeyac hill when Our Lady appeared to him, dressed like an Aztec princess.

She spoke to him, telling him that the bishop of Mexico should build a church at the place of her appearance.

When Juan Diego told the local bishop of the apparition, the bishop asked for proof. Juan Diego returned to the hill, where the Blessed Mother appeared again and instructed him to collect the roses growing there, though it was winter. Juan Diego gathered the flowers in his cloak, and when he presented them to the bishop, an imprint of the Blessed Mother appeared where the flowers had been.

In the Mexican tradition, Catholics place flowers around statues and images of Our Lady of Guadalupe to celebrate her feast day. Often, parishes with Hispanic communities celebrate her feast day with liturgies and gatherings at which young people dress as Our Lady of Guadalupe or St. Juan Diego, who was canonized in 2002.


What is that Pink Candle?

By Jen Reed

The Catholic Witness

When I was a child sitting in church during Advent, I couldn’t wait until the Sunday when the priest would light the pink candle on the parish’s Advent wreath.

To my young mind, the pink candle meant that Advent was halfway completed, and Christmas Day was getting closer and closer.

Now, as an adult Catholic, I realize that the escalating anticipation I felt as a child on the third Sunday of Advent was pretty much right in line with the Church’s observance of that day.

The third Sunday of Advent is Gaudete Sunday, meaning Rejoice Sunday. On this day, the focus of the Advent season shifts from “The Lord is coming” to “The Lord is near!”

The traditions of this Sunday date back to the fourth or fifth century, just like the season of Advent itself.

The Web site www.foryourmarriage.org, a marriage initiative of the United States Council of Catholic Bishops, notes that, because Advent was originally a 40-day season like Lent, Gaudete Sunday marked the midpoint, just as Laetare Sunday marks the middle of the Lenten season.

In addition to the lighting of the rose-colored candle on Gaudete Sunday – which is December 14 this year – priests also wear rose-colored vestments to signify the lighter mood and joyous anticipation of Christ’s coming.

When our anticipation of Christmas becomes negative, or a “Bah Humpug!” attitude creeps into our minds from the commercialization of the season, Gaudete Sunday serves as a perfect reminder that God is in charge and we await his coming with unabated anticipation – just like a child awaiting Christmas day.
Baltimore city is a popular tourist location. Inner Harbor is a destination for The National Aquarium, shopping, dining and let’s not forget the O’s. But did you know the city is the birth of the first American seminary? Just minutes away from Inner Harbor on Paca Street is St. Mary’s Spiritual Center and Historic Site, home of several inspiring and revolutionary early leaders of the Catholic Church in the United States, including Bishop John Carroll, the first bishop of the United States. This history-rich site is directed by Father John C. Kemper, S.S., a priest of the Diocese of Harrisburg. He holds a plethora of knowledge not just about the history of the seminary but about many of its past inhabitants, including Elizabeth Ann Seton, who became the first U.S. born saint in the Catholic Church.

“It was here in the lower chapel that mother Seton took her vows in front of Bishop Carroll, and in many ways I think it was providential because Bishop Carroll encountered Mother Seton and she told him about her dream of founding a community and educating children,” Father Kemper explained. “He had standing in front of him a woman who was a wife, widow, a mother of five, a convert, an educator, and now she wanted to become a nun. I don’t think he quite knew what to do with all of this, and in God’s providence he said to her, ‘Mrs. Seton, you will be the mother of many daughters.’”

“Still today, the daughters of Charity come back to this site, and it is her legacy that lives on in them, which I think is an awesome thing,” commented Father Kemper as he stood in the historic chapel that once was attached to the seminary but today is Saint Mary’s Park. After the class of 1965 graduated, it was decided the building was no longer fit for students to live in, and is now a beautiful green park for the historic Seton Hill neighborhood.

When the first Sulpician priests arrived in 1791, before Baltimore was even a city, they lived in a tavern referred to as “One Mile Tavern” because of its short distance from the harbor. Once Bishop Carroll had raised the funds necessary, he bought the land that the historic site sits on today. Thousands of priests have gone through the seminary, some of whom have been beatified.

“When schools bring trips down, they go to the harbor, the aquarium, the science center. But why not bring the children to a place where saints walked and saints lived,” commented Father Kemper about the historic chapel and Mother Seton House.

Next year will mark the 40th anniversary of Mother Seton’s canonization, and there are current causes open for others from the seminary. One, for instance, is Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange, who formed the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first African American order of sisters. Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange taught religion to slaves’ children in the same chapel that Mother Seton took her first vows.

There is more history and beautiful art and architecture to go on about, but to truly receive the most education, a tour is a must. Father Kemper tries to give most tours first hand when he can, but other qualified tour guides are available, as well as a recording with headphones that will walk visitors through the footsteps of our first American saints.

One of the most popular artifacts to see – especially for fourth-grade boys, Father Kemper noted – is the heart of Archbishop Ambrose Marechal, the third Archbishop of Baltimore. When the archbishop died, there was a written request made by him that his heart stay at the seminary.

Mother Seton’s house is preserved with furniture from the period and shines an interesting light on 18th century living. During group tours, a Mass can be celebrated in the chapel.

St. Mary’s Spiritual Center and Historic Site should be on your list of things to see in Baltimore city. It is a great day trip and especially a great pilgrimage to make just south of our diocese.

For more history, and visiting hours and directions, visit St. Mary’s Spiritual Center and Historic Site website at www.stmarysspiritualcenter.org or call 410-728-6464.
By Jen Reed
The Catholic Witness

Young minds at St. Anne School in Lancaster are getting a good grasp of just how long their school has been a staple of Catholic education in the city.

As the St. Anne School community celebrates the institution’s 90th anniversary this year, students are delving into the history of each decade of the school’s existence. Each month, the student body studies various aspects of each decade, including Church history, inventions, government and fashion.

Bishop Ronald Gainer visited the school on Nov. 19, where he celebrated Mass and then met separately with the classes of the PreK-8 school. He told the students that their school shares its anniversary with the first Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, the start of airmail in the United States, and the origination of the song “Happy Birthday.”

The yearlong history lesson gives students an understanding of their school’s longevity throughout changes and challenges in society, noted Suzanne Wood, principal.

“We have solidified Catholic education here at St. Anne School, and now our focus is on continuing that as we move into the future,” she said.

For information on St. Anne School and planned anniversary events, call the school at 717-394-6711 or visit www.stanelancaster.org.

Eli DePaulis recently completed his Eagle Scout project at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Abbottstown, where he constructed five-foot tall concrete crosses bearing images of the Stations of the Cross. The Stations, situated along the road to the parish cemetery, were blessed by Father Timothy Marcoe, pastor, on Nov. 23, the Feast of Christ the King.

St. Anne School Celebrates 90 Years of Education in the Faith

Eagle Project Graces Abbottstown Parish with Outdoor Stations

One Station, depicting Jesus falling with the cross, is in memory of Father Thomas Langan, who served as pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish from 1989-2005. The priest served as pastor from 1989 until his retirement in 2005. He died in January 2012.
Istanbul Mosque

Continued from 1

Vatican statement later described this as a “moment of silent adoration.”

The Sultan Ahmed Mosque, an early 17th-century structure, is known as the Blue Mosque for the predominant color of the 21,000 tiles decorating its interior.

The pope’s Nov. 29 visit had been scheduled for later in the morning but was moved up, out of concern that it would interfere with noon prayers.

The event recalled the last papal visit to Turkey, in 2006, when Pope Benedict XVI’s prayer in the same mosque went far to ease an international furor over his speech in Regensburg, Germany, which had quoted a medieval description of the teachings of Islam’s prophet Muhammad as “evil and inhuman.”

For Pope Francis, the prayer was only the latest dramatic sign of a desire for closer relations with Islam, including his washing the feet of two Muslims during a Holy Thursday liturgy in 2013, and his invitations to Muslim and Jewish leaders to pray for peace in the Vatican Gardens the following year.

After his arrival in Turkey Nov. 28, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan raised the issue of prejudice and intolerance against Muslims in other countries, saying that “Islamophobia is a serious and rapidly rising problem in the West” and lamenting that “attempts to identify Islam with terrorism hurt millions.”

Later, during a visit to the Presidency of Religious Affairs, its president, Mehmet Gormez, decried what he called the “dissemination of terror scenarios by the global media through anti-Muslim expressions, which is a form of racism and which has now turned into a crime of hatred.”

After visiting the Blue Mosque, Pope Francis walked to the nearby Hagia Sofia, a sixth-century basilica converted into a mosque after the Ottoman conquest in 1453, then turned into a museum in the 20th century. The interior decoration today includes gigantic calligraphy of Quranic verses as well as medieval mosaics of Jesus and Mary. As the pope toured the museum, it was filled with the sound of the noon call to prayer from the minaret of a nearby mosque.

In the afternoon, Pope Francis celebrated Mass at Istanbul’s 19th-century Catholic cathedral, which ordinarily holds fewer than 600 people, but was filled to overflowing for the Mass. It was the first event during his visit to Turkey—a country whose population is less than 0.2 percent Christian—that recalled the enthusiastic crowds who ordinarily greet him on his travels.

The congregation included Catholics of the Armenian, Syriac, Chaldean and Latin rites and prayers in several languages, including Turkish, Aramaic and English. The varied music included African drumming.

Pope Francis’ homily, which acknowledged the presence of several Orthodox and Protestant leaders, focused on the challenge of Christian unity, which he distinguished from mere uniformity.

“When we try to create unity through our own human designs, we end up with uniformity and homogenization. If we let ourselves be led by the Spirit, however, richness, variety and diversity will never create conflict, because the Spirit spurs us to experience variety in the communion of the Church,” he said.

The pope’s last public event of the day was an evening prayer service with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the patriarchal Church of St. George, New Oxford to offer pumpkins they decorated at the school and left as centerpieces for the dining room. For Thanksgiving, they collected canned goods and turkeys for The New Oxford Community Food Bank and created a human food chain on Nov. 25. Grades pre-K to eighth grade lined up and down the block to pass food from one to another until all the donations had made their way to the food pantry.

While the students were packing cans at the end of the chain, residents of the community were going in and out of the pantry. An elderly woman with a cart full of food and a cane in her hand was walking out of the pantry and headed to her car. A young man from Immaculate Conception saw her, and his next move was heartwarming. He stepped away from the line of students and approached his teacher to ask if he could assist the woman to her car. He kindly went to the elderly woman, and she welcomed his help with a smile.

After witnessing this act of kindness, it is clear that the youth of Immaculate Conception have learned a great deal from Blessed Mother Teresa.

Principal Donna Hofman reflected on Mother Teresa’s quote, “Peace begins with a smile.”

“We wanted to put smiles on those less fortunate as they enjoyed a warm Thanksgiving dinner,” she said.

The students began the school year by going to the square of New Oxford after a prayer service at their school and giving shop owners signs that read, “Peace begins with a smile,” as well as a bag of Hershey Kisses. The signs are still displayed in many shop fronts.

Hands to Serve, Hearts to Love: Immaculate Conception Students Serve New Oxford Community

By Emily M. Albert

Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary School in New Oxford has been influenced by Blessed Mother Teresa’s quote, “Give your hands to serve and hearts to love.” They are committed to a service project each month. Already, the students have visited the Brethren Home in New Oxford to offer pumpkins they decorated at the school and left as centerpieces for the dining room.

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Ivy Nieves, forefront, prepares to send a box of food along the food chain to Jack Wilson and Paige Ness.

EMILY M. ALBERT, THE CATHOLIC WITNESS

December 5, 2014

EMILY M. ALBERT, THE CATHOLIC WITNESS
The pope’s letter for the year explained that while he was writing as pope, he was also writing as a Jesuit, “a brother who, like yourselves, is consecrated to the Lord.”

Knowing the gifts and challenges of religious life from the inside, Pope Francis urged religious to “look to the past with gratitude,” rediscovering the pope, he was also writing as a Jesuit, “a person’s attitude reflects what is in his or her heart, the pope said, and for consecrated people that means “to know and show that God is able to fill our hearts to the brim with happiness.”

“None of us,” he said, “should be dour, discontented and dissatisfied, our hearts to the brim with happiness.”

Please note that numerous faith formation offerings are also available via webinar, allowing you to participate in “real time” from home or to request recordings.

Lent: Walking through the Desert with Jesus
Thursday, February 12
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.
Cardinal Keeler Center, Harrisburg
Mr. James Gontis

The Christian Meaning of Human Suffering
Thursday, February 19
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.
Cardinal Keeler Center, Harrisburg
ALSO AVAILABLE VIA WEBINAR
Mr. Ryan Bolster

The Missionary Journeys of Saint Paul
Wednesdays, February 25, March 4, 11, and 18
6:30 – 8:30 p.m.
Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Mount Carmel
Father Francis Karwacki

Catechesis on the 12 Articles of Faith and Catechesis on the Holy Eucharist
Saturday, February 28
12:30 – 3:30 p.m.
St. Joseph, Berwick
Mr. James Gontis

Catechesis on St. Patrick, Apostle to Ireland, Patron of the Diocese of Harrisburg
Monday, March 9
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.
Cardinal Keeler Center, Harrisburg
Mr. James Gontis

St. Joseph, Patron of Husbands and Fathers
Tuesday, March 10
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.
Cardinal Keeler Center, Harrisburg
Mr. James Gontis

The Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell
Thursday, March 12
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.
Cardinal Keeler Center, Harrisburg
Mr. James Gontis

Answering Misconceptions Regarding the Immaculate Conception and Other Teachings about the Blessed Virgin Mary
Monday, March 23
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.
Cardinal Keeler Center, Harrisburg
Mr. James Gontis
The names of the following deceased persons have been submitted by their parishes:

BERKELEY – Immaculate Conception BVM: Margaret Rudnicki; St. Joseph: Frances John, Esther Pellegrino.

BLOOMSBURG – St. Columba: Germaine Rees.

BONEVAULLE – St. Joseph the Worker: Jeane Shanebrook.

CONEWAGO – Sacred Heart:

CONEWAGO – Annunciation BVM: Jean M. Bunty.

FAIRFIELD – Immaculate Conception BVM: Betty Weatherly.

GETTYSBURG – St. Francis Xavier: Mary A. Coston, Eileen R. Glacken.

HARRISBURG – St. Catherine Laboure: Charlotte Horvath; St. Margaret Mary: Louis D’Augustine.

KULPMONT – Holy Angels: Anna Spishock, Anna Louise Walejko.

LEBANON – Assumption BVM: Thomas Pierce Boyer, Michael Edkin, Mary Mettley.

LEWISTOWN – Sacred Heart of Jesus: Catherine Armstrong, Jack Stewart.

MCSHERYSTOWN – Annunciation BVM: Jean M. Bunty.

MIDDLETOWN – Seven Sorrows BVM: Peter Cairo, Helen Shelley.

MILLERSVILLE – St. Philip the Apostle: Rosemary L. Fercy.

NEW OXFORD – Immaculate Conception BVM: Marian Kuhn, Robert F. Miller.

STEELTON – Prince of Peace: Dolores Szloszko King, Garrett F. Punch, III.

SUNBURY – St. Monica: Gloria S. Forrest, Sr.

TREVORTON – St. Patrick: Rita A. Kuhns.

York – St. Patrick: Dr. David Litrenta, Glenn Regger, St. Rose of Lima: Anna Mae Hussion, Mello Wagaman.

York Haven – Holy Infant: Elizabeth Mikovich.

Please use the following prayer for the deceased clergymen who died in December during the past 25 years:

Father Stephen Roliko, 1993
Msgr. Joseph Bradley, 1996
Father John Aurentz, 1996
Father Vitale Leonard Casey, 1999
Father Joseph Blascovich, 1999
Father Robert Kobulak, 1999
Deacon Michael Lydon Sr., 1999
Deacon Charles Rebuck, 2003
Father Thomas Hemler, 2006
Father Thomas M. McLernon, 2009
Father Paul Aumen, C.P.P.S., 2010
Msgr. Leo Biester, 2013
Msgr. Robert C. Gribbin, 2013
Deacon Sabino “Sam” Moschella, 2013

Several Catholic Schools Receive Scholarship Assistance through EITC Program

Bridge Educational Foundation recently announced scholarships totaling $101,000 to local families through the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) Scholarship Program. AT&T, Aegis Security Insurance, Covanta, Linc, Inc., M&T Bank and Rent-A-Center donated the scholarships to benefit children attending several Catholic schools in Dauphin County, including Bishop McDevitt High School, Harrisburg Catholic School, St. Margaret Mary School in Harrisburg, and Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary School in Middletown.

Dave Kerr, Regional Vice President of AT&T Pennsylvania remarked, “At AT&T, education has been our priority for more than a century, which is why we are working with community organizations in Pennsylvania to inspire more students to prepare for success in school, on the job and in life. We’re so pleased that our EITC contribution will help children in the Harrisburg area prepare for a lifetime of success.”

Jim Klecko, Vice President with Covanta stated, “Covanta is thrilled to be a part of continued education in throughout Pennsylvania. Our support through the Bridge Educational Foundation is an effort to assist families and students in achieving educational and socially moral goals to strengthen their future opportunities. We hope these scholarship funds assist in opening the doors of further education for all deserving students.”

“Education is a crucial component for building the future, so investing in today’s students is really an investment in the future,” said Steve Foreman, Regional President for M&T Bank. “Through these scholarship grants, students will experience educational opportunities they might have missed otherwise. And that makes for a brighter future.”

The scholarship donations are part of the K-12 and Pre-K EITC Programs. The K-12 EITC tuition program provides companies with a 75 percent tax credit – 90 percent for a two-year commitment – for funds donated to approved, non-profit scholarship or educational improvement organizations businesses may donate up to $750,000 per year though the Pre-K program.

The Pre-K program provides companies with a 75 percent tax credit – 90 percent for a two-year commitment – for funds donated to approved, non-profit scholarship or educational improvement organizations businesses may donate up to $750,000 per year though the Pre-K program. The Pre-Kindergarten initiative provides with a tax credit equal to 100 percent of the first $10,000 contributed to a pre-kindergarten scholarship organization during the taxable year, and receive a tax credit equal to 90 percent of any additional amount contributed during the year, up to a maximum of $200,000 per year though the Pre-K program.

Wreaths for a Reason

St. Francis Xavier School Plans “Noreen Neitz Memorial” Run and Walk

St. Francis Xavier School in Gettysburg will be holding its second annual “Noreen Neitz Memorial Run at the Rock 5K Race and Sufficiently Radical 1 Mile Walk” on Dec. 20. The 5K race will begin at 11 a.m., and the 1 mile walk will begin at 11:30 a.m., with registration for both events opening at 8 a.m., if not previously registered. The race and walk will begin and end at the St. Francis Xavier Catholic School, Xavier Center, at 465 Table Rock Road, Gettysburg. Registration is being accepted until race time, and the costs are $25 for the 5K run, and $15 with T-shirt ($10 without T-shirt) for the 1 mile walk. Registrants for the 5K run can join the walk with no additional charge.

Last year’s inaugural race/walk brought over 500 participants and raised more than $15,000. This year’s 5K race will have the following age categories: 8 and under, 9-14, 15-29, 30-49, 40-59, 60 and older. Homemade pies and trophies will be awarded to overall winners and winners of each age category. All of the proceeds from the 15 GPS running watch will be awarded to the first male and first female finishers.

Noreen Neitz was the spiritual leader of the St. Francis Xavier youth group and a strong advocate for patients who were going to have surgery when she was 14 years old. She died at age 20 from brain cancer in 2013. During her last months, Noreen spent much of her time writing on her blog, entitled “Sufficiently Radical,” and continued to stay active by walking wherever she could within a mile of her house. Her passion for giving back, a scholarship fund was developed in her name, encouraging youth to dedicate their time to service and be active members of the Church.

Proceeds from this event will be divided equally between the St. Francis Xavier School development fund and the Noreen Neitz Scholarship Fund for sixth, seventh and eighth grade students attending St. Francis Xavier School who show service to the community and are active members of the parish and its youth group. Those interested in more information about this event can call St. Francis Xavier School at 717-334-4221, visit the school Web site at www.sfxs.org or e-mail the St. Francis Xavier development office at kbrainard@sfxs.org.

A New ‘Parents’ Guide to Mobile Phones’

Considering a mobile phone for your child for Christmas? The group ConnectSafely has a new publication called, “Parents’ Guide to Mobile Phones” that could be a valuable resource in helping you decide if your child is ready for a phone and, if so, what you should know about keeping them safe online with it.

This is a very timely resource, given that a year ago Anne Collier of ConnectSafely wrote this about the new guide regarding the task of parenting children that are more and more mobile and Verizon Wireless – and CTIA, the Wireless Association in Washington, D.C. stated that “What I mean is, the internal safeguards that go with them not only out the door but the rest of their lives: things like critical thinking, respect for self and others, resilience, kindness and the inner guidance system sometimes called a ‘moral compass,’ ” Ms. Collier wrote. “It’s not easy for us to keep up with technology as it changes, but the great thing is that these internal safeguards do that better than anything external and they’re familiar to us. They’ve been around as long as parenting has been.”

You can find a link to the guide at FairandSafe.org under their “News” category. A link to FairandSafe.org is on the diocesan homepage at www.HbgDiocese.org.
Compiled by Jen Reed

**Spirited Offerings**

Children's Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is held every Tuesday in Advent at St. Joseph Parish in Lancaster in the Adoration Chapel in the Lower Church from 4:45-5 p.m. Come and experience the joy of seeing Jesus as He sits in the tabernacle. Handicap accessible. For information, or to learn about starting children’s adoration in your parish, call Mrs. Wanger, cathlist@177-766-2472 or Mary Vukelic at 717-766-9433 with questions.

An ecumenical candlelight service for those who have died as a result of suicide will be held Dec. 7 at 7 p.m. at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Conewago, near Hanover. For more information, contact Sue Post at 717-624-3055.

St. Joan of Arc Church in Hershey will participate in the 25th Annual National Night of Prayer for Life Dec. 8 from 8 p.m.- midnight. The service will be open to the country in prayer to end abortion and to restore life and religious liberty in America. The service will include Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, the recitation of the Rosary, a discussion about “Atrial Fibrillation and Heart Failure: What You Need to Know.” The team will review treatment options, and answer questions. Call Richard Gott at 717-766-2472 or Mary Vukelic at 717-766-9433 with questions.

**Diocesan Notebook**

Holy Spirit Hospital’s “Heartstrings” cardiac support group meeting will be held Dec. 17 from 6:30-7 p.m. in the hospital’s Auditorium C&D. Laura Snyder, MS, Coordinator of Outpatient Behavioral Health, will present on the topic of Holy Spirit, which is present on “Holiday Stress.” A question-and-answer session will follow the presentation. On Jan. 28, Christopher Spizierio, DO, Holy Spirit Cardiology, will present on “Is Electrical Shock Good is God?” He will also speak about nutritional supplements. To register, call 717-972-7690 or send an e-mail to spizierio@hsphosp.org.

Jody Cole will conduct two icon writing workshops in early 2015: “Not Without Mary” on Jan. 13 at St. Joseph’s Life and Education Center in Mechanicsburg, and Thursdays in January, Jan. 15, 22, and 29, at the school in Carlisle. Each class will meet from 6:30 p.m. for eight weeks (two additional weeks are scheduled in case of inclement weather). Advanced students will be given a limited edition icon of the Virgin Mary for Noa- mek (noah@biblejournaling.com). Beginners will be painting a face of Christ. More information is available by calling Jody at 717-919-8719 or e-mailing jcoleman@biblejournaling.com.

**Events & Fund-Raisers**

Breakfast in Bethlehem will be held at St. Benedict the Abbot Parish in Lebanon on Dec. 6 from 6-11 a.m. Breakfast provided by the Knights of Columbus with a one-man dramatization of the Nativity story by Father Michael Ronan. Parishioners $6 for adults, $3 for children. Sponsored by the Knights of Columbus and Lebanon Catholic School. For information and to reserve your seat, call 717-773-3731, ext. 329.

St. Ann’s Byzantine Catholic Church in Harrisburg will sell Peroli and K babas on Wednesdays and Saturdays in the parish hall. Sales will begin Dec. 6 and 20. Wednesday sales are noon-1 p.m. on Dec. 3, 10 and 17. Visit www.stannsbyz.org for information. Peroli fillings include cabbage, sauerkraut, sausage, meat and onion and K babas are sold frozen by the dozen. The Smoked K babas will be sold in rings for $6. The newly renovated Saint Ann Bock and icon store plans to open during the sale times for your holiday shopping.

Immaculate Conception BVM School in New Oxford will host its Winterfest Holiday Bazaar Dec. 6 from 8 a.m.-noon in the New Oxford Social Club Pavilion. Find those special gifts while shopping over 20 vendors, including Avon, Thirty-One, handmade crafts, and many more vendors. Food will be served in the Deacon Rich Weaver Parish Center.

St. Rita Parish in York will hold its Christmas Mart Dec. 6 from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Fresh green wreaths, swags, kissing balls, baked goods, crafts, and more are available. The famous Cookie Walk, with delicious breakfast and lunch served by the Knights of Columbus, Vendor space is still available by contacting 717-724-6306 or leslie.nieves@hotmail.com. For details, call at 717-634-2061 or visit www.icbvm.org.

St. Joseph the Worker Parish in Bonneauville will host its first Holy Bazaar Dec. 6 from 8 a.m.-3 p.m., featuring home- made crafts, jewelry, baked goods, and many more vendors. Food will be served in the Deacon Rich Weaver Parish Center.

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St. Philip’s Women’s Auxiliary Craft Show and Sale will be held at St. Philip’s Church in Millersville Dec. 6 from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Crafts from local artists will fill the parish halls and gym. Hot food, including chicken corn soup chili, hotdogs and nachos, sausages, beef jerky, croutons, and many more baked goods will be available. Free parking and free admission.

An evening of Christmas jazz will be presented Dec. 6 at 7 p.m. in the parish hall at St. Patrick Catholic in Harris- burg. The evening will be in tribute to the great music of Victor Garvai from his Charlie Brown Christmas soundtrack. 3 of a 5-part trio comprised of Kevin Myers on piano, Andrew Bilberry on drums, and Derek Wiegmann on the bass. For questions, contact Faith at faithgal@comcast.net or Diane at dcotter@centurylink.net.

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St. Peter Parish in Columbus will hold its annual Christmas Bazaar on Dec. 6 and 7 in the Parish Center. All items for sale are either made or donated by parishioners. Soup and sandwich lunches will be served, with all proceeds going towards the school. The event is open to the public, tickets will be available at the door, and you can eat in or take out. Raffle tickets for a handmade quilt, a variety of gift baskets and much more will also be available. St. Nicholas’ Choir will play a visit. The Youth Choir will entertain on Sunday.

The Sacred Heart School Development Committee will host an “All You Can Eat Breakfast” with Santa Dec. 8 from 8:30-11 a.m. in the school’s gymnasium. The Sacred Heart Parish in Conewago. Once again, Chef Wade will be whipping up a breakfast with the help of parents, faculty, staff, grandparents, great-grandparents, and more! Join us for a delicious breakfast, sausage, home fries, toast, donuts, fruit salad, coffee, tea, hot chocolate, orange juice and milk. The cost of the breakfast is $8 for those ages 12 and older, $6 for children 6-11, and free for children five and under. A portion of all proceeds will be donated to Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia in honor of Faith Higginbotham, who was a part of the Sacred Heart Parish in Conewago.

**York Catholic High School’s Athletic Association is hosting bingo on Dec. 7 at the high school. Doors open at noon, and games begin at 2 p.m. Cost is $30 at the door. Participants will be able to purchase bingo cards. Additional strips of 3 are available for $3 each. There are two jackpots of $500 and one $1,000 jackpot. Refresh- ments will be available for purchase. The event is open to all, call York Catholic High School weekdays from 8 a.m.-3 p.m. at 717-846-8877.

**Submission Deadlines**

The deadline for announcements for the December 19 edition of The Catholic Witness is December 10 at 4:30 p.m. Submissions should be mailed to: Witness@bhsdiocese.org. A list of upcoming dates and deadlines can be found on TheWitness page at www.bhsdiocese.org, or requested via e-mail.
In a football game filled with offense which featured more than 1,200 total yards by both York Catholic and Camp Hill in the District 3 Class A final played at Hersheypark Stadium on a mild Nov. 22, the Fighting Irish fell 63-49 in a high-light reel type of game quite entertaining to witness.

Both teams matched each other for the first ten touchdowns of the game, making it 35-35 at halftime. Leading 35-28 with less than a minute to play in the half, York Catholic took a timeout while Camp Hill faced a 4th and 5 near midfield as the Lions appeared ready to punt the ball away, giving the Fighting Irish time to drive for another score before halftime. But the Lions scrapped the punt and turned a big play into a first down, and scored a touchdown two plays later. The sequence was a momentum changer, and in the second half, after three straight Fighting Irish turnovers in less than two minutes (two fumbles deep in Lions territory and an interception), Camp Hill converted each miscue into touchdowns to pull away for good early in the fourth quarter.

Senior quarterback Hakeem Kinard fought though leg cramps to put on a dazzling performance and keep the Fighting Irish in the game, matching Camp Hill’s potent offense with big plays of his own, completing 15 of 23 throws for 323 yards. But the Fighting Irish’s defense could not stop the Lions’ spread offense that put serious size at the wideouts and speed in the backfield to give the Fighting Irish fits in matching up man-to-man.

“We turned the ball over and gave up too many big plays to win,” head coach Eric Depew said after the game. “No one’s going to beat anyone when you give up the game.”

The Fighting Irish finished another great season at 8-4 and were district runner-up for the second straight year.
By Jen Reed  
*The Catholic Witness*

A post-Thanksgiving trip to Hersheypark Stadium has become quite a tradition for Bishop McDevitt’s football program, which captured its fifth straight District 3-AAA championship on Black Friday, steamrolling the Cocalico Eagles, 41-0.

Crusader quarterback Nick Marsilio distributed a steady diet of passing and rushing plays as his team amassed a total of 460 yards against their Lancaster-Lebanon League opponent, which had been giving up just 216 yards per game in the playoffs.

The Crusaders’ perennial speed and size, and their ability to bust down the field for high-yardage plays, were too much for the Eagles to tame. On the offensive side of the ball, Marsilio’s five touchdown passes to four different receivers set a record for the championship game – breaking the previous record of four TD’s set by McDevitt quarterback Matt Johnson in 2010.

The Crusaders also netted 215 rushing yards, more than half of them earned by Penn State recruit Andre Robinson, who scored on a two-yard touchdown play with six minutes remaining in the game that was decidedly McDevitt’s.

Defensively, McDevitt stifled Cocalico’s offensive line, suppressing the Eagles – who had logged an average of 319 rushing yards per game in the postseason – to just 104 on the ground and five first downs.

Still, the Eagles clung to their running game, making just one pass completion in five attempts.

With their fifth AAA title, the Crusaders are now second on the list of District 3 championship streaks. Manheim Central holds the record with ten AAA titles in a row.

The Crusaders now set their focus on the elusive state title, which has slipped through their fingers in three finals appearances in the last four years. The next step on the path to state glory is a semifinal game in Altoona on Dec. 5 against undefeated WPIAL champ Central Valley, led by running back and Pitt recruit Jordan Whitehead, who averages 15 yards per carry. If the Crusaders jump the Central Valley hurdle, they’ll punch their ticket to the state championship game on Dec. 12, likely against Archbishop Wood, for a shot at redemption against the team that topped them in the finals in 2011 and 2013.

**CRUSADERS CORRAL FIFTH STRAIGHT DISTRICT TITLE**

By Chris Heisey  
*The Catholic Witness*

The victorious Crusaders celebrate their fifth straight District 3 Class AAA championship. They beat Cocalico in 2010 to begin their run.

Senior defensive lineman Alex Burkey closes in on a sack.

An Eagle defender saves another McDevitt big play with a good defensive play to deny McDevitt’s Bryce Hall a reception.

The victorious Crusaders celebrate their fifth straight District 3 Class AAA championship. They beat Cocalico in 2010 to begin their run.
By Chris Heisey
The Catholic Witness

In 1994, Bishop Nicholas Dattilo blessed the newly constructed Good Shepherd Adoration Chapel located next to the beautiful, fashionably old Saint Patrick Church in the heart of center city York. Twenty years later, Bishop Ronald Gainer returned to the parish to honor the decades of perpetual adoration led by the many faithful of the parish who have given more than 150,000 hours of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.

Bishop Gainer’s visit was on the Feast of Christ the King of the Universe, Nov. 23, which brings to a close the Church’s liturgical calendar the week before Advent begins. Bishop Gainer celebrated Holy Mass for more than 600 faithful gathered before processing to the adoration chapel where he offered prayers of thanksgiving for the chapel’s two decades as an unceasing place of witness. Father Keith Carroll, pastor, joined Bishop Gainer in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

In his homily, Bishop Gainer stressed the importance of giving thanks. “What a beautiful time to reflect on the beautiful meaning of thanksgiving this week,” Bishop Gainer said. He also noted that thanksgiving is a “truly instructive power – when one offers thanks, we are admitting that we are not owed or entitled… Giving thanks is an act of trust.”

Bishop Gainer thanked the faithful of St. Patrick’s and the surrounding community for their faith and devotion to Christ. “Nobody can calculate the blessings that have come from the 20 years of perpetual adoration,” Bishop Gainer said.

There are ten Chapels of Perpetual Adoration of the Holy Eucharist located throughout the Diocese of Harrisburg.