Catholic Pro-Life Day gives message of hope

By Mary P. Walker
Senior Correspondent

Hope was the theme for the Texas Catholic Pro-Life Day, observed Jan. 28 by thousands, who came to the Capitol from different parts of the state. “It’s important for the church to come together as witnesses to the dignity of human life. When we come together, we regain that hope and give new energy to our work to build a culture of life,” said Marie Seale, director of the diocesan Office of Pro-Life Activities and Chaste Living.

The day began with an early morning prayer vigil at a Planned Parenthood facility, with approximately 200 praying for an end to abortion and conversion of those working in the abortion industry. Following the vigil, hundreds gathered at San José Parish to pray the Rosary for Life. A teen or young adult represented each bead, and the rosary extended throughout the church. As the congregation prayed, elementary students reenacted the joyful mysteries.

Bishop Joe Vásquez and Bishop Wm. Michael Mulvey of the Corpus Christi Diocese, along with priests from the Austin Diocese, then celebrated the Pro-Life Mass. Approximately 1,200 people filled the church to pray for God’s mercy in removing all offenses against the dignity of life in our nation.

In his homily, Bishop Vásquez referred to the Roe v. Wade decision that made abortion legal throughout the U.S. 39 years ago. “The Supreme Court decision prevents the law from protecting the most vulnerable members of society — the unborn,” he said.

Quoting Pope Benedict XVI, the bishop reminded us that “the embryo is not an accumulation of biological material, but a new living being.”

Addressing another assault on life and conscience, Bishop Vásquez called on Catholics to fight with prayers and political action the U.S. government mandate that requires Catholic institutions to include sterilization, contraception and abortion-inducing drugs in health insurance plans. Reading from a letter distributed to all parishes, in a strong, emphatic voice, Bishop Vásquez said, “We cannot — we will not — comply with this unjust law.”

The bishop emphasized that although the culture of death leads to darkness, God calls us to be people of faith and hope, saying “We have confidence in God to take care of his church,” and entrusted the cause of life and efforts on its behalf to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

After a brief lunch break, many Catholics joined the 14-block march to the Texas Rally for Life, held on the steps of the State Capitol. Thousands participated in the march, and the crowd extended the length of four city blocks. Individuals and groups, with diverse perspectives but united in their hope and resolve to protect the unborn and vulnerable, marched together in peaceful solidarity under the cloudless blue Texas sky. Many remarked that the weather was perfect, and some saw this as a sign of God’s blessing.

Val Sutorius, a parishioner at St. Louis Parish in Austin, came to the rally to encourage women facing challenging pregnancies to choose life. Although she had not always been pro-life in her outlook, a friend took her to a past rally, and she said that over time, “Sunshine melted my stony cold heart.” She had been encouraged to abort her now 22-year-old son with special needs, but chose life. Today, she offers hope, help and support to parents of other special needs children through Texas Parent to Parent (www.txp2p.org).

At the Rally for Life, the speakers presented a theme of hope that prevailed over the
May these holy men rest in peace

Father William “Bill” Benish died Feb. 6 at the age of 66. He was born Sept. 20, 1945, in Greenville, Pa., and earned a bachelor’s degree in philosophy in 1968 and a master’s degree in theology in 1972, both from St. Mary’s University in San Antonio. He was ordained to the priesthood at St. Mary Cathedral in Austin on June 3, 1972.

Father Benish served the following Central Texas parishes: St. Monica in Cameron from 1972 to 1974, Church of the Assumption in West from 1974 to 1978, St. Louis in Austin from 1978 to 1979, St. Louis in Waco in 1979, St. Michael in Burlington also in 1979, St. Mary in Temple from 1979 to 1982, St. Paul in Smithville in 1982 and St. Louis in Austin again in 1982 to 1983. He was the founding pastor of St. Margaret Mary Parish in Cedar Park, serving there from 1983 to 2000. He served as the Austin moderator for the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women. In 2002, he served briefly as chaplain at the Catholic Student Center at Texas State University in San Marcos.

Father Benish is survived by one brother and numerous nieces and nephews. Bishop Joe Vásquez celebrated the Mass of Christian Burial Feb. 9 at St. Margaret Mary Parish in Cedar Park. Father Benish was buried at Assumption Cemetery in Austin. His family requests that, in lieu of flowers, donations be made to the St. Margaret Mary Building Fund.

DOMINICAN FATHER RALPH ROGAWSKI

Msgr. Ralph A. Brennan died in Austin Feb. 11 at the age of 82. He was born on June 14, 1929, in Cleveland, Ohio, to Charles Brennan and Mary Regan Brennan. He attended St. Mary’s Seminary in Houston, and was ordained a priest on Aug. 1, 1957, by Bishop Louis J. Reicher.

He served in the following parishes: associate pastor at St. Joseph Parish in Waco (Bellmound) from 1957 to 1965, pastor of the same parish from 1965 to 1971, pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Austin from 1972 to 1978, founding pastor of St. Thomas More Parish in Austin, and pastor of St. Mary Parish in Brenham from 1985 to 1999 with the missions at Old Washington on the Brazos and Latium. He retired from full-time ministry in 1999. He then served at the Brother Vincent Peches Residence of the Holy Cross Brothers near St. Edward’s University in Austin.

Msgr. Brennan was very active in the ministry present where he served, including the vocation committee, the Parish Council, ODCW, and various hospitals. He received the title of Monsignor in 1987.


FATHER BILL BENISH

DOMINICAN FATHER RALPH ROGAWSKI

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VOICES

FATHER BILL BENISH

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Father Bernard C. Goertz died Feb. 14 in Bastrop at the age of 83. He was born July 4, 1928, in Red Rock to Joe B. and Anna Goertz. He attended Sacred Heart School in Rockne from 1935 to 41, St. John’s Seminary in San Antonio from 1941 to 52, and New York Theological Seminary in New York, from 1971 to 72. He was ordained a priest of the Diocese of Austin by Bishop Louis J. Reicher on May 31, 1952, at Sacred Heart Parish in Rockne. He served as associate pastor of St. Mary Parish in Temple from 1952 to 58, and as pastor of St. Mary Parish in Lampasas from 1958 to 61. He entered the Texas National Guard in 1954, and then served for 23 years as an active duty U.S. Army chaplain from 1961 to 1984, including tours of duty in Germany, Vietnam and Honduras. After his retirement from the military as a colonel in 1984, he served as needed in numerous parishes and missions in the diocese. In his retirement he also served as a contract chaplain at the Federal Correctional Institution in Bastrop.

Father Goertz is survived by his brother, three sisters and many nieces and nephews.

Bishop Joe Vásquez celebrated the Mass of Christian Burial Feb. 17, at Sacred Heart Parish in Rockne. Father Goertz was buried at Sacred Heart Cemetery in Rockne.
Life
Continued from Page 1

grim reality that abortion has killed 54 million children and has been part of our culture for nearly 40 years.

Reportedly abortions are down five percent in Texas in the last 12 months. Also, the 40 Days for Life campaigns of peaceful, prayerful presence outside of abortion facilities have thus far been effective in saving lives, converting clinic workers and even causing clinics to close, said the speakers.

Another sign of hope was the high number of youth and young adults participating in the rally. Seale explained that for them, abortion is personal.

“The youth are drawn to the pro-life movement because they suffer the greatest loss. Not only have at least a quarter of their peers been taken due to abortion, but they must learn to thrive in a culture that tells them they cannot rise to the heights of virtue and holiness,” she said.

Speakers also highlighted that while abortion has been legal in our land for too long, Texas is a national leader in enacting pro-life legislation. Texas has defunded Planned Parenthood, criminalized harming an unborn baby and made “Choose Life” license plates available. In Texas, before a woman can have an abortion, she must be informed that there are resources available if she continues her pregnancy, have the opportunity to view a sonogram of her baby, learn the risks of the procedure and wait 24 hours.

The day ended with more than 600 people coming together for a pro-life party hosted by the diocese and the University of Texas Longhorns for Life at the University Catholic Center. Seale explained attendance at the pro-life events has grown from previous years, which is also a message of hope.

“We are a witness to the culture that we won’t accept anything less than respect for all human life,” she said.

Thousands gather for pro-life day in Austin

As the gravity of the Central Texas Wildfires became apparent, charitable organizations around Central Texas jumped into gear to provide relief services to fire victims. Catholic Charities, in conjunction with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, St. Vincent de Paul Thrift Store, SVdP South Central Regional Disaster Relief Program and Ladies of Charity, collected nearly 19,000 square feet of material donations and more than $612,000.

Since then, Catholic Charities has provided nearly 1,000 fire victims with material aid in the form of clothing, toiletries, retail gift cards and a “House in a Box,” and financial aid for medical expenses and hotels lodging.

The road to recovery for the people affected by the Central Texas Wildfires is not over, and Catholic Charities will continue to provide help and create hope in this area.

If you or someone you know needs assistance due to the Bastrop County wildfires, please call 211.

1625 Rutherford Lane, Austin, Texas 78754
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Vietnamese parish celebrates Lunar New Year

BY MICHELE CHAN SANTOS CORRESPONDENT

Holy Vietnamese Martyrs Parish in Austin celebrated the Lunar New Year with Mass and a celebration Feb. 5. In the Chinese calendar, this year is the Year of the Dragon.

Bishop Joe Vásquez joined the hundreds of people who filled the pews and the parish lobby for the Mass, which was held in Vietnamese. Many of the women wore traditional Vietnamese formal dresses. The church, which is just over three years old, was decorated with trees hung with shiny red and gold envelopes to commemorate the New Year. Each envelope held a Bible verse or prayer.

“I have great fondness for this community and wish you all the best for this year,” Bishop Vásquez said. “My prayer for all of us at Holy Vietnamese Martyrs Church and the Vietnamese community in the Diocese of Austin is that you continue to nurture the beauty of your culture and the beauty of your faith. All the things you hold dear you must pass on to your children.”

During his homily (given in English and then translated into Vietnamese), the bishop discussed the day’s reading from Genesis. “God creates everything out of nothing. He has made everything from nothing. The stars, the heavens, The mountains, The seas. Finally, he creates us. You and I reflect the presence of God in the world,” he said.

He quoted Pope Benedict XVI in regard to the purpose of human life.

“Life is not governed by chance nor is it random. Your very existence has been willed by God. Life is a search for the true, the good and the beautiful,” he said.

After Mass, there was a large celebration on the parish grounds, including traditional Vietnamese foods, dancing, singing and games. The rain interrupted the festivities for a short time, but they continued indoors until the late afternoon.

Parishioners ate pho (noodle soup), steamed pork buns, egg rolls and chicken satay (chicken barbecued on sticks). The children enjoyed the firecrackers, face-painting and the traditional dragon dance.

In Vietnam, the Lunar New Year is usually celebrated over a period of three days, said Msgr. Joseph Van Anh Nguyen, pastor of Holy Vietnamese Martyrs Parish. On the first day, families go to Mass and thank God for blessing them for the whole year.

On the second day, Vietnamese people honor their ancestors — their parents, grandparents, great-grandparents and other relatives. They give gifts to children — “Li Xi,” new money placed in decorative red envelopes.

On the third day, people traditionally pray for good jobs and food for their families throughout the year. In Asia, many people travel to see their families for the Lunar New Year celebration, similar to how Americans travel home for Thanksgiving.

Because the Lunar New Year is such an important holiday in Asia, Holy Vietnamese Martyrs makes sure to celebrate it every year with a special Mass and festivities.

“We want to let our children know about our country, about our traditions,” Msgr. Nguyen said.

During the Mass, the people prayed for Catholics in Vietnam, who are oppressed by their government.

According to Msgr. Nguyen, Vietnamese Catholics all over the world have been praying for the people of Thai Ha Parish in Northern Vietnam. In November 2011
Holy Spirit takes center stage at conference

BY ENEDELIA J. OBREGÓN
SENIOR CORRESPONDENT

More than 600 people were renewed in the Holy Spirit at the first Diocesan Charismatic Renewal Conference in Spanish on Jan. 21. The event packed the Parish Activity Center at St. Margaret Mary Parish in Cedar Park to hear two Missionaries of Fatima whose talks were based on the conference theme: “I came that you might have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10).

The faithful also spent time before the Blessed Sacrament and received the sacrament of reconciliation from Father Elias Arambula and Father Ángel Enrique Olivera. In between speakers, attendees sang and swayed to the music of Christian bands Pan de Vida (Bread of Life) and Emmanuel, who also played during the call to healing that brought many to tears from the power of their faith experience.

Edgar Ramirez, diocesan director of the Office of Hispanic Ministry, said the future of the Hispanic community in the diocese “is well linked with the fruits of renewal begotten through the Holy Spirit.”

Charismatic movements constitute a unique gift from the Lord and are a valuable resource for the church, Ramirez said. “It is necessary to embrace them with confidence and to value their contribution to our service to our community and help them to carry their mission in an orderly and fruitful way.”

The Holy Spirit’s renewal is a valuable instrument and helps form and cultivate the charisms in our dioceses, especially in the Hispanic community.

By bringing together all the Spanish-speaking communities of prayer within the Charismatic movement in the diocese, “it serves to recognize their work, celebrate their successes and renew us for the future . . . the future of our Hispanic community in our diocese is tied with the fruits of renewal begotten through the Holy Spirit,” he said.

Father Flores, president of the diocesan committee that organized the conference, said about 25 parish groups were represented at the conference.

The charismatic movement is an opportunity to turn one’s response – be it raising hands in prayer, speaking in tongues or crying. “At first I was embarrassed to raise my hands,” Flores said. “But if God is listening to me, there’s no need to worry. We applauded entertainers and yelled and scream. So why are we embarrassed to do so for God?”

Flores, a parishioner at St. Elizabeth Parish in Pflugerville, said many of the faithful are immigrants and dealing with adjusting to a different language and culture and dealing with discrimination.

“In the church is the real truth of Christ,” he said.

The charismatic groups allow people to grow spiritually in formation and serve as a way to evangelize. She is confident the evangelization will bear fruit. Flores has spent 19 years in the charismatic movement and says the Austin area is at a critical stage of growth. They are looking for a bigger venue for next year.

At the conference, Father Arambula reminded participants of the call to confess our sins and to allow God’s love to lead us. He noted that Jesus was always looking at people, noticing those who were overlooked, such as the widow in the temple donating a few coins (Mk 12:43).

“We often struggle in life without realizing we have to look up,” he said. “We need to remember from where our salvation comes.”

Father Arambula said God loved us before we loved him, forgave us before we asked forgiveness and gave life before we were born.

“Before you got here, Jesus was waiting for you,” he said. “Before you gazed at Christ, he had seen you.”

He also read from the recent letter from the Hispanic/Latino bishops of the U.S. addressed to immigrants. The signatories included Bishop Joe Vasquez.

The letter states, “(We) wish to let those of you who lack proper authorization to work in our country know that you are not alone or forgotten . . . we recognize that every human being, authorized or not, is an image of God and therefore possesses infinite value and dignity.”

“Tell me if this (letter) is not the gaze of Christ in his shepherd heart,” he said.

Father Olivera shared his experience with being born again after contemplating suicide in his youth during his session titled “You must be born from above” (Jn 3:7).

“Before I went to daily Mass, was involved in prayer groups and read the right books, he didn’t really know the Lord on a personal level,” he said.

At a charismatic renewal in 1984, he was renewed in the Holy Spirit and experienced new life.

“It’s a real birth — it’s not symbolic,” he said.

Being born again means dying, to one’s previous life of sin and self-centeredness and becoming a servant, he said. He found the world changed when he changed. He had promised God if he saved him from his suicidal thoughts he would consecrate himself to God. So he became a priest.

“When I wanted to commit suicide, I was living an ego-centered life,” he said. “God taught me to live to serve him and others and there is no happier life.”


Prayers offered for Vietnam’s persecuted Catholics

HVM

Continued from Page 4

more than 600 police and local government officials surrounded the parish and seized its land. Priests and religious were beaten and some were detained and imprisoned.

“As followers of Christ, we have a duty to speak up against violence and injustice, especially for those who have no voice as our Catholic brothers and sisters in Vietnam. We need to take a stance with the people in Thai Ha’s Parish to show the world that it is unacceptable for officials of the government to beat, threaten, torture and imprison individuals for simply exercising their rights of freedom of expression and religion,” Msgr. Nguyen said.

“We all gather here to show our solidarity and support for the Catholic Church and human rights in Vietnam,” he said.

In the early days of May 1975, after the fall of Saigon, waves of refugees from Vietnam entered the U.S., waiting to be sponsored by some charitable organizations, churches or individuals in the hope of a better life. Many Vietnamese families made homes in the Austin area when Bishop Vincent Harris encouraged parishes to adopt Vietnamese families.


By 1990, a Vietnamese Catholic community had been established and they purchased property in Northeast Austin. Adjacent land was given to the parish by Bishop John McCarthy and the Austin Diocese.

The building was remodeled into a sanctuary with classrooms, a parish hall and religious education office. In 1993, Bishop John McCarthy elevated the Vietnamese Catholic community to a parish level. The church, which sits across the street from the original facility, was completed in 2008.
New chapel is blessed at Eagle’s Wings

BY ENEDELIA J. OBREGÓN
SENIOR CORRESPONDENT

A dream that took almost a decade in the making came true with the dedication of the Chapel of the Holy Spirit at Eagle’s Wings Retreat Center near Burnet. Bishop Emeritus John McCarthy blessed the chapel with the help of Msgr. Elmer Haffner, who is retired and serves as chaplain-in-residence at Eagle’s Wings, and Msgr. Louis Pavlick, who is also retired and is in residence at St. William Parish in Round Rock.

The octagon-shaped chapel with its high ceiling and double-row of large windows seats 250 people on folding chairs. On the glass wall behind the altar is an etching of the Holy Spirit. The building also contains a smaller adoration chapel and tabernacle. The stone used for construction harmonizes with the rugged Hill Country landscape. A giant wooden cross adorns the western outdoor wall. A metal tower holds the church bell and is topped by a simple metal cross.

In his homily, Bishop McCarthy, who admitted he didn’t think the project could be done, praised the visionaries who used the gifts they had to make the project a reality. “You relied on vision and faith,” he told Katie and Curt Haffner, who in 2003 purchased a 157-acre ranch that they envisioned as a retreat center for youth. The couple kept 20 acres for their homestead and gave the rest to EWRC.

“You brought in others and began to share that vision and became more focused,” Bishop McCarthy said. “This is more than a facility. It’s a celebration of faith and what can happen when you are open and generous.”

The bishop said it was appropriate that along with volunteers and donors at the dedication was the confirmation class from St. Thomas More Parish in Austin on retreat.

Bishop McCarthy told the teenagers that while they should always look forward to make their dreams a reality, they should look back to the traditions of their faith the way Jesus did. “Along with vision we need memory,” he said. “The years roll by; lives change. You can always find consolation in the living presence of Christ.”

Addressing the confirmands before the recessional, Curt Haffner said, “God is asking each of you to look back to the traditions of your faith the way Jesus did. God is asking each and every one of you to be in a relationship and to become what he wants you to be.”

“If you open your heart when he calls he will take you where he wants,” he said. “Don’t be afraid of where Jesus is taking you.”

He noted that Jesus when called on a group of fishermen to follow him and become fishers of men, and they did. “Two thousand years later he is still calling,” he said, adding that the buildings are not what Eagle’s Wings is about, “It’s about relationships. You are made in the image of God. It’s in relationship that we experience God!”

Katie Haffner gave all the credit to God, saying he “made all this possible.”

Eight years ago, the site where the chapel now stands was the top of a meadow sprinkled with wildflowers. The center now has seven buildings, including a dining hall, dormitories and a residence for Msgr. Holman.

“The chapel is the highlight,” she said. “All this is God-centered for kids to develop a relationship with Christ.”

Along with the chapel, Eagle’s Wings has a grotto for Mary and Stations of the Cross, which are not found in other retreat centers. Joe Noonan, who got...
For those preparing for marriage

Couples planning to marry should contact their priest or deacon at least six months prior to their wedding date in order to begin the marriage preparation process. Engaged couples are encouraged to inquire at their parish about pre-marriage retreats and classes. Couples planning to attend the diocesan pre-marriage retreat, “Together in God’s Love,” are encouraged to register as soon as possible. The program will be offered in retreat format March 30-April 1, July 13-15 and Oct. 26-28 at Cedarbrake Catholic Retreat Center in Belton. Engaged couples must provide proof they have taken either the FOCUS or PREPARE assessment before attending the “Together in God’s Love” retreat. Couples must register by contacting the diocesan Office of Catholic Family Counseling and Family Life at (512) 949-2495. For registration forms, visit www.austindiocese.org and click on “Marriage Preparation” under “Quick Links.”

Women for Women: Awareness in Action

The Theresians of Austin and the Austin Council of Catholic Women will host an event entitled “Women for Women: Awareness in Action” March 8 from 7 to 9 p.m. at St. Thomas More Parish in Austin. The program will feature presentations highlighting aspects of Catholic Relief Services work for women and children around the world, HIV/AIDS and health issues and economic development through fair trade. Fair trade merchants will have goods for sale. A donation of $10 will go to the work of CRS. To pre-register e-mail gerri.misko@prtuxrealty.com or call Eunice Washa at (512) 258-5243.

Pro-Life Benefit Gala is April 14

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Cathedral Parish Grants program has provided more than $1 million in support. This year St. Joseph Parish in Rockdale was one of the recipients of the OCP grant program. Parishes are encouraged to apply for the grants, as they can help strengthen worship and prayer, said Msgr. Mike Six, the diocesan vicar general. For more information on the application process, visit www.ocp.org/grants.

Lenten retreats at Cedarbrake

“Discerning God’s Will In Our Lives,” a Lenten retreat, will be held March 23-25 at Cedarbrake Catholic Retreat Center in Belton. The Apostles of the Interior Life Sisters will help participants discern God’s will in their lives during this retreat. The cost is $155 for shared rooms or $185 for a private room. For more information, contact Cedarbrake at (512) 780-2436 or cedarbrake@austindiocese.org.

A day of reflection on Holy Week will be held March 28 at Cedarbrake Catholic Retreat Center in Belton. Holy Cross Father Bill Wack will help participants enter more fully into the mystery of Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection. The cost is $30, which includes lunch. For more information, contact Cedarbrake at (512) 780-2436 or cedarbrake@austindiocese.org.

Teens, young adults invited to retreat

Teens Encounter Christ (TEC) will hold a retreat March 16-18 at Eagle’s Wings Retreat Center near Burnet. This is a three-day retreat based on the Paschal Mystery for those who are between the ages of 17 and 24. For more information and for applications, visit www.tcc-etc.org.

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Clarifying misconceptions about annulments

Ten facts about annulment

1. An annulment does not cost thousands of dollars.

2. No one is rejected because of financial difficulties or inability to pay.

3. An annulment does not make children illegitimate.

4. The process can proceed even if an ex-spouse refuses to cooperate.

5. A parish priest does not have access to the information in one’s annulment-petition file, unless he is one’s advocate prior to the acceptance of the petition by the Tribunal.

6. The length of a marriage and the number of children a couple has are not factors.

7. There is no quota as to how many declarations of nullity can be issued; each case is processed individually.

8. Couples must obtain a civil divorce before the annulment process can begin.

9. The annulment process does not focus on the reasons why the marriage ended, but on the reasons why it was invalid from its beginning.

10. The annulment process is not adversarial; no confrontation occurs.

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The idea for a retreat center for youth in 2001 and met the Haffners soon after that, said seeing the 200 confirmants from St. Thomas More immersed in their faith were the rewards for all the years of hard labor.

“They are getting touched by the Holy Spirit,” he said. “You can feel it.”

The chapel was designed by architect Don Logan, who died in 2007. Contractor Don Collier is project manager. Countless volunteers came together to build the chapel.

Katie Haffner said that while the center is geared toward youth, adults can also come to renew their faith. In the next few months, Eagle’s Wings will host the Teens Encounter Christ retreat March 16-18 (www.tec-ctx.org) and Catholic Youth Camp on June 24-28. Mabee also hopes to attract more young people to the workshop in order to assist the parishes involved to come to an honest and fruitful determination of the case before a marriage tribunal.

The ex-spouse of the Petitioner must receive a declaration of nullity, which is processed individually. The ex-spouse of the Petitioner may not be located or refuses to be served. If the ex-spouse of the Petitioner is located, the Petitioner must file an annulment petition to the Tribunal or by the Roman Rota tribunal.

The church believes that all marriages should exhibit the qualities and power to bring about the effects which God intends for marriage as defined by natural, divine and church law.

The annulment case usually takes up to 12 months to complete at the first-instance level at the diocesan Tribunal, then an additional four to six months at the second-instance level at the Appellate Court in San Antonio. The Petitioner and his or her advocate can assist in this process if the petition questionnaire is fully and accurately filled out, if all documents are provided, if complete information on the Respondent’s address and background is provided, and if a sufficient number of witnesses with their names and addresses is lined.

In summary, in granting a declaration of nullity, the church is saying: (1) There indeed was a marriage which appeared valid (called a putative marriage). (2) But from its beginning, it lacked something essential or was blocked in some essential way. (3) So from the start, it could not be established as a valid marriage, that is, one which has all the qualities and power to bring about the effects which God intends for marriage as defined by natural, divine and church law.

The annulment process is meant to be primarily a spiritual process of healing and reconciliation. For further assistance, contact your local parish; or call the Tribunal at (512) 949-2400 and ask for the Tribunal. Also, for more information on the annulment process, access www.austindiocese.org, click on the “Ministries” tab, then on the link to “Canonical and Tribunal Services.”
Sister Gertrude Levy: A life dedicated to service

**By Cristina M. López Correspondent**

Working is a gift to Daughters of Charity Sister Gertrude Levy who joyfully embraces the opportunity each morning. She is a community ambassador and fundraiser for Seton Medical Center in Austin. For 40 hours a week, and sometimes on weekends, she busily goes about her day, tending to the many things and the many people who need her help. From visiting and praying with patients to overseeing the general areas on the first floor to calling donors and thanking them for their support, she is always on the move. She once tracked how many miles she walks in a day with a pedometer. She averaged almost 4 miles.

A busy schedule is not out of the ordinary for a woman devoted to her vocation and to her duties at a hospital. What is extraordinary about Sister Gertrude is that at the age of 92 she has found no reason and has no desire to stop. She said her time is God's and when he says it’s time, she will know it.

“Right now I'm healthy and I plan on working as long as I can; and I think God will tell me when it’s time to stop,” she said. She absolutely loves her work and every opportunity God sends to use the talents he has given her.

“I think it’s my contact with people that I enjoy and I know that I am helping them. It is very gratifying to know that somebody is benefiting by what I can offer them,” she said.

Sister Gertrude was born and raised in the French Quarter in New Orleans. Her father was an attorney and her mother stayed at home to raise their nine children. She received lessons in charity and compassion from her Jewish grandfather.

“When I was a young child, my grandfather used to take my oldest sister and myself to the charity hospital when he went every Sunday to visit the sick there. And it may be from him that I was inspired to care for the poor,” she said.

That hospital is also where she first encountered the Daughters of Charity. She would come to meet them again as a teenager when she attended a Catholic high school run by the Daughters of Charity.

“I saw how they worked together and how they took care of the children, how they cared for their students. I learned there how their mission was to care for the poor. I just liked what I saw them do,” she said.

In 1936, two months after graduating from high school, she entered the community. She recalls that her mother often prayed that God would call one of their sons to the priesthood. One of her five brothers did indeed become a priest. But what her parents didn’t expect was that three of their four daughters would become Daughters of Charity.

“They put us through many questions, very serious questions that we had to prove that … we knew what we were doing before they gave us permission to go. But they were very happy that we chose these lives. As my father said, he knew where we were every night,” she said.

After making her vows, Sister Gertrude studied and earned two bachelor’s degrees and a master’s degree. One of her first assignments was teaching first grade at the Los Angeles Orphanage in California. That is where Elizabeth (Csoendes) Meske first met Sister Gertrude.

“I was 6 years old when I first recall meeting her and I just thought she was an angel, the most beautiful person I had ever seen,” Meske said. She thought of Sr. Gertrude as a second mother. She mended scraped knees, chased nightmares away, and made sure Elizabeth said her prayers every night.

“I remember every night being able to see Sister Gertrude’s light on. I always knew she was there and I knew all I had to do was call and that was the most calming and comforting feeling I can remember,” Meske said.

The two reconnected about eight years ago, almost 51 years after their time together in the orphanage. Meske, who is 65 now and lives in Idaho, treasures the memories of her childhood spent with the Daughters of Charity, particularly Sister Gertrude, and is thrilled to be able to enjoy a friendship with her beloved first-grade teacher.

“Everybody has a special teacher. Sister (Gertrude) was my special teacher. She prepared me for first Communion and whatever she did, she did it effectively. It laid an impression on my mind; it was the highlight of my year,” Meske said.

Sister Gertrude taught grade school and high school for 37 years in different parts of the country before coming to Austin. For the last 38 years she has worked in public relations and fundraising for Seton. She has always cared for children, the poor and the infirmed and she has loved every moment. On her 80th birthday in 1999, the Sister Gertrude Levy Endowment was founded to provide for needy patients at the three Seton community health centers. To date friends and colleagues have donated more than $2.3 million to the endowment.

Sister Gertrude continues to help others and she is grateful to God for her vocation of service.

“I pray to God that I do every day what he has in mind for me to do that day. And every morning when I wake up I say ‘Thank you Jesus for the new day to be able to serve,’ because at this age how do I know how many more days I have. In fact, how does anybody know?”

**St. Joseph Health System in Bryan expands trauma services**

ST. JOSEPH HEALTH SYSTEM in Bryan has partnered with PHI Air Medical to operate an air ambulance with a crew of flight nurses, flight paramedics and pilots. Within the year, St. Joseph AirMedical and its crews will be permanently housed at St. Joseph Regional Health Center, where they will assist in the Emergency Room while awaiting departure.

This partnership will help St. Joseph reach a Level 2 trauma center status, which the hospital hopes to obtain within the next year.

According to the St. Joseph website, upon designation, St. Joseph will be the only Level 2 trauma center between Waco and Houston. More trauma patients in the Brazos Valley will be treated in the Brazos Valley and families and patients won’t have to travel so far away from home. If a higher level of care is needed, St. Joseph will still be able to provide stabilization care and an expedited transfer with the air ambulance services. (Photo courtesy Msgr. John Malinowski)
Growing up, Father Brian McMaster did not want to be a priest. Like most young men, he presumed that happiness would come in the form of a wife and children. He enrolled at Texas A&M University with plans to attain a finance degree prior to attending law school, ultimately preparing for a career in corporate law. Somewhere along the way, he realized the Lord had different plans for him.

The Catholic community at Texas A&M opened his eyes to another possibility. As a sophomore in college, Father McMaster changed his major from finance to philosophy, in anticipation of potentially entering the seminary. Still resolving doubts about priesthood, he maintained the option of attending graduate business or medical school as a backup plan. But over the next few years, he became increasingly aware that Christ might be calling him.

“The more I gave, the more I received. His desire became my desire,” Father McMaster said.

Now as a priest for more than 10 years, Father McMaster frequently shares his path to the priesthood with others. He recognized the power of guiding others on their faith journey while serving in campus ministry at Texas A&M. One evening while listening to a student speak to his peers, Father McMaster heard his own words repeated by the young man, which kindled the awareness of his ability to inspire a personal relationship with God, not only for himself but for others.

Currently, Father McMaster serves as the Vocations Director for the Austin Diocese, a role he describes as “a calling within a calling.” Father McMaster spends much of his time on the road visiting parishes and universities throughout the diocese. For those considering the call to priesthood, he sees himself as a companion on their journey. However, his job does not end as soon as the call is answered. Father McMaster also serves as the liaison between the bishop and the seminarians of the Diocese of Austin. His travels often take him to Houston, Louisiana and even Rome to visit with seminarians.

While visiting two seminarians in Rome last November, Father McMaster was invited to concelebrate Mass at the tomb of Blessed John Paul II, the man who taught him what it means to be a priest and to be in love with Jesus and Mary. The most moving part of the experience was the awareness that when kissing the altar, he was also kissing the tomb of this holy man.

In addition to influencing his vocation, Blessed John Paul II inspired the concept of Father McMaster’s book which is due to be published within the next year. Modeled after the traditional Marian consecration to Jesus by St. Louis de Montfort, the book leads the reader through 33 days of prayer, concluding in a consecration to Jesus with an entrustment to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The motto “Totus Tuus” (meaning “all yours”) on Blessed John Paul II’s papal coat of arms actually originates from the writings of St. Louis de Montfort. Guided by the teachings of the late pope, Father McMaster’s goal is to offer a fresh perspective on a 300-year-old concept.

Despite growing up in a devout Catholic family, Father McMaster said he did not necessarily have the answers to many questions of our faith until they were challenged by his Protestant friends during college.

“I think a lot of matur ing in my faith happened because I took the questions and looked for the answers. I found myself growing not only in understanding in my head but also falling in love with the Catholic faith,” Father McMaster said.

He likens this awakening to an old, dusty trunk abandoned in the corner of a room, unnoticed and unexplored for years. One day, the desire to open the trunk and see beyond the surface reveals a rich treasure.

“I think that is an experience that God wants us all to have with our faith, to really discover the true treasure that it is,” Father McMaster said.

Fortunately, it is never too late to accept this gift, he said. He has had the privilege of administering the sacraments to people upon conversion in the final moments of life. He recalls one particularly touching experience when he walked into the room of a sleeping man, near the point of death. Upon waking, the man immediately grabbed the priest, pulled him near to his chest and repeated three times, “Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed.”

At his 10th high school reunion, Father McMaster received the title of “Most Extraordinary Occupation.” The newly ordained priest beat out a casino game tester and a scuba diving instructor when he responded to the question of “What do you do?” with “I save souls.”

Even as a child, Father McMaster was fascinated by the ability to save. Although at that time, the saviors he emulated were Superman and Spiderman. Now he only knows one Savior, Jesus Christ, a super hero of a different nature. At the reception for his ordination, Father McMaster’s older brother announced, “We always knew Brian would do something to serve others and that it would involve wearing a cape.” Both brothers have always been supportive of his vocation, but ordination was not the last time they got a laugh out of it. On one family ski trip in Colorado, the lift operator asked, “Do we have any singles? Ski to the front.” This sparked one man to yell “married,” while another called out “divorced.” Father McMaster, in turn, proclaimed “celibate,” which caused his brother to laugh so hard he fell over and broke his ski pole.

Celibacy was the main focus of discernment for Father McMaster, who had a hard time imagining life without a wife and family. However, his view changed when he learned to see celibacy as a “yes” instead of a “no.”

“It’s not about giving something up; it’s about saying yes to a different type of spousal relationship. I have experienced a fuller intimacy than I ever could have been aware of,” Father McMaster said.
March 2012

HHS revision ignores religious liberty concerns

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

Catholic bishops across the country have expressed their disapproval of President Barack Obama’s revision to the contraceptive mandate in the health reform law, saying it does nothing to change what they and other religious leaders and organizations consider an intrusion on religious liberty.

Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced Jan. 20 that religious organizations could delay but not opt out of the requirement that all health plans cover contraceptives and sterilization free of charge.

On Feb. 10, Obama announced a revision that allows religious employers not to offer such services to their employees but would compel insurance companies to do so. The change came after three weeks of intensive criticism that the contraceptive mandate would require most religious institutions to pay for coverage they find morally objectionable.

And now questions have been raised over how that revision will pertain to self-insured parties, like many dioceses and Catholic organizations, and whether it could still force entities morally opposed to contraception to pay for such services.

“We can appreciate the efforts of the White House to quiet the furor over the president’s HHS mandate that would violate the religious freedom of millions of Catholics and other American citizens,” Miami Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski said in a Feb. 10 statement.

He noted that hundreds of Catholic universities, colleges, hospitals and other entities offered comments to HHS before the mandate was announced but they “were given short shrift by the administration.”

“The administration continued to insist that the issue is about contraception; we disagree. It is about the first freedom of our Bill of Rights: the freedom of religion and respect for the rights of conscience,” he added.

Los Angeles Archbishop Jose H. Gomez said he found the president’s revision “troubling and frustrating.”

“Unfortunately, he did not really respond to the deep moral concerns raised by America’s Catholic community,” he said in a Feb. 13 statement.

The archbishop said the fact the revision requires payment of contraceptive coverage to now be borne by insurance companies, rather than religious employers, “completely misses the point. The issue here is not one of bookkeeping or accounting. It is a matter of moral principle and religious liberty,” he said.

He also said the government has “no right to require the Catholic Church or other institutions to pay for — even indirectly — products and services that we find to be immoral and unconscionable. Again, this is not a question of contraception. It is a question of religious liberty. This mandate continues to represent a grave government intrusion on Catholic consciences and on the freedom of our Catholic institutions.”

Washington Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl similarly noted that the federal mandate “remains essentially unchanged” and criticized the president.

“Regardless of how it is characterized, shifting the cost of these drugs and procedures to insurance companies does not make their requirement any less objectionable or lessen the infringement on our religious liberty and rights of conscience,” Cardinal Wuerl wrote in a Feb. 13 letter sent to Catholics of the Archdiocese of Washington.

The cardinal said the only complete solution to the problem that this mandate poses would be for Congress to pass the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act introduced by U.S. Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, R-Neb.

Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York told Catholic News Service Feb. 13 in Rome that Fornenberry’s bill would produce an “ironclad law simply saying that no administrative decrees of the federal government can ever violate the conscience of a religious believer individually or religious institutions.”

It’s a shame, you’d think that’s so clear in the Constitution that that wouldn’t have to be legislatively guaranteed, but we now know that it’s not,” he added.

Cardinal Dolan said with his revision to the HHS mandate, the president offered “next to nothing.”

“There’s no change, for instance, in these terribly restrictive mandates and this grossly restrictive definition of what constitutes a religious entity,” he said. “The principle wasn’t touched at all.”

Other U.S. church leaders in Rome on a periodic “ad limina” visit to the Vatican echoed that opposition to the HHS mandate and the revision.

Bishop Daniel R. Jenky of Peoria, Ill., said no president has ever “tried to tell us what to believe or define what is our ministry.”

“The notion the church must cooperate with intrinsic evil is appalling,” he said.

Cardinal Wuerl encouraged Catholics not to become complacent or distracted by “incomplete proposals presented as definitive solutions.” He said the bishops’ Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, chaired by Bishop William E. Lori of Bridgeport, Conn., would be working on action steps to oppose the mandate.

In a Feb. 13 phone interview with CNS, Bishop Lori also called for a legislative remedy, saying, “Our religious freedom is too precious to be protected only by regulations. It needs legislative protection.”

An Obama administration official who asked not to be named told CNS in an email Feb. 13 that the White House plans in the coming weeks to convene “a series of meetings with faith community leaders” about the HHS mandate. He said a particular focus of the meetings would be self-insured group health plans that cover the employees of many Catholic dioceses and institutions.

“The administration will work with faith-based organizations, insurers and other interested parties to develop policies that respect religious liberty and ensure access to preventive services for women enrolled in self-insured group health plans sponsored by religious organizations,” he said.

The official said the meetings would be convened “in the coming days” and that “the bishops and others” would be invited.

Meanwhile, Bishop Blake J. Cupich of Spokane, Wash., said the current situation about the HHS mandate provides an opportunity “to have a deeper and, on a prolonged basis, a fundamental dialogue about the role of religion in society in general and the nature of religious liberty, especially as it pertains to faith-based charitable, health and social service ministries in the United States.”

Writing in the March 5 issue of America magazine, a Jesuit-run national weekly, Bishop Cupich said the church “should make every attempt to clarify the misrepresentations about its intention,” emphasizing that it “is not trying to impose its will on others” by objecting to being forced to participate in activities that violate its core religious beliefs.

The state, for its part, should be reluctant “to make national policy that is so inflexible that it fails to take into account the country’s diversity,” Bishop Cupich said.

Cardinal urges Senate to pass bill protecting conscience

By Nancy Frazer O’Brien
Catholic News Service

The chairman of the U.S. bishops’ Committee on Pro-Life Activities called on members of the U.S. Senate Feb. 15 to solve conscience protection problems with the federal health reform law by passing the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act.

By resolving a “needless dispute,” Congress and the Obama administration “could resolve one of the most pressing of all the real problems — the fact that many millions of Americans still lack basic coverage for health care,” said Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Houston.

In a three-page letter to senators, Cardinal DiNardo said the legislation, which now has 37 sponsors in the Senate, might come up for a vote soon, “either as a free-standing bill or an amendment.”

Calling the bill “needed, reasonable and carefully crafted,” he said it “simply ensures that new requirements” under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act “are not used to take away a freedom of conscience that Americans have enjoyed under federal law until now.”

The bishops “saw the need for this legislation,” the cardinal said, when Congress passed health care reform and “authorized new lists of federally mandated benefits for all health plans without including language to preserve rights of conscience.”

The cardinal rejected the final rule announced Feb. 10 by President Barack Obama that would allow organizations with religious objections to the Department of Health and Human Services’ requirement that all health insurance plans cover contraceptives and sterilization to decline to cover them, but then compel the insurers to provide contraceptives free of charge to women they insure.

The objecting employers will still pay for the coverage, he added, because it “will be included in the health plan and subsidized with the premiums paid by employer and employee for that plan.”

Cardinal DiNardo called the new rules a “radical departure from current law, under which a health plan that excludes contraception can be sold even to federal employees if the carrier has any ‘direct objection to such coverage.’”

“In short, we are back to square one — except that the rule so many hoped would change to accommodate America’s right of conscience is no longer subject to change, except by legislation,” he said.

The Respect for Rights of Conscience Act stipulates that the list of mandated benefits under the health reform law will not forbid those who provide, sponsor or purchase health coverage from negotiating a health plan that is consistent with their religious beliefs and moral convictions.

The cardinal also offered rebuffs to some misinterpretations about what the proposed law would and would not do:

• No “stakeholder in the health care coverage enterprise” would be required to provide or accept the negotiated plan. “But if all involved find an accommodation acceptable and workable, why would the federal government not allow it — as it always has in the past?” he asked.

• It does not overturn other existing state or federal laws, including present state contraceptive mandates.

• It would not “provide any support for discriminatory decisions to withhold basic coverage from some while giving it to others,” such as a decision to deny life-saving care to people with AIDS or the virus that causes it.

• It would not “allow anyone to deny coverage for high-cost treatments, using morality and religion as a pretext.”

Cardinal DiNardo said the Catholic Church, “driven precisely by its faith, is eager to work with Congress and the administration to address (the) grave problem” of the lack of basic health coverage for millions.

“Let us begin the task by respecting each other’s values that call so many of us to work for life-affirming health care for all in the first place,” he added.
Catholic News Service Jan. 5 via Associated Press

It took almost two years, but Haitian earthquake survivor Sonya Mallebranche has a place she can call home again.

“I’m so much more comfortable. Now I can sleep peacefully. Now I have my family with me,” Mallebranche told Catholic News Service Jan. 5 via cell phone from her new home.

“I am really happy to have that house,” she said.

Mallebranche’s family was among 460 families that have moved from the camp into long-term housing since November under a pilot program initiated by Catholic Relief Services, the U.S. bishops’ overseas relief and development agency.

Called Ann Alakay, Creole for Let’s Go Home, the program is designed to address a variety of needs in addition to long-term housing by preparing camp dwellers frustrated by months of living in squalid conditions for a return to some sense of normalcy. The program incorporates two professionnal psychologists and 12 social workers to guide earthquake survivors in resolving conflict, managing money and overcoming the sense of loss that lingers two years after disaster disrupted their lives.

“We realized there was a lot of fear about moving out of the camps, about restarting their lives after the earthquake,” explained Luke King, CRS country director in Haiti.

“People were concerned about how to go about returning to a normal life,” he said.

Samuel Petit-Homme, deputy resettlement manager for CRS, helps administer the program, which he said takes about six weeks from introduction to moving day.

Before camp residents are enrolled, social workers and psychologists work with camp and local political leaders to explain how it works and what it’s meant to accomplish, he said.

As families complete the program, they are offered a $500 voucher to assist with their relocation. They are urged to approach a property owner to negotiate a yearlong rental agreement. Families also get health insurance coverage for six months through the program as they get settled, said Nick de Goeij, head of programming central for CRS in Haiti. The program stresses the importance of budgeting for that expense — about $30 for six months of family coverage — so that when a health care need arises, families are not faced with the choice of bypassing a visit to a doctor or to sell a possession to cover care.

A special collection for Catholic Relief Services will be taken up in parishes March 17-18.
Catholic groups react to revised HHS mandate

By Carol Zimmermann

A former U.S. ambassador to the Vatican and the president of The Catholic University of America were among 300 signers of a letter who called President Barack Obama’s revision to a federal contraceptive mandate “unacceptable” and said it remains a “grave violation of religious freedom and cannot stand.”

On Feb. 10, Obama said religious employers could decline to cover contraceptives if they were morally opposed to them, but the health insurers that provide their health plans would be required to offer contraceptives free of charge to women who requested such coverage.

The change came after three weeks of intense criticism that Department of Health and Human Services’ contraception mandate would require most religious employers to pay for such services.

The letter signed by former Ambassador Mary Ann Glendon of Harvard and Catholic University’s John Garvey, along with professors and other academics, and Catholic and other religious leaders, said it was “an insult to the intelligence of Catholics, Protestants, Eastern Orthodox Christians, Jews, Muslims, and other people of faith and conscience to imagine that they will accept an assault on their religious liberty if only it is covered up by a cheap accounting trick.”

Other critics also said the change was a matter of semantics and still failed to address the conscience rights of faith groups and the issue of religious liberty. Others who opposed the contraceptive mandate said the revision could be a step in the right direction but needed more study because many questions “remained unanswered.”

Catholic Charities USA said Feb. 16 that contrary to media reports the organization has “not endorsed” the revision announced by Obama.

“We unequivocally share the goal of the U.S. Catholic bishops to uphold religious liberty and will continue to work with the USCCB (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops) toward that goal,” it said in a statement posted on its website.

Michael Gallagher, president of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, told Catholic News Service that his organization has “conveyed to the administration that we are interested and deeply committed to ongoing discussion” about the issue.

“We look forward to more in-depth, serious negotiations based on religious liberty being the primary issue on the table,” he added.

The Dominican Sisters of Mary Mother of the Eucharist in Ann Arbor, Mich., issued a Feb. 13 statement saying the administration was to attend a fundraiser the evening of Feb. 16. In Michigan, the Catholic conference of the state’s bishops applauded the state House of Representatives for passing a resolution that calls on the Obama administration to rescind the HHS mandate, highlights the administration’s “attack on religious freedom” and urges the U.S. House and Senate to pass the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act.
Doctors wonder how mandate will affect medicine

By Nancy Frazier O'Brien
Catholic News Service

Catholics who want to practice medicine in conformity with the church’s teachings wonder how a new federal regulation requiring health plans to cover contraceptives and sterilization free of charge will affect their work.

Although the requirement will not directly affect physicians, some said it represents a governmental intrusion into health care that could grow in the future.

Dr. Anne Nolte, a family physician with the National Gianna Center for Women’s Health and Fertility in New York, thinks the mandate represents “such a dramatic violation of such clearly defined civil rights” that it is bound to be overturned in court.

But, she said, “If Congress failed to pass an act that provides an exemption for the groups affected by this, and the courts in some incomprehensible way allow (the mandate) to stand, then Catholic health care will have to make a decision to practice civil disobedience.”

Dr. Jeremy A. Kalamarides, the physician at the Vitae Clinic in Austin, said the mandate does not respect any belief systems.

“I am a Catholic doctor, and I should not be asked to change who I am in order to deliver health care,” he said.

The Vitae Clinic opened in October 2010 and provides full obstetrical services and routine gynecological care while promoting the culture of life.

Dr. Kim Hardey, an obstetrician and gynecologist in Lafayette, La., said he hopes the decision by the Department of Health and Human Services and the Obama administration will cause Catholics and other Christians to rise up against those who would like to see abortion also become a governmental intrusion into health care that could grow in what is required.

“People who are pro-life need to see some of their effects — all of which are contrary to Catholic teaching,” she said.

Hardey prescribed contraceptives and even thought they were beneficial for the first nine years of his medical practice. But then he began to see some of their effects — not only on his patients but on societal attitudes — and decided to conform his practice to the church’s teachings in “Humanae Vitae” ("Of Human Life").

The 1968 encyclical by Pope Paul VI on married love and procreation reaffirmed the church teaching that artificial contraception is morally wrong.

Kalamarides uses natural family planning methods approved by the Catholic Church to help women achieve and delay pregnancy. “My patients are coming here because they do not want contraception,” Kalamarides said. “They have witnessed the positive impact natural family planning has on their marriage and on their gynecological health in general.”

Nolte, who completed her medical training in 2009, focuses her family practice on providing “authentically Catholic” health care for women, especially in the areas of gynecology, infertility treatment and natural family planning. She sees the Gianna center as “an alternative to Planned Parenthood” in Manhattan.

“We do exclusively women’s health care faithful to the ‘U.S. church’s ‘Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services,” she said.

The directives, most recently revised by the U.S. bishops in 2001, guide Catholic health care facilities in addressing a wide range of ethical questions, such as abortion, euthanasia, care for the poor, medical research, in vitro fertilization, prenatal testing, and nutrition and hydration.

At the Vitae Clinic, Kalamarides said he sees patients of many faiths, but at least a quarter of his patients are “coming to us specifically for the way we deliver health care and because we follow the Catholic ethical and religious directives.”

Nolte has experienced the same in her practice.

About 40 percent of her patients are Protestants or have no religious affiliation.

“Women come from other states just for their annual exams, and they bring their daughters,” Nolte said. “They see that we treat patients differently.”

Lake Hardey, she expressed concern that “this administration is happy to violate civil rights” on the issue of contraception and could then decide to do the same on abortion or other problematic issues. But she said nothing will ever put Catholic health care out of business, even if civil disobedience is required.

“A large number of people would not have access if we get out of health care,” she said.

“And we can’t let that happen.”

For more information on the Vitae Clinic in Austin, visit www.vitaeaustin.com or call (512) 458-6060.
Giving thanks to those who understand the mission of the church and give generously

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

I am pleased to present the annual accountability report for the Austin Diocese, which covers the fiscal year ending June 30, 2011. This year’s report includes financial information for the Central Administrative Offices of the diocese, summaries of parish finances, special collections, an overview of some accomplishments in the last few years, and the challenges we continue to face.

The financial information for the diocesan Central Administrative Offices includes the operating revenue and expenses for running the day-to-day business of the diocesan departments, as well as health insurance and property/liability/workers’ compensation insurance programs for all employees, parishes and schools in the diocese.

Many good works have been accomplished through your generosity, as this report shows. Among these good works has been the success of the Our Faith ~ Our Legacy Capital Campaign and the annual Catholic Services Appeal. Both have provided great financial support to the many programs and ministries in our parishes and schools throughout the diocese, for which I am very grateful. This generosity indicates to me that many understand the importance of the mission of the church.

As our Holy Father Benedict XVI reminds us, “the church is alive because Christ is alive.” Indeed, the church is very much alive and we work together to build up the Body of Christ in Central Texas. Recognizing the vitality of the church, we have responded by placing our gifts and talents in service to our brothers and sisters.

As shepherd of the Diocese of Austin, I am grateful for your service and faithfulness.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Joe S. Vásquez
Diocese is blessed by the generosity of many

BY MARY BETH KOENIG
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

Thank you for your faith and continuing generosity to the Diocese of Austin. Our ability to carry out the mission of Christ in Central Texas depends on your personal commitment to stewardship. It is our hope this annual financial report helps you better understand our financial statements, our activities and ministries, and our commitment to be good stewards of the gifts you entrust to the diocese.

The accompanying financial statements are those of the Central Administrative Office (CAO) of the Diocese of Austin. The CAO provides programs and services to parishes, schools and other Catholic organizations in Central Texas. The accompanying financial statements have been extracted from the audited financial statements of the CAO. The financial statements do not include the parishes, missions and schools in the diocese nor do they include the activities of the Catholic Foundation – Diocese of Austin. The Foundation was created in October 2007 as a separate nonprofit corporation to promote the establishment and growth of endowment funds to provide perpetual funding for the CAO and participating parishes, schools and other Catholic organizations within the diocese.

For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2011, net assets increased by $1.7 million, compared to a decrease in net assets of ($21 million) in the fiscal year ended June 30, 2010. The decrease in net assets for 2010 was directly related to distributions and adjustments associated with the Our Faith ~ Our Legacy (OFOL) Capital Campaign.

Total revenues increased by $6.4 million in 2011, primarily due to increases in investment income, contributions and bequests, and insurance premiums. Consistent with improvements in the overall financial markets in 2011, investment income of the CAO increased by $2.2 million in 2011. This investment income was from realized and unrealized gains on investments, dividends and interest income. Income from contributions increased by $1.4 million due to higher than expected collections from OFOL pledges in 2011 and distributions of approximately $600,000 received from OFOL endowments in the Catholic Foundation. Insurance premiums increased by $1.3 million primarily due to increases in the number of employees and dependents covered by the group health insurance plan combined with a small rate increase in the premiums charged to parishes and schools.

Total expenses decreased by $16.3 million in 2011. During the fiscal year ending June 30, 2010, approximately $14 million of funds received by the CAO from the OFOL campaign was transferred to the Catholic Foundation for the establishment of endowment funds for seminarian education ($5 million), retired priests ($3 million), Catholic Charities, ($3 million), deaconate ministry ($1 million), Catholic schools ($1 million) and campus

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## Pastoral Report

### Statements of Activities*

*The Statements of Activities were extracted from the audited financial statements of the Central Administrative Office of the Diocese of Austin. The entire document is available at www.austindiocese.org.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revenues, gains and other support:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Services Appeal</td>
<td>$4,330,933</td>
<td>$3,966,828</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cathedraticum assessments</td>
<td>5,838,047</td>
<td>5,639,068</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contributions and bequests</td>
<td>2,481,385</td>
<td>1,057,062</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special collections</td>
<td>554,671</td>
<td>752,903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest income from DIAL notes</td>
<td>4,369,795</td>
<td>4,169,299</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investment income (loss)</td>
<td>3,856,837</td>
<td>1,656,565</td>
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<tr>
<td>Insurance premiums</td>
<td>11,117,739</td>
<td>9,847,228</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program service fees</td>
<td>1,674,981</td>
<td>1,026,033</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catholic Spirit</td>
<td>465,136</td>
<td>504,624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cedarbrake Catholic Retreat Center</td>
<td>379,666</td>
<td>362,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain on sale</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2,974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>601,221</td>
<td>273,147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>35,670,411</strong></td>
<td><strong>29,255,657</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Expenses and losses:       |            |            |
| Pastoral services          | 3,989,907  | 3,245,760  |
| Formation and religious education | 3,029,511  | 2,987,242  |
| Catholic schools           | 1,148,684  | 669,471    |
| Social services            | 628,393    | 685,736    |
| Religious personnel care and development | 1,415,670  | 1,172,397  |
| Catholic Charities         | 544,229    | 567,432    |
| Communications and Catholic Spirit | 751,211    | 792,304    |
| DIAL deposit interest      | 109,489    | 183,741    |
| Insurance program          | 9,124,826  | 8,502,836  |
| Administration             | 1,445,816  | 1,316,651  |
| Facilities and information technology | 2,137,820  | 2,212,219  |
| Fundraising                | 1,236,558  | 1,340,087  |
| Provision for uncollectible pledges | 50,139     | 8,074,000  |
| Distribution to Foundation | 50,139     | 14,474,905 |
| Interest on debt           | 5,214,591  | 4,037,774  |
| OFOL Distribution and other | 3,128,214  | 7,950      |
|                          | **33,955,058** | **50,270,505** |

| Total revenues, gains and other support | 35,670,411 | 29,255,657 |
| Change in net assets | $1,715,353 | $(21,014,848) |

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**CFO**

Continued from Page 16

Mary Beth Koenig has served as the Chief Financial Officer of the Austin Diocese since 2002. She and her husband have three children and they are parishioners of St. Theresa Parish in Austin.
**Parish financial information**

(Unaudited)

Years ending June 30, 2011 and 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assets</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cash and cash equivalents</td>
<td>$9,837,220</td>
<td>$8,274,293</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIAL Deposits</td>
<td>16,607,602</td>
<td>19,163,551</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investments (includes building funds)</td>
<td>15,429,659</td>
<td>15,145,041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant assets</td>
<td>418,518,850</td>
<td>392,771,408</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8,773,062</td>
<td>9,623,666</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Assets</strong></td>
<td>469,166,393</td>
<td>444,977,959</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liabilities</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounts payable to Central Administrative</td>
<td>105,924</td>
<td>226,698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other accounts payable</td>
<td>1,223,987</td>
<td>939,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funds held in trust</td>
<td>9,847,296</td>
<td>9,574,879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes payable</td>
<td>73,916,472</td>
<td>67,649,727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonds payable</td>
<td>4,850,000</td>
<td>4,980,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other liabilities</td>
<td>743,593</td>
<td>597,998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Liabilities</strong></td>
<td>90,687,272</td>
<td>83,968,517</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Net Assets                                  | $378,479,121      | $361,009,442      |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenues</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday, Holy Day and Other Collections</td>
<td>$51,448,935</td>
<td>$50,055,812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Funds</td>
<td>7,590,128</td>
<td>5,443,218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifts, Bequests and Grants</td>
<td>4,633,004</td>
<td>2,766,324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising (net of related expenses)</td>
<td>4,304,200</td>
<td>4,473,391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program fees</td>
<td>1,700,556</td>
<td>1,407,602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment income</td>
<td>1,291,932</td>
<td>1,470,802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Faith ~ Our Legacy Collections (Parish Share)</td>
<td>3,488,540</td>
<td>2,879,494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Income</td>
<td>6,531,366</td>
<td>7,629,967</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Revenues</strong></td>
<td>80,988,661</td>
<td>76,126,610</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral services</td>
<td>10,380,638</td>
<td>10,263,518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious development</td>
<td>5,654,282</td>
<td>5,541,222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social services</td>
<td>1,764,044</td>
<td>1,805,093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School subsidies</td>
<td>3,512,096</td>
<td>2,930,744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant operating and maintenance</td>
<td>14,902,969</td>
<td>13,512,494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diocesan assessment</td>
<td>5,197,256</td>
<td>4,882,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest expense</td>
<td>4,116,496</td>
<td>3,695,104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General and administrative</td>
<td>16,035,888</td>
<td>15,832,096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other expenses</td>
<td>4,173,945</td>
<td>3,956,672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Expenses</strong></td>
<td>65,737,614</td>
<td>62,419,179</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Revenue Over Expenses                       | $15,251,047       | $13,707,430       |

**Special collection totals**

Special collections are a vehicle by which Catholics can reach beyond their own immediate needs and assist the work of the Catholic Church at the diocesan, national and international levels. The following collections were taken up in diocesan parishes in the 2010-2011 fiscal year.

- **Propagation of Faith**................................................................. $164,500
  Taken up Oct. 23-24, 2010, this collection helps the Society of the Propagation of Faith bring the Gospel to developing countries.

- **Catholic Campaign for Human Development**............................. $143,015
  Taken up Nov 20-21, 2010, this collection supports the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, which empowers the poor to claim their economic rights and reclaim their dignity.

- **Clergy and Religious Retirement Fund**.................................... $174,337
  Taken up Dec. 11-12, 2010, this collection helps retired priests, brothers and sisters with their medical expenses.

- **Feast of the Holy Family**...................................................... $127,452
  Taken up Dec. 28, 2010, this collection supports Pro-Life Activities, Annunciation Maternity Shelter and Our Lady of Angels Maternity Shelter.

- **Catholic Higher Education**.................................................... $117,168
  Taken up Feb. 12-13, 2011, this collection helps support Catholic higher education and campus ministries in our diocese.

- **World and Home Missions**...................................................... $164,358
  Taken up March 9, 2011, this is a combined collection for the church in Latin America, the African American and Native American home missions, Catholic home missions and Eastern Europe.

- **Catholic Relief Services**....................................................... $208,337
  Taken up April 2-3, 2011, this collection supports the Holy Father’s Relief Fund, Migration and Refugee Services, and the Department of Social Development and World Peace.

- **Holy Land**............................................................................... $126,493
  Taken up April 22, 2011, this collection supports the shrines and the people of the Holy Land.

- **Seminarians and Priests**......................................................... $176,895
  Taken up April 30-May 1, 2011, this collection supports the education and formation of diocesan seminarians and priests.

- **Peter’s Pence**.......................................................................... $154,117
  Taken up June 25-26, 2011, this collection helps the Holy Father respond to requests for emergency funds from the most disadvantaged throughout the world.

**Total special collections**.................................................................. $1,556,672
Bishop's Interview

Strengthening the ‘domestic church,’ the family

The church must do everything possible to support and help our families. We have to provide ministry to our families. In the past, ministry has been somewhat isolated, that is to say we have had ministries for young couples, for young adults, for adolescents and for children, but we seem to be neglecting one element and that is the one that binds them all together — we need to minister to families. I encourage parishes to bring families together through common activities of prayer, education and socializing.

At the home level, I encourage families to spend time together. Because most families are torn in many directions, time must be set aside to allow the family to nurture one another and strengthen the bonds of love. I encourage families to go to Mass together, to share meals together and to spend time together. Parents should have ongoing conversations with their children about school, friends, activities and other aspects of daily life. This is not simply taking interest in our children, but it involves a personal commitment and responsibility given to parents to love and raise their children to become mature persons. All of these things help make families strong.

Editor: As Blessed John Paul II said, as the family goes, so goes the nation and so goes the world in which we live. How can we strengthen our families and thus our nation and world?

Bishop Vásquez: Blessed John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have emphasized the importance of the family and how the family relates to our world. The foundational element of a society is the family. Blessed John Paul II understood that families that are strong provide strength for the general society. Pope Benedict XVI has expounded upon this.

The family is a necessary good for people, an indispensable foundation for society and a great and lifelong treasure for couples. It is a unique good for children, who are meant to be the fruit of the love, of the total and generous self-giving of their parent. To proclaim the whole truth about the family, based on marriage as a domestic church and a sanctuary of life, is a great responsibility incumbent upon all,” the Holy Father said on July 8, 2006.

The church must do everything possible to support and help our families. We have to provide ministry to our families. In the past, ministry has been somewhat isolated, that is to say we have had ministries for young couples, for young adults, for adolescents and for children, but we seem to be neglecting one element and that is the one that binds them all together — we need to minister to families. I encourage parishes to bring families together through common activities of prayer, education and socializing.

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Editor: Many families struggle because of finances, divorce, health and illness. What is your advice to those parents who are struggling?

Bishop Vásquez: Indeed, families struggle on many levels. There are many internal struggles that families face including financial hardship, illness, poverty and separation. There are also many external struggles, such as materialism, a lack of appreciation for the gift of human life and laws that undermine God’s purpose for marriage. Pope Benedict has spoken in great detail about the erosion of the sacrament of marriage. “The spouses’ love and total giving of self ... are at the root of this communion of life and love that constitutes the married state. Today, it is necessary to proclaim with renewed enthusiasm that the Gospel of the family is a process of human and spiritual fulfillment in the certainty the Lord is always present with his grace. This proclamation is often distorted by false concepts of marriage and the family that do not respect God’s original plan ... [thus] society itself is affected and every kind of risk shaves its foundations,” the pope said.

Therefore, we must keep all families in prayer, and we must work to restore the sacrament of marriage. Families should look to the Holy Family — Jesus, Mary and Joseph — as the model of faith for all families. They are the perfect family in one sense, but that doesn’t mean that they were immune to problems and difficulties.

Mary was a very young girl who was expecting a child, and through her faith was able to trust in the Lord and believe he would care for her needs. The same was true for Joseph. He came to believe and understand God’s plan that Mary was to give birth to the Son of God, the Savior of the world, and he had to trust in that plan. And then there was the difficulty of the birth of Jesus, which took place in a stable, among the animals. Shortly after this, the family had to flee because they were being persecuted; they had come from a land far away to wait until the danger had passed. Undoubtedly, the Holy Family had many challenges, but they trusted in God. As families, we are called to be dedicated and committed not only to one another and especially to God. Parents need to know they have a special place in the heart of the church. Parents who are struggling should never be afraid to ask for guidance from the church. Prayer is the minimum parents should do for families who are struggling because of illness, finances or divorce. I encourage parishes to develop ministries and resources for families. We cannot lose sight of these families that are struggling. We must find ways to help families cope and we must keep families strong.

Editor: What is your prayer for families as we continue through the rest of Lent?

Bishop Vásquez: My prayer is that we will all come to appreciate our own families more. During this Lent, I pray as a church we will reach out to the families who need our attention, our help and our support. I pray that all families will turn to the Holy Family as an example of how to trust in God despite their many struggles.

I pray that God will bless our families with an awareness of his unfailing presence and love. May they recognize the presence of God in each other, and appreciate they are a unique gift to society. The family is where God’s presence becomes real through acts of compassion, charity and care for our neighbors.

BISHOP VÁSQUEZ encourages all families to look to the Holy Family as example of models of faith despite great challenges and difficulties.

(GNS photo by Karen Callaway, Northwest Indiana Catholic)
Capitol Comments

The HHS Mandate is an attack on religious liberty

BY MARIA HUEMMER
Texas Catholic Conference

In late January, the Department of Health and Human Services issued a rule mandating employers to provide contraceptive, abortifacient and sterilization services as part of their health care plans. Unified opposition from Catholic bishops, Catholics across the political spectrum, and other religious and secular groups have resounded to oppose this mandate, which in its purest form is an unprecedented attack on the First Amendment right to religious liberty. The HHS Mandate is an attack on religious liberty

Supporters of the mandate hail the ruling as a step forward for women’s health and for efforts to reduce poverty — but these accolades serve as a straw man for the real issue at stake — access to the First Amendment freedom of religion.

Catholic opposition to the mandate centers on the protection of the free exercise of religion, the foundation of our freedoms as Americans. Implicit in this right is the safeguard against requirements that would force individuals to participate in actions that contradict their religious precepts.

The mandate’s meager religious exemption, modeled by the ACLU after the narrowest state-level exemptions, is limited to organizations that hire and serve primarily people of its own faith and therefore fails to protect faith-based employers whose work occurs beyond the walls of a single church building — employers such as our Catholic hospitals, schools, universities and charities. Faith-based organizations have thrived in the U.S., facilitating the growth of hospitals, schools and community programs that educate our workforce, alleviate suffering and ultimately strengthen our nation. These organizations strive to provide the highest quality service while also maintaining a strong faith identity. This identity is upheld regardless of the religious beliefs of the employees or those served, and is protected by the First Amendment. Another straw man enters the argument as mandate supporters claim that because many of these faith-based organizations receive government funding, that exemptions to employers are not given based on government funding received, and this argument fails to recognize that the protection of individuals’ consciences is still not upheld.

The Obama Administration’s recent attempt at compromise is perhaps the biggest straw man of all. HHS in fact issued a regulation finalizing its initial rule “without change” later that same day as the “accommodation” was announced. Employers will still be required to purchase health care coverage that they deem immoral. Individuals will still contribute premiums to the provision of services they deem immoral. That the insurance company will now have the responsibility to inform women about their ability to access those services is no concession.

Without a broader exemption, religious employers will face a dire decision — to provide coverage that violates their consciences, simply stop providing coverage at all and face steep penalty fees, or close up shop altogether. Individual employees who oppose these services will have no recourse against mandatory participation in paying premiums for services they consider immoral.

In early February, the Texas Bishops wrote to the state’s Congressional delegation asking them to oppose the “unconscionable and unnecessary” mandate and urging them to cosponsor the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act, legislation that preserves freedom of conscience for those who provide or purchase health care coverage. The bishops have also asked Catholics across the state to contact their members of Congress to voice their concerns. Visit the Texas Catholic Conference HHS Mandate web page at www.TXcatholic.org/HHSMandate.asp to learn how you can contact your members of Congress and ask them to protect religious freedom. Let us join with the diverse groups who see past the straw men in this mandate and recognize the attack on religious freedom that must be reversed.

MARIA HUEMMER is the communications director of the Texas Catholic Conference. The conference fosters cooperation and communication among the dioceses of Texas. For more information, visit the website at www.txcatholic.org or call (512) 339-9062.
Social Justice

HHS changes prove advocacy does work, so keep it up

By Barbara Budde

COLUMNIST

In late January when the Health and Human Services department issued a ruling regarding implementation of the “preventive services” mandate as part of health care reform implementation, our bishops called us to defend our religious liberties and our Catholic teachings. Within weeks, President Obama announced a “compromise” that he hoped would address the situation. For the bishops, it did not and they continue to call for a legislative or judicial response to protect religious liberty and rights of conscience.

While the media and pundits debate and dissect many aspects of this controversy, what we all must recognize is that advocacy worked! The bishops asked Catholics to act, we did and there was change. That change might not be sufficient to address all of our concerns, but our voices were heard and there was movement.

So often there is cynicism about political engagement. There are plenty who will argue that it is not worth the time or effort to fight for what we believe, but the events from Jan. 20 to Feb. 10 prove that when we speak, our voices are heard and change can occur. This issue is not resolved fully, but it is clear that we can make a difference. There are other issues about which our bishops have spoken but these have not received the same concerted effort from all of us or the same media attention. Here are two that need the same energetic collective response from us.

For decades, the U.S. bishops have called for an end to the use of the death penalty. In 1972 Columbus Avenue facility. They stopped in the driveway for a brief visit with one of our sidewalk counselors, but then they drove in. About an hour later, a middle-aged man drove in; minutes later he drove out with his daughter who we had talked to earlier. He stopped and rolled down his window and with tears streaming from his eyes thanked us for being there, smiled broadly, and said his grandson was going to live.

The joy over the closing is tempered with one voice on this issue and they launched a national campaign several years ago to end the use of the death penalty, we have not seen the same call to protect life from the faithful as is needed to change hearts, minds and the law.

As we prepare for the Texas legislative session that will open at the beginning of 2013 and examine the views and values of candidates running for office, we have the opportunity to bring this pro-life issue forward in our state. Advocacy works; we can change our state policy and end the use of the death penalty.

On Dec. 12, 2011, Bishop Joe Vasquez joined with his fellow Hispanic bishops of this country in writing a pastoral letter to undocumented immigrants. In it they renewed the call that all bishops have given for comprehensive immigration reform. Throughout the last decade the bishops have been calling for humane, sensible immigration reform that respects U.S. sovereignty, respects the dignity and rights of undocumented immigrants and calls for necessary reforms so that families can stay in their country of origin with sufficient work and income to survive.

Together we can change the tone of political rhetoric to reflect our pro-life values which teach every person is made in God’s image and deserving of respect and dignity. In this letter, the bishops acknowledge that many Catholic faithful have not joined their efforts for change. As we did in these past few weeks regarding religious liberty and conscience protection, let us rise up to support our bishops’ call for justice, for respect for every person and for change in our laws that reflect our values.

For more information on ending the use of the death penalty, visit www.catholicmobilizing.org or www.uscdp.org. For more information on comprehensive immigration reform, visit www.justiceforimmigrants.org. For more information on the HHS mandate, visit www.usccb.org/conscience.

Barbara Budde is the diocesan director of social concerns. She can be reached at (512) 949-2471 or barbara-budde@austindiocese.org.

Pro-Life

After 18 years of prayer, Waco abortion facility is closed

By John Pisciotta

GUEST COLUMNIST

Closed! After 18 years, the Planned Parenthood Waco abortion facility at 1927 Columbus Ave. shut down at the end of 2011. The sign at the back door entrance displayed the message, “We have moved. Planned Parenthood Waco Family Planning and Surgical Services is now located at 1121 Ross Ave., Suite A.” At this door, 18,000 women had entered to allow the lives of their unborn to be taken. This is 3,000 more than all the students currently enrolled in Waco Independent School District.

The Waco pro-life community — Catholic and Protestant — had stood, prayed and counseled for life in the public right of way at Columbus Avenue for nearly two decades. Those who made this sidewalk and turf a focal point of their Christian discipleship thank God for the closure. This place of death is now itself lifeless.

The joy over the closing is tempered with the reality that Planned Parenthood has relocated abortion to its central facility at 1112 Ross Avenue. Nevertheless, the closing of any such facility is cause for rejoicing for the culture of life.

The Columbus Avenue surgical abortion facility was a one-day-a-week operation. In the final months of destruction of the unborn, that day was Monday. The abortionist has always come from out of town.

From the launch of the abortion business in 1994, dedicated pro-lifers proclaimed that something terrible was happening in Waco and tried to deter mothers from abortion. I was a regular for over a decade. For the last four years this involved driving the Pro-Life Waco billboard truck out to the abortion site. One precious defender of life, Carolyn Keating, stood in the Choose Life bus and continued on those days when a death toll reached 20 or higher. Yes, there were many days when the death toll was higher than the 16 killed by Charles Whitman at the University of Texas tower on a summer day in 1966. Along with the tragic losses, many babies and mothers were saved through the grace of God and the witness of those who stood for life. On one morning last year, a young couple drove to the Columbus Avenue facility. They stopped in the driveway for a brief visit with one of our sidewalk counselors, but then they drove in. About an hour later, a middle-aged man drove in; minutes later he drove out with his daughter who we had talked to earlier. He stopped and rolled down his window and with tears streaming from his eyes thanked us for being there, smiled broadly, and said his grandson was going to live.

Events like this, and the realization that there were many others unknown to us, led us on week after week. Over the 18 years at Columbus Avenue, there were so many heart-breaking, as well as encouraging, events.

In 2000, Pro-Life Waco and Elijah Ministries launched a court challenge to the City of Waco over unequal enforcement of its sign ordinance (very strict at 1927 Columbus Avenue). In November 2001, in Federal District Court, the City of Waco was required to abandon the existing sign ordinance. In 2001, Planned Parenthood added the RU-486 chemical procedure for carrying out abortions.

In 2006 the City of Waco approved an advertising ban on those days when a death toll reached 20 or higher. Yes, there were many days when the death toll was higher than the 16 killed by Charles Whitman at the University of Texas tower.

The ordinance an unconstitutional infringement on our constitutional rights. For more than 18 years, we gathered to pray the rosary each week at Columbus Avenue.

We held four 40 Days for Life campaigns of prayer and public witness at Columbus Avenue. Our children used colored chalk to illustrate their prayers.

In June 2011, Pro-Life Waco opened Hope House next door to the Columbus Avenue abortion facility.

In July 2011, Planned Parenthood Waco announced that they would be taken over and managed by Planned Parenthood of the Texas Capital Region.

On the Roe Anniversary of Jan. 22, we held an “Hour of Remembrance” at 1927 Columbus Avenue to honor the innocents lost to abortion. We then drove to 1121 Ross Avenue for a Joshua March seven times around the new abortion center.

The shift of abortion from Columbus Avenue to Ross Avenue changes the battle for life in Waco. We will revamp our outreach to work for the end to abortion in our city. We need support and prayers to sustain our efforts. God will be with us. We know the Culture of Life prevails, everyone is invited to Waco for the celebration!

John Pisciotta is a member of the Respect Life Committee of St. Mary Parish in Waco and he is the director of Pro-Life Waco. Visit www.prolife-waco.com and plannedpromiscuity.com or contact him at proliefwaco@gmail.com.
St. Cyril of Jerusalem helped introduce people to faith

BY MARY LOU GIBSON
COLUMNIST

When something is truly valuable, it usually stands the test of time and becomes an important treasure for generations to come. Such are the lectures delivered orally and later written by St. Cyril of Jerusalem for instructing the catechumens and newly baptized. These discourses include 24 areas of instructions delivered in Lent to those preparing for baptism.

Today, St. Cyril is a model for those involved in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) programs, the process by which adults are introduced to the Catholic faith.

Writer Bernard Bangley reports in “Butler’s Lives of the Saints” that Cyril expressed a positive faith in his discourses. He insisted on a relationship of faith and action, stating that “Pious doctrine is not acceptable to God without good works.”

As a newly ordained priest, he was given the job of instructing the catechumens by his bishop, St. Maximus. Cyril treated these new candidates for Catholicism with tenderness and great solicitude. He wrote about God as ever kind, compassionate and full of counsel.

When Maximus died, Cyril was consecrated as bishop of Jerusalem in about 350. There was much controversy in the church at this time over the human and divine natures of Christ. Paul Burns noted in “Butler’s Lives of the Saints” that Cyril tried to seek peaceful resolutions to the arguments while upholding orthodox doctrine against Arianism, a heresy that denied the divinity of Jesus and was widespread in the Roman Empire.

Not only did Cyril find himself embattled in fighting this heresy, but soon after he became bishop, he came into conflict with Acacius of Caesarea over a question of jurisdiction and matters of faith. The disagreement became open strife between the two men.

The death of Constantine in 361 ended the recall of all bishops and Cyril was once again returned to Jerusalem. His last banishment occurred in 367 and he remained in exile until 378. He finally returned to Jerusalem to live out the last eight years of his life.

On his final return, Cyril found a city consumed with heresy and strife. He was never able to put things completely right. There was schism and appalling crimes that tore Jerusalem apart. In 381, Cyril and Gregory of Nyssa were at the Council of Constantinople where the Nicene Creed and orthodoxy triumphed and Arianism was finally condemned. Cyril finally received justice at this same Council. He was cleared of all previous rumors and commended for “a good fight in various places against the Arians.”

Cyril was described by many biographers as a gentle man who had the misfortune to live in turbulent times. Richard McBrien explains in “Lives of the Saints” that Cyril was attacked by both sides on doctrinal matters.

On the one hand, he was attacked by those loyal to the teaching of the Council of Nicaea that Christ is of the same substance with God the Father. On the other hand, he was attacked by the Arians who held that Christ was the greatest of creatures but not divine.

Cyril died in Jerusalem in 386 at about 70 years of age. His feast day is March 18 and it is on the General Roman Calendar and is also celebrated by the Russian Orthodox Church.

He is also commemorated by the Church of England and the Episcopal Church in the U.S. Cyril was declared a doctor of the church in 1882 by Pope Leo XIII.
Lent
Silence in mind, voice can lead to deeper faith

BY JOE TOWALSKI
GUEST COLUMNIST

Silence as an essential part of communication seems at first to be a contradiction. Silence may be golden, some would say, but it won't help you get your point across to others in a world dominated by a steady stream of voices and information flowing nonstop from televisions, radios, computer monitors and smartphones.

But Pope Benedict XVI, in his latest message for World Communications Day, reminds us that silence plays a vital role in our communication with others: It forces us to listen more closely, evaluate ideas more thoroughly, and temper our responses.

Who wouldn't like to see more of that kind of communication taking place during presidential debates or television talk shows? Or during discussions on important social policy issues facing our state and nation? Or, even in our workplaces and around our family dinner tables, where all of us have trouble at times not interrupting or raising our voices?

Silence here is not the focus, but space” to rejuvenate ourselves and reflect more deeply on our lives, our relationships and the world around us.

Many of us try to do something extra for our spiritual lives during the season of Lent — which began Feb. 22, Ash Wednesday. If you haven’t already committed to a Lenten program — and even if you have — book some additional time right now during those 40 days for silence, prayerful meditation and reflection.

Check your parish bulletin or diocesan newspaper calendar section for upcoming opportunities for silent retreats around the area. Or make a point to visit one of the many eucharistic adoration chapels for an hour or even a few minutes once per week.

If you enjoy the outdoors, take advantage of area nature trails and state parks for some quiet time alone to pray and contemplate the beauty of God’s creation.

Spend some time at home as a family with televisions, radios, phoners and computers turned off. These media — as valuable as they are — can sometimes interfere with family communication. Shut them down, share a prayer and a meal together, and then play a board game or enjoy another family activity.

Silence here is not the focus, but it’s an opportunity worth seizing to nurture better communication in other ways among husbands and wives, parents and children.

Pope Benedict wrote that “If God speaks to us in silence, we, in turn, discover in silence the possibility of speaking with God and about God.”

Silencing our voices and our minds can help us deepen our relationship with God and broaden our awareness of his presence in our life. Silence coupled with attentive listening can also help us deepen our relationships with others we encounter every day of our lives in our families, workplaces and communities.

JOE TOWALSKI is the editor of The Catholic Spirit, newspaper of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.
Celebrating Catholic Schools
Event honors those committed to Catholic education

The fourth annual Celebrating Catholic Schools Dinner and Awards Ceremony was held Jan. 28 at the Westin Hotel in Austin. The event brought together hundreds of people to celebrate the gift of Catholic education in the Austin Diocese. Funds raised through the event will be returned to the Catholic schools to aid in their financial assistance programs.

Bishop Joe Vásquez and Ned Vander, the diocesan superintendent of Catholic schools, presented honorees from each Catholic school an award for their leadership and service. This year more than 550 people attended the event, which was the largest crowd to date. Matthew Kelly, an internationally acclaimed motivational speaker and bestselling author, was the keynote speaker for the evening.

“I am so pleased that we will be returning a record amount back to the schools this year to support tuition assistance programs,” Vander said.

Kelly spoke about the importance of telling the story of the Catholic faith. The Catholic Church has provided affordable health care and education to millions of people in the U.S.; however, that is not the story the media tells, he said.

“We need to know our story spiritually, and we need to tell it. We need to live it!” he said.

Kelly thanked the attendees for envisioning a bigger future for Catholic schools in Central Texas.

“The 5,000 children attending Catholic schools are going to influence all walks of life in the years to come. They are going to share the values and virtues they learn in Catholic schools with the rest of the world, and that is reason for great hope,” he said.

The people from each school who were honored are listed below and continue on Page 25.
GOOD NEWS

25 March 2012

Not photographed:

Yolanda Cortes-Mares
St. Mary’s Catholic School, Temple

OUR THANKS to these Celebrating Catholic Schools Sponsors

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Dr. Ned F. Vanders
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CATHOLIC SCHOOLS
Diocese of Austin
Education to the Highest Power

PARTNERS OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION
Cathedral School of Saint Mary, Austin
Holy Family Catholic School, Austin
Holy Trinity Catholic High School, Temple
Reicher Catholic High School, Waco
Sacred Heart Catholic School, LaGrange
St. Austin Catholic School, Austin
St. Dominic Savio Catholic High School, Austin
St. Gabriel’s Catholic School, Austin
St. Helen Catholic School, Georgetown
St. Ignatius, Mary Cathedral School, Austin
St. Joseph Catholic School, Bryan
St. Joseph Catholic School, Killearn
St. Louis Catholic School, Austin
St. Louis Catholic School, Waco
St. Mary’s Catholic School, Taylor
St. Mary’s Catholic School, Temple
St. Mary’s Catholic School, West
St. Michael’s Catholic Academy, Austin
Sts. Cyril & Methodius Catholic School, Granger
St. Theresa’s Catholic School, Austin
San Juan Diego Catholic High School, Austin
Santa Cruz Catholic School, Buda

FRIENDS OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION
Francis R. and Elen Jane Bradley
Dennis and Carla Dovkey
Society of St. Katherine Drexel
Dan and Emily Hudnut
The John Paul II Life Center
Bob and Mary Gay Murray
Brent Crawford and Hae-Jung Kim
Larsa O’Neill and John Sherman
Mr. and Mrs. Tim VonDohlen
Brent and Karin Warrington
The Catholic Business Network will hold its next meeting March 7 at 7:30 a.m. at St. William’s Parish Center in Round Rock. All Catholic business professionals are invited to attend and network in an effort to form trusted relationships based on Catholic values. Spiritual development is an integral part of all meetings. For details and to register to attend, visit www.catholicbiznetwork.org. This is not a ministry of the Diocese of Austin.

Catholic Scripture Study is in its 12th year in Austin. The study meets on Wednesdays at 9:30 a.m. at St. Louis Parish (a group also meets at St. Margaret Mary Parish in Cedar Park). This year the two-hour sessions will be studying prophets and apostles. Classes consist of prayer, small group discussion, lecture, and fellow readers. The first Wednesday of every month is Intro Day, where visitors are invited throughout the year to attend a session and register for class. For more information, visit www.cssaustin.org or contact Patty Hogan (Austin classes) at (512) 356-0742 or (512) 940-0698.

Five lay people, members of Sacred Heart Secular Franciscan Fraternity, will make their lifelong profession to follow Christ in the manner of St. Francis of Assisi on March 4 at 11 a.m. at St. Joseph Parish in Bryan. The Rite of Permanent Profession marks the end of several years of preparation and begins a lifelong commitment to live the Gospel as lay people in the world as members of the Secular Franciscan Order, the third order founded by St. Francis in 1221. The Rite of Profession will be celebrated in the context of the Mass and a reception will follow. For more information, contact Sharon Toups at (512) 355-3575.

Pax Christi Austin will meet March 18 at 7 p.m. at the Father John Payne House at St. Ignatius, Martyr Parish in Austin. Pax Christi Austin, which meets the third Sunday of every month, is a member of Pax Christi International and Pax Christi USA, the Catholic peace and justice movement that works and prays to create a world that reflects the peace of Christ. For more information, contact Bob Rankin at bobrankin.net.

All are invited to collectively make or renew their “Total Consecration to Jesus through Mary” on the Annunciation of the Lord. Rosary and Mass will be offered on March 26 at St. Mary Cathedral in Austin at 6 p.m. (Msgr. Mike Sis will preside), Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Martindale at 6:30 p.m., Santa Cruz Parish in Buda at 6:30 p.m. (Msgr. Joseph Deane will preside), and St. William Parish in Round Rock at 6:15 p.m. (Father Jonathan Raia will preside). Visit www.TexasToJesusThroughMary.org for more information.

The Austin Rosary Crusade will celebrate their 37th anniversary with a retreat in Spanish on March 10 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at St Ignatius, Martyr Parish Hall in Austin. The program consists of a light breakfast, music, rosary, contemplation, exposure of the Blessed Sacrament and Mass. Admission is free. Lunch is $5 for adults and free for children. For more information, call Ignacio Moreno, coordinator at (512) 443-4111 or (512) 940-0698.

An introductory session to the Creighton Model of natural family planning will be held March 5 at 7 p.m. at St. Mary Catholic Center in College Station. Learn how women can understand and monitor their reproductive health. Learn how couples can naturally plan their family. Registration fee is $20. To register online visit www.aggiecatholic.org/fecsm or e-mail fecetexas@gmail.com.

A series of classes on the Symptothermal Method of natural family planning will be held beginning March 13 at 7 p.m. at St. Mary Cathedral in Austin. The classes are spaced about one month apart and will help couples learn how to identify the three common signs of fertility and infertility. To register or for more information, visit http://register.cedi.org.

The Austin Couple to Couple League will offer a natural family planning Introduction Seminar March 18 at 7 p.m. at St. Catherine of Sienna Parish in Austin. The class will satisfy the Austin Diocese requirement for marriage. To register call Sam and Katrina Hartsock at (512) 899-8294.

An introductory session on the Creighton Model of natural family planning will be held March 24 at 10 a.m. at Seton Williamson in Round Rock. To register, e-mail name and the date of the class to austinfre@gmail.com.

A series of classes on the Billings Method of natural family planning will begin March 29 at 7 p.m. at St. William Parish Education Center 24/26 in Round Rock. The complete course costs $100 and is comprised of three classes. For more information or to make reservations, contact Amanda and Ryan Ransom at ransonsnf@gmail.com.

Send in your items!

Catholic Spirit offers this page, “For Your Information,” as a “community bulletin board.” Items of general interest of upcoming parish and diocesan events, including parish social events, will be printed at no charge at the discretion of the editor. The deadline for material is the 10th of the month, with publication occurring the first week of the following month. Material may be e-mailed to catholic-spirit@austindiocese.org or faxed to (512) 949-2523.
Parish and community events

Young wives and mothers are invited to a bi-weekly Bible study on Mondays from 3 to 11:30 a.m. at St. John Neumann Parish in Austin. The study is based on “Reasons for Our Hope,” which goes through the Gospel of Luke. Child care will be offered for a fee. For more information, contact Jen Crowley at (512) 328-3220, ext. 108 or jcrowley@sjaustin.org.

Dolores Parish in Austin will serve cheese enchilada plates during Lent on Fridays March 2, 9 and 16 from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Capistrano and cakes will also be sold. The Knights of Columbus Council of Caldwell will host Fish Fry Friday Dinners March 9, 16, 23 and 30 from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. at St. Mary’s gym in Caldwell. The cost is $8 per plate.

St. John Neumann Parish in Austin will host a Fish Fry at 6 p.m. and the Stations of the Cross will follow at 7 p.m. on the Fridays during Lent. Dinner includes fried catfish, cole slaw, fries and hush puppies. Suggested donation is $5 or $8 for families.

Between the Masses, an adult formation series is underway at St. John Neumann Parish in Austin on Sundays at 10:15 a.m. in the St. Timothy Room. For more information, contact Nancy Biehler at (512) 328-3220 ext. 108 or nbiehler@sjaustin.org.

The Notre Dame Glee Club will perform March 14 at 7 p.m. at Emmaus Parish in Lakeway. The concert is open to the public and will be free. Donations will be accepted to cover the group’s travel expenses.

Teens Encounter Christ (TEC) will hold a retreat March 16-18 at Eagle’s Wings Retreat Center near Burnet. This is a three-day retreat based on the Paschal Mystery for those who are between the ages of 17 and 24. For more information and for applications, visit www.tec-ext.org.

Bishop Emeritus John McCarthy will dedicate the new church at St. John Neumann Parish in Austin March 17 at 3 p.m. The dedication will be followed by music, dancing and dinner. For more information, visit www.sjndedication.org.

St. William Parish in Round Rock will celebrate Father Dean Wilkins’ 50th birthday on March 17 at 7 p.m. at Dell Diamond’s United Heritage Center in Round Rock. Tickets are $50 each, and all proceeds will go to reducing the parish’s debt and moving from “Maintenance to Mission.” For more information, contact Ana Cristina Gonzalez at (512) 600-8179 or agonzalez@saintwilliams.org. Sponsorship and tickets can be purchased online by visiting www.saintwilliams.org.

An Austin Prayer Vigil for Life is scheduled for March 17 at St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Austin. Mass will begin at 7 a.m., followed by adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the church and a caravan will travel to Planned Parenthood where the rosary will be prayed from 8:20 to 9:20 a.m. Benedictine Bishop Ryan of St. Catherine at 10:30 a.m. Refreshments will be served. All are invited to attend. For more information, contact Bob Christian at (512) 247-1701 or pjhaustin@gmail.com.

The Clerical Endowment Fund provides less-cost loans to parishes. Interest from the loans is used to educate diocesan seminarians. For information, contact either Father Ed Kaszas at (524) 826-5705 or Mary Ann Till at (512) 353-4943.

Fish Fry Friday Dinner at 6 p.m. and the Stations of the Cross will follow at 7 p.m. on the Fridays during Lent. Dinner includes fried catfish, cole slaw, fries and hush puppies. Suggested donation is $5 or $8 for families.

The Third Annual Savio Bookfair will be held March 24 from 1 to 5 p.m. at the Barnes and Noble at 14010 Hwy. 183 in Austin. Activities include storytime, robotics, poetry recitation and band and choir performances. A percentage of the purchases made at Barnes and Noble will benefit the St. Dominic Savio Catholic High School Library (submit “Bookfair April 25” at checkout in store). For more information, contact Bob Christiansen at (512) 353-8233 or agonzalez@saintwilliams.org. Sponsorship and tickets can be purchased online by visiting www.saintwilliams.org.

An ACTS retreat for women will be held March 22-25 at St. Mary, Church of the Assumption Parish in West. For a registration form or for more information, contact Karen at (254) 495-5682 or westacts@gmail.com.

Dolores Parish in Austin will host a Fish Fry March 23 and April 6 from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Capistrano and cakes will also be sold.

The Pro-Life Benefit Gala will be held April 14 at the Renaissance Hotel in Austin. It will feature Bishop Joe Vasquez and George Weigel, a renowned theologian and author of the best-selling biography of Blessed John Paul II, “Witness to Hope.” Sponsorships are also available.

Holy Cross Parish in Bertram will host its fifth annual golf tournament March 31 at Delaware Springs in Burnet. The four-person scramble will begin with a shotgun start at 1:30 p.m. The fee is $60 per player, which includes green fees, cart, range balls and meal. There will be a grand prize of $5,000. For more information, call Roy Salazar at (512) 355-2833.

Single Catholic women ages 18 to 50 who are discerning God’s call are invited to attend a “Come and See” weekend at Incarnate Word Convent in Victoria on March 31-April 1. For more information, visit www.jwbcvttx.org, call (361) 575-7111 or e-mail rbewevoe@yahoo.com.

St. Joseph Parish in Cyclone will host its annual Spring Fest April 1 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Homefried chicken, sausage, dressing, cole slaw, noodles and dessert will be served for $8 per plate. Other activities include homemade baked goods, a silent auction and more.

The annual Chirist Mass is April 3 at 10:30 a.m. at St. William Parish in Round Rock.

St. Mary Cathedral Parish in Austin will hold its annual Spring Gala benefiting the Cathedral School of St. Mary on April 12 at 6 p.m. Highlights of the evening include a performance by members of the Cathedral’s renowned Schola Cantorum, live and silent auctions and dinner. To purchase tickets or sponsorships, contact Greg Vidal or Susan Leach at (512) 476-6182. For more information, visit www.smcraustin.org.

The Pro-Life Benefit Gala will be held April 14 at the Renaissance Hotel in Austin. It will feature Bishop Joe Vasquez and George Weigel, a renowned theologian and author of the best-selling biography of Blessed John Paul II, “Witness to Hope.” Sponsorships are also available. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit www.centraltexaprolife.org or call (512) 949-2486.

“The Virtues in Scripture,” a lecture series, will be presented April 15 at 6:45 p.m. in the school library at St. Mary Cathedral in Austin. Father Michael Therese Scheerger of the Community of St. John will be the presenter. For more information, contact Celia Martinez at (512) 441-9914 or celiatorn15@yahoo.com.

Pastoral support for victims of sexual abuse

The Diocese of Austin is committed to providing confidential and compassionate care to victims of sexual abuse, particularly if the abuse was committed by a clergy or a church representative. If you have experienced abuse by someone representing the Catholic Church, please contact the diocesan coordinator of pastoral care at (512) 949-2400.

Apoay pastoral a las victimas de abuso sexual

La Diocesis de Austin se compromete a proporcionar ayuda confidencial y compasiva a las victimas de abuso sexual, especialmente si el abuso fue cometido por el clero o un representante de la iglesia. Si usted ha sufrido abusos por parte de alguien que representa a la Iglesia Católica, favor comunique con el coordinador diocesano del cuidado pastoral al (512) 949-2400.

Como reportar un caso de abuso

La Diocesis de Austin está comprometida a la prevención del daño que se cause a cualquier niño o adulto vulnerable. Si usted está enterado del abuso sexual o físico y/o abandonó de un niño o adulto vulnerable, la ley estatal requiere que se reporte esa información a la policía local o el Departamento de Servicios de Protección de Menores de Texas al (800) 962-5955, si la sospecha de abuso es por parte del clero, empleado o voluntario de cualquier parroquia, escuela u organización de la diócesis, se debe enviar un Reporte Confidencial de Abuso y debe ser presentado a la Oficina de Etica e Integridad en el Ministerio de la diócesis al (512) 949-2400. El Reporte Confidencial de Abuso se encuentra en nuestra página de Internet diocesana: www.austindiocese.org (Haga click en la liga COMO REPORTAR UN CASO DE ABUSO). Estos reportes pueden ser hechos de manera anónima.
El Obispo Joe S. Vásquez es el quinto obispo de la Diócesis de Austin. Es pastor para casi 500,000 católicos en 25 condados en el Centro de Texas.

Editora: Señor Obispo, el Catecismo se refiere a la familia como la "iglesia doméstica". Por favor diga-nos lo que significa este término.

Obispo Vásquez: El término "iglesia doméstica" o del latín "domus ecclesiae" se ha utilizado durante mucho, mucho tiempo para describir a la familia. En los inicios del cristianismo, no había edificios o edificios a la familia. En los inicios del cristianismo se refería a la familia como la "iglesia doméstica". Por favor diga-nos lo que significa este término.

Editora: En la sociedad actual, los padres enfrentan muchos desafíos para la crianza de sus hijos. El materialismo y el deseo de más y mejores "cosas" están fuera de control. ¿Cómo podemos enseñar a nuestros hijos a querer y confiar en Dios en medio de esta tendencia?

Obispo Vásquez: Puesto que los padres son los educadores primarios de sus hijos en la vida y en la fe, es importante que tengan una comprensión adecuada de las necesidades y deseos. Junto con el materialismo, la familia puede dar prioridad a lo que realmente necesitan y lo que quieren. Todos necesitamos alimentos, cuidados en el hogar, ropa y salud. Estas son las necesidades, por lo tanto, tenemos que planear para ellos y hacer nuestras prioridades. En segundo lugar, hay cosas que podemos querer, pero que no nos son necesarias para sobrevivir.

Por ejemplo, podemos querer un automóvil o un tipo de vehículo, pero otro tipo de vehículo es menos costoso pero puede ser igual de bueno. Nosotros decimos: "Bueno, no necesitamos tener que tener ese tipo de vehículo ahora, porque tenemos una familia, tenemos hijos, tenemos que cuidar de ellos, tenemos que planificar para el futuro y para su educación. Por lo tanto, tenemos que vivir de una manera que no sea costosa y todavía cuidar de nuestras necesidades y deseos".

Recomiendo que las familias revisen su estilo de vida y determinen cuáles son las necesidades y los deseos de la familia. Los niños aprenden mucho observando a sus padres. Aprender prioridades y tomar decisiones en consecuencia. Deben enseñar a nuestros niños a vivir en formas que fomenten el bien y el apoyo de la vida familiar.

En segundo lugar, creo que es muy importante que las familias encuentren formas de conectarse con los pobres. Muchas veces somos tan bendecidos que nos olvidamos de que hay de 2006. La iglesia debe hacer todo lo posible para apoyar y ayudar a nuestras familias. Tenemos que ofrecer un ministerio a nuestras familias. En el pasado, el ministerio ha sido algo aislado, en el que hemos tenido los ministerios para las parejas jóvenes, para jóvenes adultos, para adolescentes y para los niños, pero parece que estamos desacudiendo uno de los elementos y que es el que une a nosotros — que tenemos que atender a las familias. Alentamos a las parroquias a unir a las familias a través de actividades comunes, la oración, la educación y la socialización.

En el nivel de casa, aliento a las familias a que tomen tiempo juntos. Debido a que la mayoría de las familias se separan en muchas direcciones, el tiempo debe dejarse de lado para permitir que la familia se cuide mutuamente y fortalezca sus lazos de amor. En efecto, las familias luchan en muchos niveles. Hay muchas luchas internas que las familias luchan en muchos niveles. Hay muchas luchas internas que las familias enfrentan, pero hay que conectarnos con ellos a ríos de, para permitir que la familia se cuide mutuamente y fortalezca sus lazos de amor. Animó a las familias para ir a Misa juntos, para compartir las comidas juntos y pasar tiempo juntos. Los padres deben tener conversaciones con sus hijos sobre la escuela, los amigos, las actividades y otros aspectos de la vida cotidiana. Esto no es simplemente tomar interés en nuestros hijos, pero se trata de un compromiso personal y la responsabilidad de los padres a amar y criar a sus hijos a ser personas maduras. Todas estas cosas ayudan a hacer que las familias sean fuertes.

Editora: Muchas familias luchan por las finanzas, el divorcio, la muerte y la enfermedad. ¿Cuál es su consejo para los padres que están luchando?

Obispo Vásquez: En efecto, las familias luchan en muchos niveles. Hay muchas luchas internas que las familias enfrentan incluso los problemas financieros, enfermedades, la pobreza y la separación. Hay muchas luchas externas, tales como el materialismo, el deseo de más "cosas" están fuera de control. Aliento a las parroquias a desarrollar ministerios y recursos para las familias. No podemos perder de vista una de estas luchas o el otro. Debemos encontrar formas de ayudar a las familias a enfrentar y tenemos que mantener firmes a las familias.

Editora: ¿Cuál es su oración por las familias a medida que estamos luchando con el resto de la Cuaresma?

Obispo Vásquez: Mi oración es que todos lleguemos a valorar más a nuestras propias familias. Durante esta Cuaresma, ruego, que como iglesia, nos perdamos de algunas de nuestras familias que necesitan nuestra atención, nuestra ayuda y nuestro apoyo. Rezo para que todas las familias se conviertan en la Sagrada Familia como un ejemplo de cómo confiar en Dios a pesar de sus muchas luchas.

Rezo para que Dios bendiga a nuestras familias con la conciencia de su presencia constante y el amor. Que reconozcan la presencia de Dios en cada uno y valore que son un don único para la sociedad. La familia es donde la presencia de Dios se hace real a través de actos de compasión, la caridad y el cuidado de nuestro prójimo.
El Espíritu Santo al centro de la conferencia

POR ENDELIA J. OBRÉGON  
CORRESPONSAL PRINCIPAL

Más de 600 personas fueron renovadas en el Espíritu Santo en la primera Conferencia Diocesana de Renovación Carismática en español el 21 de enero. La multitud llenó el Centro de Actividades de la Parroquia de St. Margaret Mary en Cedar Park para escuchar dos Misioneros de Fátima cuyas conversaciones se basaron en el tema de la conferencia: “He venido para que tengan vida y la tengan en abundancia” (Juan 10,10).

Los fieles también pasaron algún tiempo ante el Santísimo Sacramento y recibieron el Sacramento de la reconciliación del Padre Elías Arámbula y el Padre Ángel Enriquez.

Entre los oradores, los asistentes cantaban y se balanceaban al ritmo de la música de las Cristianas Pan de Vida y Emmanuel, que también tocó durante la llamada a la curación que llevó a muchos a las lágrimas por la tristeza que llevan y les permitirá sanar sus heridas”, dijo Flores.

La experiencia de renovación recuerda a la gente que “Cristo está vivo en la iglesia”, dijo. “És la Iglesia está la verdad de Cristo.”

Los grupos carismáticos permiten a las personas a crecer espiritualmente en su formación y a servir como una forma de evangelización. Ella confía en que la evangelización dará sus frutos. Flores ha pasado 19 años en el movimiento carismático y dice que el área de Austin se encuentra en una etapa crítica de su formación espiritual en su formación.

Arámbula recordó a los parroquianos en Waco, Marble Falls, Kileen, Temple, Buda y Austin.

En la conferencia, el Padre Arámbula recordó a los participantes de la llamada a ser discípulos de Cristo. A diferencia de otras religiones donde la gente busca a Dios, en la Iglesia Católica, es Dios quien nos busca (Juan 1,48).

Señaló que Jesús estaba siempre mirando a la gente, dándose cuenta de los que fue pasando por alto, como la viuda en el templo donando unas cuantas monedas de cobre (Marcos 12,43).

“Nosotros a menudo tememos dificultades en la vida sin darse cuenta de que tenemos que mirar hacia arriba”, dijo. “Tenemos que recordar de dónde viene nuestra salvación”.

Dijo que el Movimiento de Renovación Carismática es un instrumento valioso y ayuda a formar y a cultivar los carismas en nuestras diócesis, especialmente en la comunidad hispana. Al reunir a todas las comunidades de oración de habla hispana en el movimiento carismático en la diócesis, “serve para reconocer su trabajo, celebrar sus éxitos y renovarnos para el futuro... el futuro de nuestra comunidad hispana en nuestra diócesis está vinculada con los frutos de la renovación engendrado por el Espíritu Santo”, dijo.

María Flores, presidente de la comisión diocesana que organizó la conferencia, dijo que cerca de 25 grupos de la parroquia estuvieron representados en la conferencia. Venían de las parroquias en Waco, Marble Falls, Kileen, Temple, Buda y Austin.

Flores dijo que hay una liberidad al abrirlse al Espíritu Santo y no preocuparse por lo que los demás puedan pensar de la respuesta — ya sea levantando las manos en la oración, hablar en lenguas o llorando.

“Al principio me daba vergüenza levantar mis manos”, dijo Flores. “Pero si Dios me está escuchando no hay necesidad de preocuparme. Aplaudimos a los artistas y gritamos y gritamos. Entonces, ¿por qué avergonzarse de hacerlo para Dios?”

Flores es feligrés de la Parroquia St. Elizabeth en Pflugerville, y dijo que muchos de los fieles son inmigrantes y tratan de adaptarse a una lengua y a una cultura diferente y hacer frente a la discriminación.

Padre Arámbula dijo que Dios nos amó antes de que lo amáramos, nos perdonó... Dios me ha enseñado a mí, que no estoy solo... Dios me ha enseñado que cierta, que cierto, que no estoy solo... Dios me ha enseñado que no estoy solo... Dios me ha enseñado que no estoy solo... Dios me ha enseñado que no estoy solo... Dios me ha enseñado que no estoy solo... Dios me ha enseñado que no estoy solo... Dios me ha enseñado que no estoy solo...

Dijo que a pesar de que iba a misa todos los días, participar en grupos de oración y leer los libros correctos, en realidad no conocía a Dios. En la renovación carismática en 1984, fue renovado en el Espíritu Santo con la “experiencia de una vida nueva”.

“Es un verdadero nacimiento — no es simbólico”, dijo. Nacer de nuevo significa morir a la vida anterior de pecado y egoísmo y convertirse en un santo, dijo. Él encontró que el mundo cambió cuando él cambió. Él había prometido a Dios que sí él lo salvaba de sus pensamientos suicidas iba a con sacarse a Dios. Así se convirtió en sacerdote.

Cuando yo quería suicidarme estaba viviendo una vida centrada en el ego”, dijo. “Dios me ha enseñado a vivir para servirlo a él y a los demás y no hay vida más feliz”.

Reflexión Espiritual

La Cuaresma nos llama a la conversión

POR EDGAR RAMIREZ
DIRECTOR DEL MINISTERIO HISPANO

En estos cuarenta días de oración, ayuno, meditación y obras de caridad, una de las prácticas religiosas muy importantes en nuestra comunidad Católica es el Viacrucis. El Viacrucis es una tradición ancestral de la edad media que se ha convertido en una expresión clara de la fe Católica. En nuestra comunidad hispana esta devoción tiene un lugar bien importante al igual que la visita de las 7 casas, el pésame a la Virgen y las 7 palabras.

Recuerdo que de joven en mi parroquia San José de la Montaña en el CDMX, el grupo de Jornadas al que pertenecía organizaba el Viacrucis de Semana Santa, y yo participé varias veces personificando a algún personaje bíblico. Con mi familia todos los Jueves Santos llamamos a visitar 7 diferentes parroquias y, al terminar el evento cantábamos el calvario de Jesús, de Pilatos a Herodes, de los sacerdotes del templo a Pilatos, etc. El Viernes Santo participábamos en el Viacrucis parroquial caminando junto a la cruz. Participábamos de la predicación de las siete palabras y del pésame a la Virgen. Este último lo recordamos muy vivamente. María frente a la cruz, con lágrimas en sus ojos por la muerte de su único hijo, pero con una ternura y paz interna santa, sabiendo que ese sufrimiento que le punzaba el corazón no es en vano. El pésame a la Virgen me enseñó el valor del sufrimiento. Ya aquí en Estados Unidos también encontré ese mismo fervor ante estas devociones, que intensamente al mirar a este país los estamos olvidando, cierto es también que en algunas parroquias estas tradiciones no son entendidas y por ende no son promovidas o aceptadas. Éstas devociones tienen un secreto profundo de recuperar la memoria de Jesús, su calvario y su victoria antes de la muerte, esa memoria es la historia de nuestra fe, nuestra comunidad, y la razón de nuestro futuro. El Viacrucis es una expresión de fe que predica un valor contrario al que nuestra sociedad hoy predica: el valor del sufrimiento. Sin embargo, estas devociones también nos revelan el valor de la fe en nuestra comunidad Hispana. Jesús es llevado de palacio en palacio esperando lo juzguren, cargando la cruz, muriendo en ese madero con su madre a sus pies condenado al denunciar las injusticias sociales, los pobres, los hambrientos y los oprimidos sufrirán también. Nuestra comunidad Hispana en Estados Unidos sabe de este sufrimiento.

El sufrimiento de Jesús es el sufrimiento del joven indocumentado que por esta su situación tiene opciones de educación y progreso limitadas, opciones que tampoco tiene en su país de origen. Jesús carga esa pesada cruz como las familias que no tienen acceso a servicio de salud y que aun que enfermos no deciden ir al doctor al reconocer que económicamente no podrían cubrir esos gastos sin seguro médico. María llora junto a la cruz con la madre de familia que junto con sus hijos viven lejos de casa en este país, y que al estar lejos de casa no tiene todo el apoyo familiar que podrían haber tenido en sus países de origen para salir adelante como pareja y como padres de familia, pero que por su situación económica tuvieron que dejar para buscar de este lado de la frontera una vida mejor. Al identificar nuestra propia historia de sufrimiento y violencia con el sufrimiento y violencia visible en el Viacrucis, la visita a la cruz puede cambiar su vida y que el pésame a la Virgen le ponga también un fin a este. El sufrimiento de Cristo en la cruz es premiado con la resurrección, no es un sufrimiento pasivo, sino un sufrimiento transformador. Los que condenaron a Jesús buscaban quitarle su humanidad al desnudarlo y clavarlo en unos palos de madera, después de forzarlo a cargar esa cruz por las calles de Jerusalén; sin embargo, Jesús nunca perdió su humanidad, sino al contrario en su sufrimiento Jesús siente y vive su humanidad. “Verdaderamente este era el Hijo de Dios,” dice el Centurión, al verlo en la cruz, sangrando y agonizando. Así, mis hermanos y hermanas, al reconocer el sufrimiento en nuestras propias vidas, nuestra humanidad es reconocida, y este sufrimiento nos transformará.

Estas tradiciones también nos invitan a reconocer la humanidad sufriende del otro. El pueblo inmigrante hispano no es el único que sufre en la cruz y que encuentra en estas expresiones un espacio para conectar su fe con su vida diaria. Todos los católicos estamos invitados a hacer de estas devociones un alimento transformador. El sufrimiento es una experiencia humana universal. Jesús también sufre con toda la comunidad inmigrante del mundo, con la clase media y pobre de todo el mundo que cada día tiene menos recursos para vivir, con las mujeres y niños en los lugares donde hay violencia y guerra, con los enfermos, los encarcelados, los jóvenes que no encuentran esperanza en las instituciones de hoy, con las madres que piensan en el aborto como una opción. Jesús carga junto con usted su cruz.

Esta cuaresma lo invito a reconocer su sufrimiento en estas devociones. ¿Qué heridas tiene de su niño? ¿En qué áreas de su vida hay dolor? ¿Qué experiencias de dolor y sufrimiento ha enfrentando aquí lejos de su tierra? ¿Cuál es su cruz, cuantas cargas, cuanto pesan?

Pero le advierto del peligro de sólo quedarse ahí —en su sufrimiento. La resurrección no es una historia distinta a la del Viacrucis o la muerte de Cristo en la cruz. No. La resurrección es la misma historia. Que su sufrimiento no sea en vano, sino un sufrimiento transformador. Mi oración es que usted también pueda ver el sufrimiento de los demás, de su vecino, de la persona de la otra raza, del que profesa otra religión o valores diferentes a los míos, pues si no reconoce su sufrimiento y realidad, sería como bajar a Jesús de la cruz y dejar la cruz vacía.

Edgar Ramirez es el Director del Ministerio Hispano para la Diócesis de Austin. Se le puede llamar al (512) 495-2468 o por correo electrónico a edgar-ramirez@austindiocese.org.

La cruzada del Rosario de Austin

La cruzada del Rosario de Austin celebra su 37 aniversario de la promoción del Rosario y la evangelización con un retiro de 8 a 4 el sábado, 10 de marzo de 2012 en el Hall de la parroquia de St. Ignatius, Martyr, 126 Oltorf W. en Austin, TX 78704. El programa consta de un ligero desayuno, música, Rosario, confesiones, exposición del Santísimo Sacramento, Santa Misa, servicio de curación y almas. La entrada es gratuita. La comida es $5 para adultos y gratis para los niños. El programa está en español. Para obtener más información, llame a Ignacio Moreno, Coordinador de (512) 443-4111 o al (512) 940-0698.

“La Total Consagración a Jesús a través de María”

Se les invita a todos a hacer o renovar la “Consagración Total a Jesús a través de María” el Lunes 26 de Marzo en la Fiesta de la Anunciación. Para esta Consagración, se ofrecerá una misa en 4 Iglesias. Por favor visita www.TexasToJesusThroughMary.org para mas información.

Los jóvenes adultos hispanos

Los jóvenes adultos hispanos están invitados a la Misa en español que será celebrada el 3 de marzo en la 9 p.m. en la Parroquia de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe en la ciudad de Austin. Los participantes rezarán el rosario a partir de las 8:30 p.m. Para mas información comuníquese con Juan Torres al (512) 415-5908 o Lily Morales al (512) 363-3609 o pjhaustin@gmail.com.
Send photos by the 10th of the month to catholic-spirit@austindiocese.org.
THIS YEAR St. Helen Catholic School is celebrating 10 years of providing academic and spiritual education to the greater Georgetown area. (Photo courtesy Debbie Chaney)

ST. PAUL PARISH in Austin has started a Schoenstatt Girl’s Ministry to develop future female parish leaders. (Photo courtesy Debbi Saunders)

EIGHTH GRADERS at St. Mary’s School in Taylor learned about the anatomy and physiology of the heart in Science Class. (Photo courtesy Tabby Darilek)

THE ST. THOMAS AQUINAS Child Development Center in College Station participated in the Pencil Project during Catholic Schools Week. In less than one month 6,010 pencils were collected to send to Zavala Elementary School in El Paso. (Photo courtesy Monica Love)

FATHER MATTHEW KINNEY led a guided silent meditation at the Catechist Spirituality Retreat at St. Anthony Parish in Kyle on Feb. 4. (Photo courtesy Anna G. Hernandez)

IN HONOR OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK, Holy Family Catholic School celebrated the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord Feb. 2. Father Michael O’Connor celebrated Mass and led the Eucharistic Procession through each building of the school. Dominican Sister Jude Andrew organized the procession. (Photo courtesy Sister Elizabeth Ann O’Reilly and Kelly Hagemeier)

ST. ALBERT THE GREAT Parish in Austin celebrated its 25th anniversary on Jan. 29. In the photograph are those priests and deacons who have served the parish, along with Bishop Joe Vásquez. (Photo by Dale Jarmush)

MIDDLE SCHOOL religious education students at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Austin collected toiletry items for those served by Mobile Loaves and Fishes. The students made more than 530 bags that included shampoo, lotion, deodorant and tooth paste. (Photo courtesy Josie Kleypas)

MORE THAN 1,700 gathered at St. William Parish in Round Rock to hear Matthew Kelly speak on Jan. 29. (Photos courtesy Martina Kreitzer)

Send photos by the 10th of the month to catholic-spirit@austindiocese.org.