

THE MAGAZINE  
OF THE CATHOLIC  
DIOCESE OF  
SAGINAW

Issue 2, 2022

# faith *Saginaw*

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pro-abortion petition

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WITH FATHER JOE**

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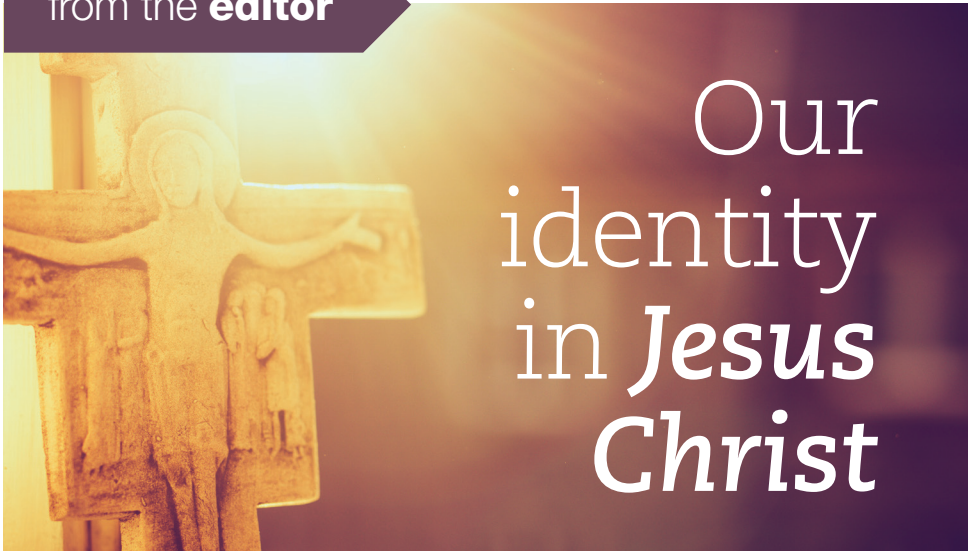


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# MASS *transit*

Catholic school student's request helps classmates attend Mass





# Our identity in *Jesus* Christ

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## “Who are you?”

That’s the question Bishop Gruss asked all of us at the beginning of Lent. He followed up by asking, “Are you living your true identity?”

For the next six weeks, he spent time via video and written messages dispelling five lies about our identity according to the late Father Henri Nouwen (visit the diocesan website, [Saginaw.org](http://Saginaw.org), to view or read). They are:

- I am what I have.
- I am what I do.
- I am what other people say or think of me.
- I am nothing more than my worst moment.
- I am nothing less than my best moment.

These lies can be powerful and convincing, but buying into them brings about stress, anxiety, pain, disappointments, regret and a whole lot of unnecessary sadness, Bishop Gruss reflected. This, he said, is not the Lord’s will for any of us.

The Lord’s will for each of us is that we live our true identity as beloved sons and daughters, created in God’s image and likeness.

“Our truest identity isn’t something we create or build ourselves,” Bishop Gruss said. “It’s a gift we receive, whereby we become adopted children of God – beloved sons and daughters, partakers of God’s divine nature. This is what happens in the Sacrament of Baptism. Baptism is the great sacrament of belonging and of identity. When we know who we belong to, we know who we are.”

What a beautiful reminder and teaching our Bishop gives to us about who we are as we celebrate this Easter season.

As St. Catherine of Siena said, “If you are who God meant you to be, you will set the world on fire.” When we know and believe who we truly are in God’s eyes, we are empowered to do great things for his glory. It is such a joy to share stories in *FAITH Saginaw* of people spreading the fire of God’s love within our own diocese.

May we all be encouraged to embrace our deepest identity in Jesus.

Come Holy Spirit!



**ERIN LOOBY CARLSON**

is editor of *FAITH Saginaw* magazine and director of communications for the Catholic Diocese of Saginaw.

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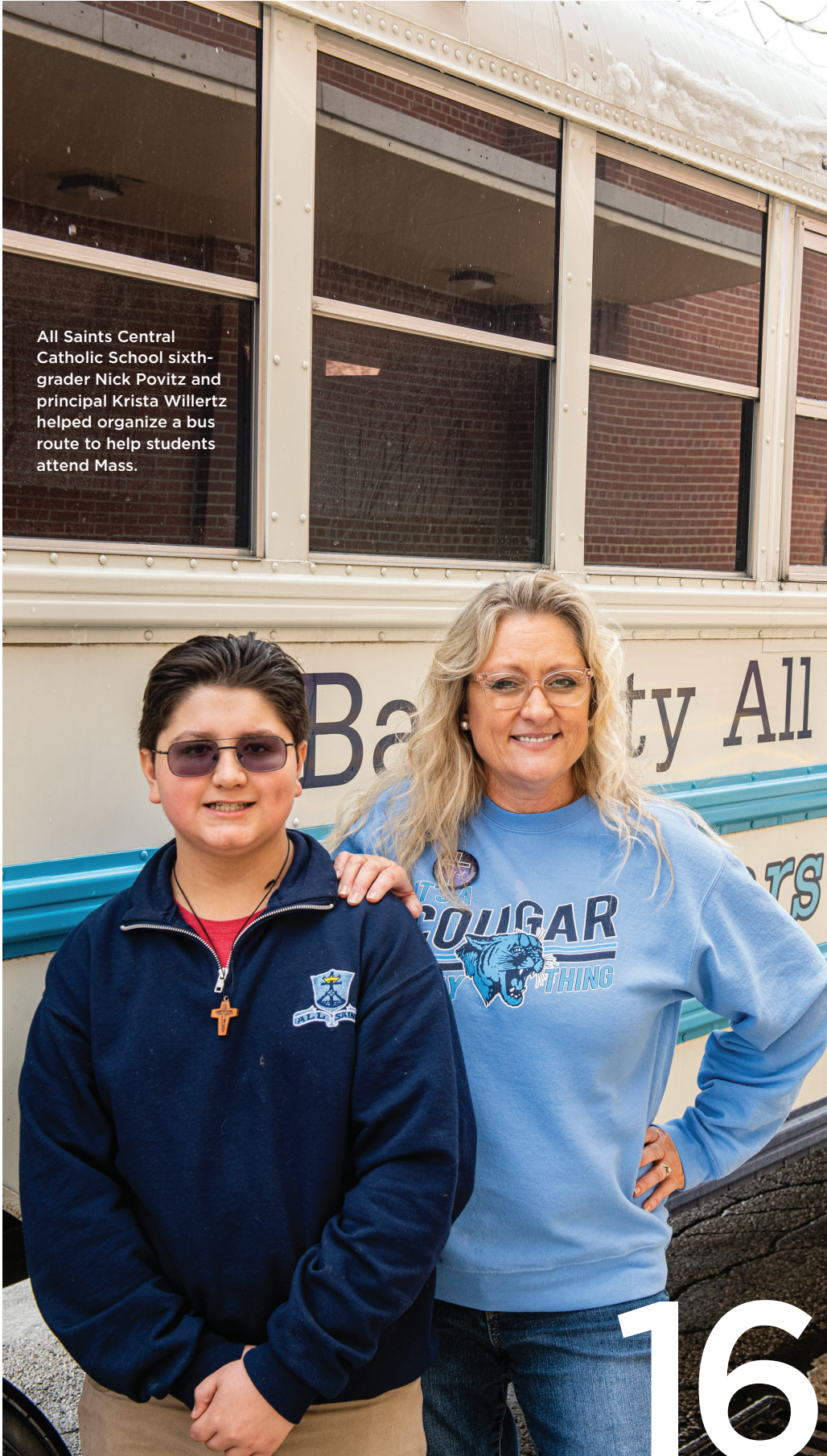
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# ‘God’s love will always be the last word.’

**M**ay the peace and the joy of the Risen Christ be with you all!



**THE MOST REV. ROBERT D. GRUSS**  
is the seventh bishop  
of the Diocese of  
Saginaw

Christ is risen! Christ is truly risen! Throughout the world, since that moment over 2,000 years ago when the tomb was found empty, this has been the cry that gives us our identity. This is the truth that changes everything and everyone.

Easter reveals all the glory and power of God. God is the master of life and death, not only of his Son Jesus, but every one of us. In the same way in which he has resurrected Jesus, he will bring his holy people from death to life. God will always have the last word, and his love will always be the last word. The very life of God cannot be confined in a tomb, but has been released for all the world to experience through the resurrection of Jesus. There is no one or nothing beyond the depth of God’s love. Not even death itself.

Jesus promised to be with us until the end of time. He desires to share in our lives, to be with us in every moment. Therefore, the celebration of

Easter should be lived each day, purposefully.

We have been told, “Do not be afraid! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen. He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.” No matter what is going on in the world, Jesus invites us into this ongoing reality of his victory over sin and death. For those who seek him will see him. Those who desire him will find him in the midst of everyday life. This is where he can be found.

Through the power of his Holy Spirit, Jesus can transform our lives and bring about new life in our hearts – a new springtime. And he desires to do this for us individually and as a faith community, as a country and as a world! His love can transform anything and everything for those who believe.

May your hearts be set afire with his love so that, in spite of the challenges our world faces today, we all will be bearers of his radiant glory, filling the world with his victory! Be assured of my prayers for each of you as we celebrate this Easter victory. Have a blessed Easter! †



## **‘DO NOT SIGN’ effort against pro-abortion initiative**

Dear Friends in Christ,

*“You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother’s womb. I praise you, because I am wonderfully made; wonderful are your works!”* Psalm 139:13-14

These words from the psalmist clearly speak to the truth regarding human life, why it is sacred and why it must be protected. The unjust taking of a human life is always morally wrong, no matter the age of the person. Life should be protected from conception to natural death.

As many of you know, the United States Supreme Court will be ruling on the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, a case addressing whether banning abortions after 15 weeks in a pregnancy is constitutional. This could happen in late June of this year. This ruling could potentially have a tremendous impact in overturning the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling that protected a woman’s right to an abortion prior to the viability of the fetus.

Obviously, abortion is a highly divisive and politicized issue in our culture today. For many, abortion is seen as a woman’s health issue. For many others, it is the taking of innocent human life.

Overturning *Roe v. Wade* would be a welcome decision. The Catholic Church has always proclaimed a vision for our society that every human life is sacred and inviolable, a society in which the legal protection of human life is accompanied by profound care for mothers and their children.

“Every human life, unique and unrepeatable, has value in and of itself; it is of inestimable value. This must always be proclaimed anew with the courage of the Word and the courage of actions. It calls us to solidarity and fraternal love for the great human family and for each of its members.” Pope Francis on the 25th Anniversary of *Evangelium Vitae* (March 25, 2020)

If *Roe v. Wade* is overturned by the Supreme Court, the abortion battle will move to the state level. As we have seen in the last few years, many states have been enshrining access to abortion into state law or restricting it in some form. Michigan state law bans abortion.

But currently in the State of Michigan, a new pro-abortion coalition, Reproductive Freedom for All, has formed and begun a petition drive to collect enough signatures to put their proposal on a statewide ballot. Organizations included in this initiative are Planned Parenthood and the American Civil Liberties Union. If passed, it would amend the Michigan constitution to allow unlimited and unregulated abortions at any time of pregnancy, for any reason, and prevent health and safety requirements for abortion facilities. It would allow schools to help teens obtain abortions without their parents knowing. This Reproductive Freedom for All constitutional amendment puts women’s health at risk. It would eliminate at least 25 health and safety laws that currently regulate abortion and would allow abortion to be performed by anyone – even those without a medical license. It would go into effect regardless of the upcoming decision of the Supreme Court. The coalition’s proposal would “reaffirm Michiganders’ fundamental right to reproductive freedom.”

To get this amendment on the ballot, 425,059 valid signatures from Michigan voters must be submitted to the State by July 11.

**All people should oppose this initiative.** To oppose this petition, a coalition of organizations committed to protecting the lives of unborn children and supporting their mothers has formed. Citizens to Support Michigan Women and Children includes Michigan Catholic Conference and Right to Life of Michigan. The way you can personally oppose it and potentially keep it from getting on the ballot in November is to **DO NOT SIGN** the Michigan Right to Reproductive Freedom Initiative petition when asked, and tell your family and friends as well. We have also learned that those collecting signatures for the pro-abortion initiative are deceptive in their explanation of the petition and are not being truthful about all it entails.

Please carefully consider the negative impact of this proposed policy on unborn children and the health and wellbeing of their mothers. Rather than abortion, women should be provided love, compassion and support through pregnancy and into each child’s early years. We believe that no woman should ever feel forced to choose between her future and the life of her child. More information is available at [www.supportmiwomenandchildren.org](http://www.supportmiwomenandchildren.org).

We must continue our efforts in the pro-life movement bringing the message of life to the world. Since that tragic decision 49 years ago, more than 60 million innocent lives have been taken. We grieve this great and tragic loss. But even in our grief, we live in faith and hope. We also know that as Christians, we must give hope to others, by accompanying especially those in need. Let us not be afraid to bear witness to the truth that every life has immense value, in fact is sacred, and is worth living.

God is always with us encouraging us onward. In the words of St. Paul, *“To him who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”*

– Bishop Robert D. Gruss



# DEAR FATHER JOE, DOES GOD KEEP FORGIVING THE SAME SIN?

I'm really struggling to overcome a sin I commit over and over. If I continue to commit the same sin, does God keep forgiving me when I go to confession?

**OH MY! THIS IS A STRUGGLE I KNOW.** This is, in fact, a struggle that everyone who regularly goes to confession knows, and I pray that you see that in and of itself as the beginning of a blessing. We humans are communal creatures, and sometimes, one of the effects of our struggles is that we feel alone. You are not alone. Everyone striving for holiness wrestles with this reality.



**FATHER JOE KRUPP**

is a former comedy writer who is now a Catholic priest. @Joeinblack

In fact, here is a great quote for you that I think of a lot: *"I do not understand myself. I do not do the good I intend to do, I do what I hate."*

That quote comes from Saint Paul. Saint. Paul. The guy who wrote three-quarters of the New Testament. The man who formed so much of our early theology. The saint who laid down his life for Christ. That guy wrote *that!*

Your struggle is the struggle that saints have. People who don't care whether they sin, or don't even call sin "sin," are not in this fight. Saints are.

So, you are not only **not** alone, you are in a community of saints – people who want to be holy and love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Blessed be the

name of the Lord!

So, what do we do? I'd like to offer you a few things I hold to my heart in my struggle with the fact that I often say many of the same things in every confession.

A big step for me is a prayer I often offer: that God heal me of my affection for sin.

One of the reasons I sin the same so often is because, at my core, I like that sin. It's a tough realization to come to, but an important one. I sin because it's easier. I sin because it gets instant results. Those are two of the appeals of sin.

Jesus sees that affection in me, so I offer to change and heal. At every moment, I stand before God fully seen; so why pretend I can hide anything? Why not surrender

that affection to him so he can heal it? Jesus, heal me of my affection for sin.

Another thing to keep in mind is that one day, you will confess this sin or these sins for the last time. Never forget that this battle is won. Whether God heals this in heaven or here on earth, there will be a day when you and God rejoice in this seemingly impossible victory.

I have experienced this in my own life and frankly, remain shocked at how quickly I turned from assuming I would struggle with a sin my whole life to being freed of it. There really wasn't a "magic moment" as much as a process of little victories that I couldn't see except in retrospect.

I also encourage you to remember that our goal is fidelity, not success. "Success" in fighting sin is a funny thing: Of course we want that and of course that is the optimal outcome, but the process of gaining victory often seems to come from our willingness to get in the fight and stay in it. We go to confession as often as needed, and we trust that this process is, in and of itself, a victory. By going in over and over, we are recognizing that mercy and forgiveness get the last word, not our sin.

There is a wonderful quote from St. Julian of Norwich: "Ultimately, even sin is beholden to God."

What this means is a liberating thing in and of itself: She is pointing out that God's mastery over sin is **so** complete that he can even use that sin for his purpose. In this case here that we are talking about, we can become more humble through our recognition that we desperately need God in order to stop sinning. We become less judgmental and more compassionate as we recognize our struggle against our own sin. How wonderful is that?

The next time you or I feel we are a bit superior, the next time we are tempted to judge our neighbor harshly, we can, by God's grace, call to mind our own struggles and



# The beginning of Wisdom is fear of the Lord...

PSALM 9:10

**I** look forward to concerts as restrictions related to the pandemic unwind. I recall a concert I attended in a Catholic church a few years ago. The music was lovely and beautifully performed, but had nothing to do with God. I asked myself whether I should remain, as I understood that the church is built and blessed and set aside to give glory to God, and music and art in churches should give honor to God.<sup>1</sup> I waited for the next composition of music and then the next for music that referred to God, to our Faith, to Scripture ... but that orientation was not present.

let God make us more merciful, more compassionate.

Finally, I ask you to remember an important point: When you confess your sins to God and receive his mercy, he takes those sins on his shoulders and puts them to death. Those sins exist no more. They are dead. They are gone.

As a result of this, it is only you who are aware you are confessing the same thing over and over. As far as God is concerned, this is the first time you've confessed it.

I pray that Jesus lift your heart and keep you from despair or frustration. I pray that you rejoice in the fact that one day, you will confess this sin for the final time.

Until that day, I pray that you allow God to heal your affection for sin, and that God keeps you and me humble and allows us the wonder of knowing that our sins are dead through this beautiful sacrament. †

I looked around and saw that others were enjoying this music. But that gaze outward was irrelevant. "Should I leave?," I wondered. "Perhaps, but let me see what will be played and sung next ... and so it went." I remained, but with the wonder whether my presence would offend God.

I know that this is a trivial example. Yet, this example of an uncomfortable situation can prompt us to question, "Should I be here? Should I say or do something?"

*I am not contributing to the gossip ... but I am listening (and perhaps giving an impression of approval).*

*I am not the one turning away a stranger with a harsh look ... but do I welcome? I don't bully or belittle a colleague at work ... but do I befriend him?*

*Is my presence, my silence offensive to God?*

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord.

Fear takes different forms. A child will act

well in front of parents if the child is afraid of punishment. A driver may slow down out of fear of a ticket. I may be afraid of God's punishment and therefore act "correctly" to escape his wrath. This type of fear, sometimes referred to as servile fear, matches our behavior with the perceived expectations of parents, police and even God. While not especially a strong moral compass, servile fear does get us on the path of good behavior. This fear is not a gift of the Holy Spirit.

There is also learned fear, closely connected to servile fear. One learns to be careful around a hot oven, to drive with caution in a snowstorm ... Generally, a healthy fear of the consequences of danger can result. Sometimes, unfortunately, one can overlearn – that is, become too fearful and withdraw. This fear is not a gift of the Holy Spirit.

The beginning of Wisdom is fear of the Lord ... (Psalm 9:10) Rather than fear of punishment or of danger, fear of the Lord is attention to anything that might offend my relationship with God.<sup>2</sup> This is the sensitivity if we wonder whether a particular statement or action fits with who I am before God. This sensitivity is not the guilty feelings of someone who cannot shake a sense of being out of step with God. Rather, fear of the Lord, built on conscience and an awareness of my interior pursuit to be united with God, is often subtle and genuinely personal.

Fear of the Lord leads us to piety, the second gift of the Holy Spirit in which we give honor to parents, to country and to God. These are the stepping stones to Wisdom. Fear of the Lord leads us to seek a deeper personal relationship with God. Can we listen to this voice? Where is this gift of the Holy Spirit leading you? †

<sup>1</sup> Congregation for Divine Worship, "Concerts in Churches, 1987, "Sacred music, that is to say, music which was composed for the liturgy, but which for various reasons can no longer be performed during a liturgical celebration, and religious music, that is to say, music inspired by the text of Sacred Scripture or the liturgy and which has reference to God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Saints or the Church, may both find a place in the church building, but outside liturgical celebration. The playing of the organ or other musical performance, whether vocal or instrument, may "serve to promote piety or religion." Paragraph 9

<sup>2</sup> A Novena to the Holy Spirit, with each day dedicated to each of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, can be found: <https://catholicnovenaapp.com/novenas/holy-spirit-novena/>



**SISTER MARY JUDITH O'BRIEN, RSM** is a member of the Religious Sisters of Mercy of Alma. She serves as chancellor of the Catholic Diocese of Saginaw.





# A resilient faith



## Reflections from my time as a missionary in the former U.S.S.R.

MAP: belterz/iStock / Getty Images Plus

**W**hen Pope Francis asked for a day of prayer for peace in Ukraine on Jan. 26, I believe it would have impacted us more if the painful history of Ukraine was our own history. For instance, can we imagine reading a history book about the entire population of New York City being starved to death in 1932-33 by edict of a foreign leader? Can we imagine coming to grips with an era when our nation’s churches were boarded up by the government and the practice of religion was illegal? How would we feel if our parents and grandparents had to celebrate Eucharistic liturgies in secluded forests to avoid arrest? And how might we react if we met Catholic priests who had spent years in isolated, brutal prison camps – simply because they refused to stop being Catholic priests? All this is part of Ukraine’s history as they defend their nation.

From 1992-94, I was blessed to serve as a lay missionary in western Ukraine before serving another few years in Moscow. I was there just a couple of years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and so much from the Soviet era still remained. When you went shopping, you would first go to a store named “MEAT” and, if you were lucky, you could buy some kielbasa. Next you would go to a store named “MILK” to get whatever dairy products were available. And

finally, you would stop at the store called “BREAD.”

Western Ukraine has the largest Catholic population, but during communism, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church had to survive “underground.” These Catholics, who are united with the pope but worship in the Byzantine Rite, were harshly persecuted by the leaders in Russia. One bishop had to work as a street sweeper in the city of Lviv for many years, and many Greek Catholic priests were sent to Siberia and impris-

This photo (c. 1993) was taken in a village in Ukraine where Dr. Dan Osborn (pictured far right) worked to create a home for underprivileged children.



**DR. DAN OSBORN**  
*Diocesan Theologian and Coordinator of Permanent Diaconate Formation & Ministry.*

*“I ask you to pray the Our Father for peace in Ukraine ... We have spoken about the Holocaust. But let us think too that [in Ukraine] millions of people were killed [1932-1933]. They are a people who have suffered; they have suffered from hunger, suffered from much brutality and they deserve peace. May the prayers and supplications that today rise up to heaven touch the minds and hearts of world leaders, so that dialogue may prevail and the common good be placed ahead of partisan interests. Please, no more war.”*

– POPE FRANCIS, JAN. 26

oned in gulags (Soviet prison camps). Once, I met one of these priests near the Cathedral of St. George and chatted with him in my broken Ukrainian. It dawned on me that I was in the presence of what the Church calls a “confessor of the faith” – someone who suffers for, but does not die for, their Christian faith. What impressed me was the joyful twinkle in his eye. He had picked up a couple of English words along the way, perhaps from his time in Siberia, and as we stood on the snowy grounds of the cathedral, he smiled and said, “Frosty!”

I also remember meeting an elderly Ukrainian grandmother one day who told me about what happened in her village when she was a child. The Communist forces had entered her region and quickly identified a man of great Christian faith in the village. They apprehended this man, dragged him to a tree and publicly crucified him as a warning to everyone about practicing religion.

On a visit to the Carpathian Mountains near the Polish border, I learned about a time when a Communist propaganda team came to a village for an all-day “training” on the merits of communism and the need to leave religion behind. The speakers went on and on until finally, at the end of the propaganda session, an elderly Ukrainian villager stepped up on the stage with the help of his cane and made his way to the microphone. He only wanted to say two words, and those were the words that, to this day, western Ukrainians use to greet each other at Easter: *Khristos voskres!* (Christ is risen!) And all the villagers shouted back: *Voistinu voskres!* (He is truly risen!). The Communists knew that all their efforts that day had been instantly conquered by the light of the Resurrection.

Along with Easter, though, Christians are also called to accept the reality of Good Friday. For the Ukrainian people, their most painful Good Friday experience

came in 1932-33, when the Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, engineered a mass starvation of Ukrainians. It is estimated that up to 7 million people in Ukraine died in what is called the Holodomor (Ukrainian for “murder by starvation”). This and other horrific memories of Moscow-based aggression are still alive for 21st century Ukrainians as they hope and pray for peace.

In the United States, Catholic dioceses are now beginning a multi-year journey to help the faithful rediscover or strengthen their faith in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist – and to appreciate with fresh vigor what a privilege it is to attend Mass. I sometimes reflect on what my Ukrainian friend, Vasyl, told me about his grandfather who served as an underground Byzantine-Rite Catholic priest during the communist era. (This may sound strange, since most of us have grown up hearing that Catholic priests cannot be married. While it is true that married Catholic priests are not allowed in the Latin Rite, they are allowed in some other Catholic rites such as the Byzantine Rite.)

Vasyl’s grandfather had to celebrate the Eucharistic liturgy in secret, sometimes in a forest, so that he and his congregation would not be arrested for public worship. Sometimes, when I find myself thinking about the challenge of getting our kids dressed and arriving at Mass on time, the memories of the people of Ukraine come flooding back to me – people who risked imprisonment to attend liturgy and receive Jesus in Holy Communion. They recognized the divine treasure that is before us in the Holy Eucharist... not just a symbol of Jesus, but the Risen Lord himself. And this reality should prompt us to echo in our own hearts that ancient greeting which the Carpathian villager boldly proclaimed: *Christ is Risen! He is truly Risen!*

May Christ, the Prince of Peace, hear our prayers for peace in Ukraine. †





# What's next after high school?

the world. It's mighty because society has given teens a pretty tilted view of what success and future success look like. I'd like to offer some thoughts about this fork in the road.



**SHERI WOHLFERT** is a Catholic school teacher, speaker, writer and founder of Joyful Words Ministries. Sheri blogs at [www.joyfulwords.org](http://www.joyfulwords.org).

Helping teens plan for life after high school is a mighty task. It's mighty because it's emotional for parents to think about their kids growing up and taking on

**FIRST STEP:** Turn to the Father in prayer. Jeremiah 29:11 promises that God has a plan for each of us, and we need to turn to him first and seek his inspiration and guidance. As parents, we should pray that our kids yield to his voice rather than to the sounds of the world. It's not a secret code to crack; the Father who perfectly created us is delighted to show us his perfect will for our life.

**NEW QUESTION:** Instead of asking, "What are your plans after graduation?" try asking, "What do you like to do?" or "What kind of person do you want to become?" Focus on what brings them joy and sparks their passion, or what allows them to share their unique gifts and talents with the world.

**THE BIG PICTURE:** Help your teen step back and ponder the questions, "How would you like to make the world better?" and "What gifts, talents and abilities has God created you with to help you do that?"

**JUMP IN:** As possibilities begin to surface, create a short list. Then jump in and try them out. Spend time talking, listening, watching and doing the things on the list. If your child wants to be a teacher, for example, doing an afternoon job shadow won't paint a clear picture; help them find a place to really immerse themselves.

**TRUTH:** College is fabulous, but it isn't the only option; in many cases it isn't even the best option. Our kids are not second-class citizens if they make a choice other than a university education. We need to encourage our kids to let their post-high-school experience be dictated by their passions and skills. Trade school, community college and an array of alternative job training programs and military service have produced some of the most happy, successful, productive professionals I know.

**TAKE TIME:** If your teen is searching and unsure, it makes sense to let them take time to make a decision that will affect the rest of their life. Taking a "gap" year to experience and inquire is a great idea.

A gap year isn't a year of TV and sleeping in, it's a year of service, working, internship and deep prayer. Think of it as a career test-drive.

**THE TRUE WORK:** Each of us was created to be a saint, and our career is a vehicle to fortify our sainthood; through our work we can grow in holiness. We need to pray for this true work as much as our kids do. Being open is key: to a vocation, to a career path, to an educational path and mostly open to the fact that God may be calling our kids to do something we never even imagined.

**FINAL THOUGHT:** Whatever path and work our children choose, we should remind them to choose something that will help lead them to heaven and allow them to bring glory to God. †



**FATHER ANDY  
LAFRAMBOISE**

*is pastor of St. Agnes Parish, Freeland and director of priestly vocations. He holds a licentiate in Sacred Theology in Marriage and Family Studies from the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family.*

# Receive this ring

**H**ave you heard of the three rings of marriage? First is the engagement ring, and then the wedding ring and then the suffer-ring! *Lord of the Rings* fans might be quick to quip that it is also “the one ring to rule them all.”

The ring remains the great symbol of marriage. We love to see and hear about how the ring was placed on the finger at the engagement, and the exchange of rings is one of the great symbols of the wedding liturgy: “Receive this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Before he became Pope John Paul II, Karol Wojtyła wrote a play called *The Jeweler’s Shop*. I first read this as I was graduating high school. It was very formative in my faith, serving as an awakening of sorts. I encourage you to read it. The play follows three couples: a young couple torn by war, a middle-aged couple tempted to infidelity, and Andrew and Teresa, the children of the first two couples, who have found each other and are fearful and excited about beginning a life together. As they made their way to the jeweler’s shop, Andrew said this, “The rings in the window appealed to us with a strange force. Now they are just artifacts of precious metal, but it will be so only until that moment when I put one of them on Teresa’s finger, and she puts the other on mine. From then on they will mark our fate.”

What does the ring signify? On the one hand, being made of precious metal expresses that the other is

precious. It also signals to the wearer and to all observers that this person belongs to someone. The ring says, “I belong to you and you belong to me.” Rings also cost something to procure and give. People will save up for the perfect ring. It is a sign which says, “I am willing to part with something that is mine for you.” It reveals that sacrifice is part of love.

Isn’t that the nature of every gift? In every gift we give, we are trying to give ourselves in some way. The ring is like the Cross. The Cross of Jesus tells each of us that we are precious to him. It tells us that we belong to him. It quite clearly shows that he was willing to sacrifice himself for us. The Cross tells us how marvelous we are, how precious we are to him. We need to hear that message often, for we can forget or not hear it because of all the noise that competes for our attention.

What is your ring telling you today? Where is it summoning you to sacrificial love? What will it cost you? Is it your time? Has too much time been committed to work or personal entertainment to the neglect of your spouse and of God? Is it your pride that you are being called to sacrifice, putting aside the need to be right or to get the last word, to be the winner in every argument?

The ring is not just an artifact of precious metal; it speaks a language. It does not lose its voice after the wedding is done, but continues to speak throughout the marriage. Jesus’ Cross continues to speak a language loudly to us. From the Cross, Jesus says “I thirst.”

May your ring be a reminder of your love for each other. May it be a reminder of God’s great love for you and of his abiding presence in your lives. †



# Share your story

BY STACEY TRAPANI  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF SCHRIER

## Disciple Maker Index (DMI) survey sparking new energy at St. Joseph the Worker Parish



Fran Hammerlee holds her rosary and looks out the window of her Lake Isabella home. She is a member of St. Joseph the Worker Parish in Beal City.

**N**o one can say for sure why the resurrected Christ revealed himself to only a select group of people, giving them the responsibility of bearing witness to the greatest story ever told.

What is known is that their testimony was the spark that grew into an eternal flame destined to spread around the world. Today, all Christians are caretakers of that flame, given an equally meaningful responsibility to share its warmth and light with all people.

Without exception, every Catholic has a story to tell.

Fran Hammerlee's story is decades in the making, filled with highs and lows, eventually leading her to find peace in Christ. It is a powerful, inspirational story, and her willingness to share it is just one of the benefits that has come from the Disciple Maker Index (DMI) survey that parishioners across the Diocese of Saginaw took part in during 2021.

"The message for anyone who hears my story is that God loves them," Fran said. "It doesn't matter what you do or where you've been, when you come to God, you are loved as a prodigal child. God wants you to be a part of him, and he wants to be a part of your life, so let him be."

## Not an easy road

Fran is 71, a retired school secretary and a member of St. Joseph the Worker Parish in Beal City. She grew up in the Grand Rapids area, along with three sisters and two brothers in a home where religion was not a priority.

“We were all baptized in the Congregational Church, but I really didn’t get the church experience,” Fran recalled. “When I was married, I became a Methodist. Later, I said to my husband, ‘We haven’t been going to church, and I want to go to church. I want my children to have the opportunity to know about God and Jesus, and I don’t feel qualified to teach them.’”

When her husband passed away at age 41, Fran’s resolve to expose her children to the teachings of Christ was strengthened.

“I was very involved. I did youth group. I did kids’ club. I went through a 34-week training course in the Bible, and spent quite a few years teaching the Bible at a Methodist summer camp,” Fran said.

After retiring, with her children grown and moved out of state, she prepared to move to Kentucky to be closer to them, though she couldn’t help feeling that it was not the best path to follow.

“So I prayed. I said, ‘God, I’ve been alone for 31 years now, and I really don’t want to be, so if there is someone here you would have for me to marry, he’ll have to knock on my door for me to understand it,’” Fran said. “On Feb. 22, 2017, Joe knocked on my door.”

Fran did not move to Kentucky. She stayed in the Beal City area, and that knock on the door turned into a friendship that grew into love.

“Joe is the person God has prepared for me, and I for him” Fran said.

They were married April 25, 2020. Fran converted to Catholicism, Joe’s faith, because,

she said, “I wanted to sit at the same table as my husband. I didn’t want us going to separate churches.”

Turns out, she was not alone in finding her way to the Catholic faith.

“When I told my sisters, they said, ‘Welcome home.’ All three of them have become Catholic,” Fran said.

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**“It doesn’t matter what you do or where you’ve been, when you come to God, you are loved as a prodigal child.”**

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## Finding her voice

In 2021, Fran and Joe accepted a request from Father Thomas (Tom) Held, pastor for St. Joseph the Worker Parish, to join a group that would study the results of the DMI survey and propose ways to improve the parish’s faith experience. The goal of the survey, implemented by the Diocese in February 2021, was to provide insights into the effectiveness of the experience at Mass, preaching and other aspects of parish life.

“The survey identified three things that we could focus on, and one of them was the need for parishioners to tell their stories,” Father Tom said. “We have a pretty vibrant parish, but it’s a conservative community. They have a deep faith, but they aren’t necessarily going to express it in words. Most of them will live it and be a witness by the way they live.”

That form of witness is perfectly fine, Father Tom pointed out. It is also fairly typical of Catholics



Fran and Joseph Hammerle married at St. Joseph the Worker in Beal City on April 25, 2020, they are pictured here with Father Tom Held. *Photo courtesy of the Hammerle Family.*

in general, he added. Sometimes, however, a person’s story can change another’s life.

“Ultimately, it is about bringing people into the faith,” he said. “I want our parishioners to be comfortable in their skin, but I want them to be open. They don’t necessarily have to share their story, but I want them to know that they have a story. That will add to their relationship with Christ. And the time may come when they say, you know what, I think this person needs to hear my story.”

Fran is ready to start. She has agreed to be the first to share her story with others in the parish as a way to keep the light of Christ burning anew.

“When you think of evangelization, you think of someone standing on a street corner telling people ‘You need to know Jesus. You need to go to church.’ But it’s not that,” Fran said. “It’s about sharing your faith and showing who you are.” †





**MASS** *transit*  
Catholic school student's request helps classmates attend Mass



# **“Going to Mass with other people who share your commitment to the Church is just something special.” – Nick Potvin**

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIELLE MCGREW TENBUSCH

**W**hen 13-year-old Nick Potvin realized how important it was for him to be in Mass on Sunday, he didn't let not having a ride get in his way.

“I started realizing that the Mass is an important part of Catholicism,” Nick said.

Nick, a sixth-grader, said he used to regularly attend and serve Mass at All Saints Parish in Bay City, but had stopped.

“I still considered myself a Catholic, but I never really connected with the Mass,” he said.

Nick credits All Saints Central campus minister Chris Tanner, who teaches his sixth-grade religion and choir classes, for providing him with a deeper understanding of the roots of Catholicism and helping him discover what happens during each Mass.

“I have those conversations in my class, in the hallways and in morning prayers,” Chris said. “With these kids, we've got to give them a little more credit. They want to dive deeper into the faith because they don't know it, and they realize they don't know it.”

In addition to participating in the weekly school Mass, Nick's desire to attend Sunday Mass grew, but he didn't have a way of getting there. If he needed a ride to Mass, he figured other students might be in a similar situation. In fact, he already knew of a few.

“All Saints is all about community,” he said. “This could be something that's not just an opportunity for one, but an opportunity for all.”

When Nick mentioned the idea of busing students to Mass, Chris encouraged him to pursue it. Nick requested a meeting with his principal, Krista Willertz, and shared his desire to attend Mass and help



Campus minister Chris Tanner and principal Krista Willertz give the the All Saints 'Mass' Transit initiative a thumbs-up as they prepare to leave the school on Feb. 20.

other students get there as well.

“Nick is a young man of deep faith. He doesn't care if his idea is 'popular' or not. He is most concerned that people who want to attend Mass and receive the sacraments are able to do so,” Krista said. “His conviction and initiative are mature well beyond his young years.”

After getting the enthusiastic support of the All Saints Central School Board, figuring out the logistics—the bus route, where to pick up students, permission slips, which churches to visit—Nick began reaching out to other students with the support of Krista, Chris, and teachers Amanda Richert and Terry Dewar. By the time of the All Saints 'Mass' Transit inaugural run on Feb. 20, 12 students had signed up.

“His desire is contagious,” Krista said of his desire to share his love of Jesus.

Chris believes that other students recognize that.





Twelve students from All Saints Central Middle and High School went on the first run of the 'Mass' Transit bus.

## **“If you know everything about the Mass, you would never, ever want to be away from the Mass.”**

— CHRIS TANNER, ALL SAINTS CENTRAL MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL CAMPUS MINISTER

“There is such a desire for more that they don’t get—and they can’t get—in the world. There’s so many things that the world is trying to feed our kids, and the Lord is saying, ‘Hey, I’ve got something that is much more valuable.’ And our kids realize that,” he said. “We often talk about what the Lord desires and how he’s working in our lives.”

### **Starting with the ‘12 apostles’**

The All Saints ‘Mass’ Transit route will visit different churches in the Bay City area on the first and third Sundays of each month. Beginning at the high school, the bus stopped at two other locations, blasting praise and worship music along the way. The first stop was Corpus Christi Parish.

“The smile on Father Bob Kelm’s face when he saw the students walking in was something I will never forget,” Krista said. “Father gave all the students a special shout-out before Mass—they were sitting in seats he had reserved for them—and had them all stand for a blessing at the end of Mass. Several parishioners at Corpus Christi made a point of commenting to me how encouraged they were to see teenagers at Mass. There were smiles all around [that] Sunday!”

Father Bob reflected on the students’ presence and the effect it had on his parishioners, most of whom are elderly and many of whom have family who no longer attend church.

“Seeing students ... showing up on their own because they want to be there, not because someone dragged

them there, (parishioners) were very impressed and heartened by their presence,” he said. “These children coming to Mass to try and continue to develop their own personal relationship with Jesus Christ and receive him in the Eucharist is great!”

In his blessing at the end of Mass, Father Bob called the group of 12 “the holy apostles” and prayed their “evangelization trips would be especially effective.” They got a round of applause from the parish community.

“This group gets it,” he said. “Seeing them responding to Mass and coming and receiving Holy Communion, knowing how to receive Holy Communion, it was good.”

Nick feels very encouraged by his peers’ responses.

“I heard some kids say, ‘Yeah, that was pretty fun. That was new.’ And I was really excited, because that’s the exact response I was looking for,” he said.

The positive response was not only among the teens, but also the wider Catholic community.

“The reactions of adults and priests who have heard about this initiative





have been fantastic,” Krista said. “They are very uplifted to think of students finding a way to get to Mass on their own. The support this gives our priests is incalculable. Every priest I’ve spoken with has been so encouraged by this student-led initiative.”

### **Building community**

“Several students have commented that they wish they had gone on that first ride,” Krista said. “Several of Nick’s classmates (and even some high school students) have said how impressed they are that Nick got this going. While Nick is probably the most enthusiastic student about attending the Mass itself, his energy is infectious, and I can see our bus being filled by the end of the school year.”

Chris believes that in addition to the enthusiasm surrounding the initiative, by continuing to share the truth about what Mass is, and the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, more and more students will realize the importance of attending.

“Part of the reason people don’t go to Mass is they don’t get what’s going on during the Mass,” Chris said. If you know everything about the Mass, you would never, ever want to be away from the Mass.”

Nick said he hopes attending Mass together will also encourage peer

discussions about the readings, homily and music, applying the liturgy to their everyday lives.

“Going to Mass with other people who share your commitment to the Church is just something special,” he said.

The sense of community is important to Nick, and he acknowledges that some students may have a way to get to Mass but simply don’t want to go alone.

“Mass is, of course, a nourishment.

It is a form of spiritual hearing through the Eucharist in the Body and Blood of Christ, but I also think that the bus project is . . . a good sense of community,” he said. “You can get a strong connection, not only with your faith, but with your parish, school, family and friends.”

### **Contagious faith**

While Nick speaks humbly about his role in the bus project, his mother Danielle Potvin is not surprised by his initiative, pointing out his deep faith and determination.

“He’s very passionate about Mass and about his readings and his Bible,” she said, adding his love of the liturgy could be contagious to other students.

“If they could say, ‘Wow, if he’s getting that much out of it, maybe I’m missing something, maybe I need to look at changing my attitude,’ . . . that would be a real positive,” she said.

Chris, the campus minister, sees



Left: Father Bob Kelm, pastor of Corpus Christi Parish, greets students who arrived on the All Saints ‘Mass’ Transit bus on Feb. 20.

Above: Students from All Saints Central Middle and High School arrive at Corpus Christi Parish. The ‘Mass’ Transit bus will take students to a different parish throughout the Bay City area twice a month.

God’s hand across the school and in Nick himself.

“You can see that the Lord is at work, and it just takes the willingness of a person to say, ‘Yeah, I’m on board,’” he said. “I’m just continually so impressed by not only the amount of faith that he has, but also his insight in the faith. . . . (Nick) definitely has a huge concern for people’s souls. It’s not just like being kind and generous—his concern is for their eternal salvation.”

The All Saints ‘Mass’ Transit initiative is just one way Catholic schools can work to strengthen the faith community in parishes across the region. As All Saints strives to cultivate the faith in students like Nick, Chris has a few words of encouragement:

“The future of the church is very much alive and well and healthy and willing.” †





# A new springtime for Catholic Schools

First graders Easton Fryzel, Tobias Shark, Lucas Hunter and Colten Julian pose for a photo at St. Michael School in Pinconning on Feb. 4.

## Bishop names Catholic Schools a priority, team dedicated to effort

DANIELLE  
MCGREW  
TENBUSCH AND  
ERIN LOOBY  
CARLSON

**A** new season has begun for Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Saginaw. The launch of *Our Catholic Schools: Centered in Christ, Committed to Excellence* signals the beginning of a dedicated effort to strengthen and grow Catholic schools in the diocese.



“I’m excited about this,” said Bishop Robert Gruss, who announced Catholic schools as one of his priorities in December 2021. “A Catholic voice in the world today is important. The teaching of the Catholic Church stands against the secular environment and teachings, because the Gospel stands against some of the things being taught in our culture. Catholic schools help us to evangelize our young people and their

parents so they can be living models of our faith in the world today.”

Bishop Gruss empowered the Superintendent of Catholic Schools and a team of school and community leaders, parish and diocesan staff and professionals of various backgrounds to lead the effort. There is already momentum and a spirit of renewal.

Commitments have been made in the following key areas: mission and Catholic identity, academic excellence, leadership, governance and operational vitality.

“We began by reviewing current operations of our schools, based on the 13 standards and over 70 benchmarks that make up the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and

Secondary Schools (NSBECS),” said Superintendent of Catholic Schools Cormac Lynn.

All schools in the diocese currently use the NSBECS as part of an annual school review as well as for accreditation. NSBECS helps schools identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth.

“We used NSBECS to determine how effectively our schools are living out the core values on a daily basis,” Superintendent Lynn said. “This review shed light on the areas of greatest need as well as potential resources to address them.”

The result was an investment in excellence study to support efforts moving forward.

### Centered in Christ, Committed to Excellence

The investment in excellence study revealed areas where human and financial resources would better equip the schools now and into the future.

“We are looking for excellence,” said Bob Looby, chairman of the Our Catholic Schools: Centered in Christ, Committed to Excellence committee. “Excellence means we need to be closer to paying our teachers (what they make in public schools), better pay, better benefits, so we can ensure they stick around. ... That will also help enrollment.”

A St. Dominic parishioner, advisory member of the diocesan finance council and Catholic school alum, whose children and grandchildren also attended Catholic schools, Bob said forming disciples of Christ is the responsibility of all.

“Everybody should be concerned with Catholic education in forming disciples of Christ and enriching them in Catholic heritage—our Catholic schools are the best place for that—and the continuation of the faith. It’s up to all of us to support, not only Catholic schools, but RCIA programs, anything educational and instructional within the Church, whether you participate or not,” he said.

A commitment to being centered



The Our Catholic Schools: Centered in Christ, Committed to Excellence committee includes (front) Deb Bierlein, Michael Cavanaugh, Mary Kay Yonker, Bishop Robert Gruss, Lisa Seeley, Sister Mary Judith O’Brien, (back) Pete Shaheen, Bob Looby, Patrick van Sumeren, Cormac Lynn, Katy Pham, Erin Looby Carlson, Deacon Gary Patelski and Father Rick Bokinskie. Not pictured are Deacon Rick Warner, Dick Dolinski and Joe Stong. *Photo by Jeff Schrier.*



in Christ identified the need to hire a curriculum and Catholic identity coordinator. The position will be tasked with updating and maintaining Catholic theology curriculum and standards for kindergarten through 12th grade, supporting the implementation of the Catholic faith across the curriculum and providing professional development to teachers on Catholic identity, relevant standards, curriculum and instructional techniques.

“If we want our Catholic schools to thrive and serve our communities for generations to come, we need to make some systematic changes to how we operate,” Superintendent Lynn said. “We also have an obligation to make sure that we are providing great formation and value to those families

Bishop Robert Gruss greets students with a fist-bump after celebrating Mass at St. Brigid of Kildare in Midland on Feb. 1. *Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch.*

that sacrifice to send their kids to Catholic schools and for parishes that support Catholic schools.”

### Lessons from other dioceses

Deacon Gary Patelski, a permanent deacon passionate about Catholic school education, began by researching and continues to research other Catholic dioceses whose schools were not just surviving, but thriving. He spoke with administrators in the Archdioceses of Chicago, and the Dioceses of Grand Rapids and Erie, Pennsylvania. He also accessed information from





The arts are an important part of a well-rounded Catholic School education. *Photo by Mike Kolleth, Nouvel Sports Photography.*



Students Lydia Olivarez and Zoi Wegener color their names for a Catholic Schools Week art piece at Auburn Area Catholic School on Feb. 1. *Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch.*

several other dioceses including Cincinnati, Ohio and Wichita, Kansas.

“Many of them have turned their schools around in terms of enrollment, in terms of being more financially sustainable,” he said, explaining that he noticed five main points the schools shared.

“First and foremost was the explicit support of the bishop for Catholic schools,” he said. “Bishop Gruss has stated several times how important Catholic schools are.”

The other aspects these districts had in common were appropriate diocesan governance, such as a working team to support the schools; an Office of Catholic Schools with enough staff to provide resources to schools; a strategic plan; and a focus on both short- and long-term fund-

ing revenue, including endowments and capital campaigns.

Armed with this knowledge and with the help of consultants at Catholic School Management, the Our Catholic Schools: Centered in Christ, Committed to Excellence committee is finalizing a strategic plan and making the changes needed to ensure all the diocese’s 12 Catholic schools will continue offering excellence in academics, faith formation and extracurricular activities.

### Sharing the Good News

Michael Cavanaugh, the principal of Our Lady of Lake Huron Catholic School in Harbor Beach, is proud to share that 10 of the past 12 valedictorians at Harbor Beach High School were graduates of Our Lady of Lake Huron, which goes to eighth grade.

“We lay the foundation,” he said. But Our Lady of Lake Huron’s education is more than academic excellence.

“It gives them so much more in the areas of spirituality, faith development, moral development— all of those areas that are so significant when kids are young ... they become

## HIGHLIGHTS

**ENROLLMENT:** Collectively, our Catholic schools saw a 6.5 percent increase in enrollment in the 2021-22 academic year. Some schools are reporting a waitlist for specific grade levels for the 2022-23 school year.

**WELCOME SCHOLARSHIP:** This awarded nearly \$275,000 to support 429 first-time students enrolling in our Catholic schools (kindergarten through 11th grade) from the 2018-2019 to 2021-22 school years.

**RECOGNITION:** Father José María Cabrera (All Saint Parish, Bay City) was recognized for his support of Catholic education by the Michigan Association of Non-public Schools. Father José received the Father John B. Zwiers Pastor Award in the fall of 2021.

**SERVICE:** Catholic school students across the diocese collectively give thousands upon thousands of hours of service to their schools, parishes and local communities.

### HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS:

- **Senior Class of 2021** earned over \$5.3 million in scholarships. (All Saints Central, Nouvel Catholic Central and Sacred Heart Academy)
- **Senior Class of 2021** college acceptances included, but are not limited to: Albion College, Alma College, Aquinas College, Case Western Reserve, Central Michigan University, Grand Valley State University, Hillsdale College, Holy Cross College (Indiana), Madonna University, Michigan State University, Michigan Technological University, Saginaw Valley State University, St. Mary’s College (Indiana), University of Notre Dame, Penn State University, University of Indiana and the University of Michigan
- **2021 graduates:** 100 percent of graduates from all three Catholic high schools’ were accepted into a college or university

Nouvel Catholic Central High School students Madison Looby and Noah Lucas bring up the gifts during Mass at the Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption in Saginaw. *Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch.*

much more successful when they get into high school and college,” he said, adding that the Catholic school gives a lifetime of benefits.

Though our diocese’s Catholic schools have so much to offer, it’s hard for smaller schools like Our Lady of Lake Huron to market themselves and increase enrollment when Catholic families may not automatically choose to put their kids in the parish school.

This is another area Our Catholic Schools: Centered in Christ, Committed to Excellence plans to address. In addition to a curriculum and Catholic identity position, the committee recognized the great need for a marketing and admission coordinator to help each school tailor marketing campaigns for their target audience.

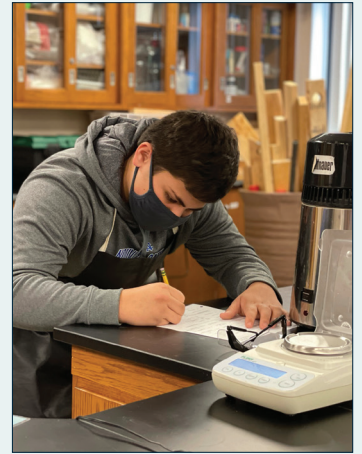
“We can serve our schools in a very intentional, purposeful way by helping them market within their local and surrounding communities,” Superintendent Lynn said.

“I don’t have a marketing person on staff, and having an expert in that area would help. .... I’m excited,” said Lisa Seeley, principal of St. Mary School in Alma and Our Catholic Schools: Centered in Christ, Committed to Excellence committee member.

The very creation of the marketing and admission coordinator, along with the additional new position of curriculum and Catholic identity coordinator, signal something much bigger to Lisa.

“It shows dedication and commitment,” she said. “They are here to support the Catholic schools.”

By increasing enrollment, Catholic schools will be more financially secure and sustainable, teacher salaries will increase and hopefully schools will be able to offer more variety in classes and extracurriculars. Growing enrollments and endowments could also help lower overall tuition costs in the long run.



Science is fun! Students at Sacred Heart Academy in Mt. Pleasant (left) and Nouvel Catholic Central in Saginaw (above) engage in hands-on learning in their classrooms. *Photos courtesy Sacred Heart Academy and Nouvel Catholic Central.*

## Prayer for Catholic Schools

Dear Jesus, Lord and Savior,  
our rabbi and greatest teacher.

We ask you to help to accompany us on our journey  
in Catholic education.

Breathe the Spirit into your plan,  
give us courage to be steadfast,

be the source of wisdom in our actions and decisions,  
provide the necessary resources for our schools to be  
successful in spreading your message of eternal life,

Be with all of our students and families who sacrifice  
to provide a Catholic education,

Be with our staff and faculty,  
bless them for their dedication and commitment  
to this essential ministry.

Remind us at all times that education in the  
faith is essential to forming disciples  
who can transform our society and evangelize  
throughout our Diocese and beyond.

We ask this all through Christ our Lord.  
Amen





Nouvel Catholic Central High School senior Jonathan Tunney hoists the district basketball championship trophy as his team celebrates their victory. *Photo Credit Mike Kolleth, Nouvel Sports Photography.*

### Strengthening the foundation to grow

“We’ve come a long way in a short amount of time,” said Bob, quick to credit the support and leadership of Bishop Gruss. “Our schools are important to not only the Saginaw Diocese, but the Church as a whole.”

With areas for improvement identified, committee members are working on a roadmap forward.

Success, to each person interviewed, will include Catholic discipleship formation, thriving academics and extracurriculars, along with increased enrollment and higher teacher salaries. Catholic school education will also be more accessible for all families, particularly the underserved. Increased enrollment will provide greater financial sustainability and more opportunities for students.

By strengthening the Catholic schools, parishes will also be strengthened and renewed by the increased participation and deepening faith of students and their families. As Bishop Gruss says, it’s about “growing disciples of Jesus Christ in our schools and in families.”

“We’re all the Body of Christ. Catholic schools are meant to help support and sustain the Body of Christ,” he said. “No matter if we have kids in the school or not, we should want our young people to have a strong Catholic education, because that’s what the Body of Christ does.” †

## Strategic Plan for Catholic Schools

### Key commitments



St. Joseph the Worker Catholic School students participate in a Marian procession for the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary on Oct. 15, 2019. *Photo by Jeff Schrier.*

**SCHOOLS AS A PRIORITY:** A Catholic school is the optimal setting for academic, religious education and formation which nurtures the unique gifts of each student. Catholic schools offer 1,098 hours during 180 days of instruction steeped in Catholic culture.

**EVANGELIZING MISSION:** Catholic schools exist to evangelize and to foster a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church and all who come into contact with authentically Catholic schools.

**EXCELLENCE IN FAITH FORMATION, ACADEMICS AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES:** Each Catholic school must provide experiences that prepare students and their families for future challenges.

**ACCESSIBILITY:** The Diocese, parishes and schools must work to minimize or eliminate obstacles that may deter those seeking a Catholic education.

**STRONG CONNECTIONS AMONG PARISHES, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES:** These groups must work together as they share in the common mission of evangelization and forming disciples.

**FINANCIAL VIABILITY:** We must have a funding model to ensure short- and long-term viability and sustainability for our schools.

# Young adults believe in a “Hopeful Future” for pregnant and parenting students



Madison Velez and Matt Bartels helped establish a scholarship for Saginaw Valley State University and Delta College students who are pregnant or parenting.

**Editor’s note:** The previous issue of FAITH Saginaw introduced the Hopeful Future Scholarship and the major donor for this endowment, Michael Marsden. In this issue, the CCFMM is pleased to share the story of the two young adults behind this scholarship initiative.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIELLE MCGREW TENBUSCH

The Hopeful Future Scholarship, which will help women complete their higher education at Delta Community College or Saginaw Valley State University, was born out of a desire to do something radically different in the pro-life movement.

“This is something I began praying with— how can I do something radically different that might actually prevent the loss of an innocent life, or at the very least give a profound witness to the value of both the mother’s life as well as her baby’s life,” said Madison Velez, an SVSU student who served as vice president last year of Protect Life SVSU.



Madison Velez speaks to Hopeful Future Scholarship supporters at the reception on Jan. 29 announcing the scholarship’s creation.

Matt Bartels says the Hopeful Future Scholarship is one way those involved in the pro-life movement can show their support for mothers facing an unexpected pregnancy.

Matt Bartels, last year’s Protect Life SVSU president, suggested a scholarship for pregnant women and mothers. Though they weren’t sure where to begin, they trusted in the Lord.

Lori Becker, coordinator of diocesan outreach for the Diocese of Saginaw, introduced them to Kristin Smith, the executive director of the Catholic Community Foundation of Mid-Michigan. An endowment was established to provide annual scholarships with a significant donation by Michael Marsden in memory of his late wife, pro-life volunteer Helen Marsden, and numerous additional donations.

Over one-third of women who have an abortion are college-aged, and 73 percent of women choose abortion due to financial reasons. The Hopeful Future Scholarship will be renewable one time and provides tuition assistance to pregnant and parenting students at Delta and SVSU. As the endowment fund increases, they hope to expand the scholarship to all eight colleges within the Diocese of Saginaw.

Prayerfully, they chose the name ‘The Hopeful Future Scholarship’ because of its reference to Jeremiah 29:11 and the theological virtue of hope.

“Growth in the virtue of hope is moving from not only wanting something to happen, but also expecting that it will happen in accordance with God’s will,” Matt said. “It is totally God’s perfect will that no innocent child will ever have to die due to abortion ever again. This in and of itself should be enough reason to hope for abortion’s end.”

Madison and Matt hope the scholarship will speak to the dignity of both unborn children and their mothers.

“This scholarship is just one way we can support young women facing crisis pregnancies and an uncertain future and work to make abortion unthinkable,” Matt said. “Women truly do deserve better than abortion; they deserve a hopeful future.”

The Hopeful Future scholarship application will be available at [www.ccfmm.org](http://www.ccfmm.org) this coming summer. †

The CCFMM is here to help guide you with your planned and legacy giving.

**Mission:** We encourage faithful giving that is responsibly managed and reflective of the teachings of Jesus Christ.

**Vision:** Joyous giving in Jesus, forever meeting the needs of God’s people.



For more information, call the CCFMM’s executive director Kristin Smith at 989.599.0079 or [kristin.smith@ccfmm.org](mailto:kristin.smith@ccfmm.org)

The Catholic Community Foundation of Mid-Michigan is a registered 501(c)(3), and all gifts are tax-deductible.

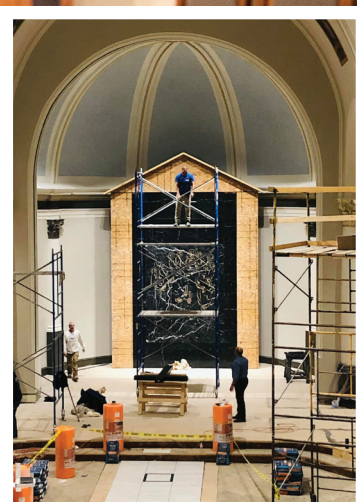


# Reclaiming beauty **OF THE PAST**



Father John Cotter and pastoral associate Joe Henige admire the renovated St. Michael Parish. *Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch.*

**Inset:** The sanctuary is pictured midway through the renovation process. Quality Wood Products from Ubly constructed the wooden part of the reredos, framing the Last Supper marble. *Courtesy photo.*



## Church renovation includes return of century-old stained glass

**W**hile pulling up the old flooring at St. Michael Parish of Maple Grove, pastoral associate Joe Henige pondered the old, worn original wooden floor underneath.

“I couldn’t help but think of how many of my family members walked down the aisle for baptisms and communion and weddings and funerals,” he recalled.

Like many parishioners, Joe’s family has attended St. Michael’s for generations—a connection he especially felt during its recent renovation, which brought back some of the beautiful original features from the 1920 church building.

“Many generations have been proud of the parish and have given

their time and talent to keep it going strong and keep our worship space a beautiful space,” he said. Many current parishioners recalled their grandparents talking about when the church was built.

### 1920s beauty

When St. Michael Parish was preparing to celebrate its 150th anniversary in 2015, parishioners wanted to make needed repairs and renovations. The timeline was shifted a few years, however, due

to the need to replace the slate roof, the realization a capital campaign would be necessary to raise funds, and, most recently, the pandemic.

Father John Cotter, pastor of St. Michael Parish, credited the late Bishop Joseph Cistone with helping them begin.

“We knew we needed some serious help. He put us in touch with (St. Jude Liturgical Art Studio),” Father John said. St. Jude Liturgical Art Studio was also involved in the 2016-17 restoration of the Cathedral of Mary

BY DANIELLE MCGREW TENBUSCH





of the Assumption in Saginaw.

As the liturgical consultant, Pennsylvania-based St. Jude Liturgical Art Studio coordinated the design, fabrication and installation, helping the parish look as its builders intended.

“The apse [semicircular recess at the front of the church] has been totally restored to the 1920s space that it was,” said Father John. A new carved wooden crucifix imported from Italy hangs in the center, reminiscent of the suspended crucifix that was once there.

The church’s Last Supper marble was placed in a large marble and wood reredos, and the sanctuary reflects the original. A new baptismal font was placed near the church

entrance, the paintings along the ceiling were framed in gold paint, and gold leaf was added to accent the capitals on top of the columns.

“(The work) reinvigorated it to what the original design of the church was,” Joe said.

### New homes for old treasures

The renovation also included breathing new life into items from other churches. Pews from the former St. Joseph Church in Bay City were refinished and installed. The Stations of the Cross, acquired from a closed church in Philadelphia, were repainted and given an antique look. Both pews and stations were about 100 years old and fit the style of St. Michael’s.

### CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

A wooden crucifix, carved in Italy, is suspended over the sanctuary. *Photo by Jeff Schrier.*

The renovation included plaster repairs and adding gold paint to frame the canvas paintings on the ceiling. The capitals on top of each column are also accented with gold leaf. *Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch.*

Father John Cotter, pastor, sits in a pew that was brought from the former St. Joseph Church in Bay City. *Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch.*

The Stations of the Cross were purchased from a closed Philadelphia church and repainted in an antiqued white and framed in gold. *Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch.*

Joe Henige, pastoral associate, describes the renovation as reinvigorating the original design of the church. *Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch.*

The church’s Last Supper marble was surrounded by additional marble and a large wooden reredos. The tabernacle is a combination of the parish’s former tabernacle and new construction. *Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch.*





A stained glass window depicting the Road to Emmaus story from the Gospel of Luke was originally in the 1883 church. It is now in the parish's reconciliation room. The brilliant red hue of the upper piece is made from arsenic and gold. *Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch.*

called “Aunt Tillie,” was buried in the St. Michael Parish cemetery, and her great-nieces and great-nephews still attend the church.

“It was pretty cool! I was so happy,” said Karen (Krupp) Wendling, one of Aunt Tillie’s great-nieces. She fondly remembers Aunt Tillie, who lived from 1877 to 1973, visiting her family—usually treating them with donuts. Karen added the rediscovery of the window has prompted her to want to research Aunt Tillie and learn more about her.

“I’m pretty proud. ... We’ve got such roots in this church!” she exclaimed, referring to her family. Her grandfather had also donated a window in the current church. Knowing they purchased and donated these windows, she said, shows her ancestors’ commitment to the parish.

“It was just so wonderful (the parish) got hold of it,” she said. “God does work in mysterious ways. The timing was perfect.”

William donated the window back to the church, and they were happily able to add the antique window Aunt Tillie had donated to the 1883 church to their renovation plan. It is now backlit and graces the reconciliation room.

### Investing in the future

With more than 2,000 hours of volunteer labor in addition to the contractors’ work, the renovation committee believed they were investing in their parish’s future—not only the building, but also the faith community.

“It’s a gift to our children and to our community. Your experience

*“It’s a gift to our children and to our community. Your experience of your faith and God is definitely enhanced when you have a worship space that has all of the beauty that we have here.”*

- JOE HENIGE

Perhaps most unexpected, however, was the rediscovery of a stained glass window from the 1883 church. In the midst of the renovation process, Amber Schroeder contacted St. Michael’s about a stained glass window her mother, Alice Simons, had purchased from a Saginaw thrift shop. The window depicts the moment when Jesus breaks bread

with disciples, who recognize him after walking together on the road to Emmaus.

Alice and her husband William had moved to California and back, bringing the window packed between a mattress and a box spring both ways. After Alice’s death, the family tried to find the family of Ottilia Scherer, whose name was on the glass. Ottilia, affectionately



of your faith and God is definitely enhanced when you have a worship space that has all of the beauty that we have here,” Joe said.

The renovation, he said, helps others to see that members of the parish community take their faith seriously and are willing to invest their time and money to establish a solid foundation for future generations. If you don’t, he added, “you’re going to set yourself up to keep up the trend” of declining Mass-goers.

He added they have also considered materials’ longevity and durability, ensuring fewer resources are spent on replacements and repairs.

“They’re just elated,” Father John said of the parishioners. “It’s unbelievable. They took this challenge head-on and they didn’t compromise.”

The St. Michael Parish community was able to celebrate the renovation when the church was blessed and dedicated on Dec. 19. During the Mass, Randy Henige, who served as the parish liaison for the renovation project, secured a relic of St. John Neumann in the altar, which Bishop Robert Gruss then consecrated with sacred chrism. Faithful filled the church, taking in its numerous updates.

Joe said he enjoys seeing longtime parishioners’ reactions to the beautiful space.

“To see people who have been so faithful to the parish look around in awe just puts a smile on my face,” he said. “It’s amazing to see the awe and the work that’s been done.” †



The St. Michael Parish of Maple Grove church renovations, including art and environment and building support, were supported by the Diocese of Saginaw through the Office of Liturgy and Office of Building and Maintenance and made possible through **Christ’s Mission Appeal**.



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:**

The faithful fill St. Michael Parish of Maple Grove to celebrate the Mass of Dedication on Dec. 19. *Photo by Jeff Schrier.*

Jackie Harris and fellow parishioners pray during the Mass of Dedication. The pews were originally from St. Joseph Church in Bay City. *Photo by Jeff Schrier.*

The Wendling sisters— Sheri Warner, Diane Henige, Shelly Emmendorfer and Nancy Vincke— wipe down the altar after Bishop Gruss consecrated it with Sacred Chrism. Father Pat O’Connor, associate for the Office of Liturgy, and Joe Henige, St. Michael pastoral associate and member of the renovation committee, assist in the background. *Photo by Jeff Schrier.*

Bishop Robert Gruss pours sacred chrism oil over the altar at St. Michael Parish in Maple Grove. This consecrates it as a symbol of Christ in our midst. *Photo by Jeff Schrier.*





Parishioners at Holy Family Parish participate in a synod listening session on March 17.

# Everyone

## has a voice in the 2023 Synod

**T**he experiences and opinions of all people have the opportunity to shape future outreach of the Church. Through the 2023 Synod, “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission,” the entire Church is called to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying.

BY DENYSE SHANNON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF SCHRIER

“Men and women, young people and the elderly: we’re all invited to listen to one another, to hear one another’s experiences in order to hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit,” Bishop Gruss said last fall, calling this a new Pentecost movement.

This massive endeavor began in the Diocese of Saginaw months ago and is in the midst of listening sessions happening in parishes and schools across the diocese. The diocesan phase, which includes

the listening sessions and sorting through the resulting data, lasts through August 15. Input will be taken locally through early May to allow time to create a written report which will be shared.

Each parish is asked to facilitate consultations or listening sessions around this question: A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, journeys together. How is this journeying together happening in your particular church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to

grow in our journeying together?

This synod was convoked by Pope Francis on Oct. 10, 2021, in his address at the opening of the Synod of Bishops he shared his hope for: “... concrete pastoral proposals capable of fulfilling the synod’s purpose. In other words, to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another, and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands, and inspire in young people – all young people, with no one excluded – a vision of the future filled with the joy of the Gospel.

While the synod is not about changing Church teaching, it is about reading the signs of the times and listening to what the Holy Spirit is speaking into the hearts of Church leaders and the faithful.

“The bottom line: your pope is asking to hear from you,” said Rose Langdon, parish group coordinator for St. John Vianney Parish in

## PARISH COORDINATORS



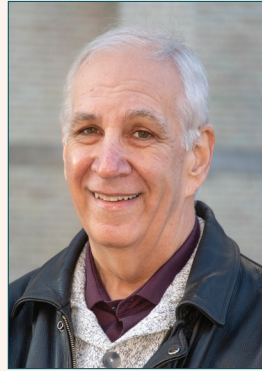
Suzanne Guttowsky of Holy Family Parish, Marlette/Peck/Sandusky



Rose Langdon of St. John Vianney Parish, Saginaw



Kristyn Russell of Blessed Sacrament Parish, Midland



Norman Moore of Our Lady of Czestochowa Parish, Bay City



Cathay Converse of St. Vincent de Paul Parish, Shepherd

Saginaw. Each parish appointed a group coordinator, who was trained and then called upon to organize listening sessions with parishioners. Sessions representing additional populations, such as Catholic school students, multicultural groups and ecumenical (non-Catholic) groups are also being held.

Connecting the synod to the Bible, Norman Moore from Our Lady of Czestochowa Parish in Bay City agreed that hearing everyone's voice in this process is important.

"Luke tells us that everybody had a voice, and people listened to all the voices, but not all the voices were equal," Norman said, referring to the Council of Jerusalem. "I don't expect that our voice is going to be right at the top of anything, but we have a part to play because we are part of the Body of Christ, as Paul tells us. And Acts 15 reminds us that we have a voice and we need to use it."

Several group coordinators say the people they've heard from are grateful for the opportunity.

"We're working as the Body of Christ, and communication is very key," said Cathy Converse of St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Shepherd. "I'm also excited to see that the pope wants to hear our voices, starting from the end of the people and working our way up. It's long overdue."

Young people are included as well.

"They took it really seriously," said Kristyn Russell, who held

a listening session with 30 high school students at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Midland. "For the young church – the high schoolers, they loved that they were able to be heard, that they had a faith, to be able to say this is what we're doing well, and this is where the church needs to maybe work on this."

Kristyn noticed a common thread with many teens.

"Young people want to see a church that is welcoming and hospitable to everyone," she said. "They obviously perceive that either the people of God or the institutional church is somehow excluding people or isn't welcoming to all people, and they want to see that changed."

The message of welcome is a common thread among the parishes. Cathy said there are some issues that seem to keep people from entering the Church, making them feel excluded.

"As a Catholic Church, we make it difficult for others to come into the Church – there's too many obstacles," she said. "We have to be careful of that. In one sense we're saying, all are welcome, and in the other sense we're putting barriers up."

In the Thumb at Holy Family Parish in Marlette/Peck/Sandusky, Suzanne Guttowsky says she recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit in the process.

"The Holy Spirit is at work. I was very apprehensive as to what



Barbara Sheridan, Wendy Lefler and Kim Smith participate in a synod listening session at Holy Family Parish, St. John Church in Peck.

I would encounter from people's discussions, but the Holy Spirit is guiding this," she said, adding that she has seen excitement build about where the Holy Spirit is leading the Church for the future.

Regardless of what they hear during the listening sessions, the coordinators agree that working with the synod helps everyone understand the importance of listening to each other and being able to have a voice in the process.

"This isn't just a survey for our diocese or our Church," Rose said. "The pope wants to know. Our pope believes that we need to hear from the laypeople."

"If people are truly listening to the Holy Spirit, this is something we can use here in our parish, and in our diocese," Suzanne said. "It's calling us to be a better worker in this world, and to make the world better." †



## Catechumens, candidates join Bishop Gruss for Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion

Those who prepared to enter the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil gathered at the Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption on Sunday, March 6 for a special liturgy with Bishop Robert Gruss. Including men, women and children from across the Diocese of Saginaw, the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion begin the final stage of preparation for the candidates before they receive the sacraments of Initiation.

At the Rite of Election, each catechumen is personally greeted by

Bishop Gruss and then inscribes their name in the Book of the Elect. This rite is for those who are not yet baptized.

During the Call to Continuing Conversion, those who were baptized in another Christian tradition are called to continue their journey into full communion with the Catholic Church. Usually, these candidates will not be baptized again, but they will make a profession of faith at the Easter Vigil.

We extend our prayerful support to all who joined the Catholic Church around the world during the Easter Vigil.



All Saints Parish, Bay City, parishioners Lizzie Best and her sponsor John Helmreich participated in the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion at the Cathedral. *Photo by Jeff Schrier.*

## Bishop Gruss celebrates Mass with healthcare professionals

On Feb. 16, faithful gathered for a Mass for Healthcare Professionals at the Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption in Saginaw. This Mass has been a tradition in the United States since the late 1800s. During the Mass, faithful pray for God's blessings and safety for all those serving in the healthcare field and for the people they serve.

In his homily, Bishop Gruss reminded those in attendance that "We are called to be his instruments of mercy. Jesus sends all of us into the world to enter into the wounds of others, wherever we find ourselves and to whomever Christ sends us. We can never be afraid to enter into the wounds of others - in order to bring love there, Christ's love, the very tenderness and mercy of God."



Bishop Robert Gruss celebrated a Mass for Healthcare Professionals on Feb. 16. *Photo by Jeff Schrier.*

## Sarah Messing hired as coordinator of youth and young adult ministry

As part of the ongoing diocesan re-envisioning process, Sarah Messing will bring the skills honed in 18 years of teaching to the chancery.

As coordinator of youth and young adult ministry, Sarah will develop leadership training for all parishes to use with those involved with youth and young adult ministry. She will initiate and support youth and young adult programs and coordinate ministry to young adults, especially on college and university campuses. She will work with and regularly participate in opportunities for youth and young adults to be enriched in the liturgy, to develop a deep prayer life, and to learn and share their faith and faith stories in a peer community. Sarah is also the Vicariate 3 liaison.

### First Fridays with Bishop Gruss

**Date:** May 6, June 3

**Time:** 11 a.m. Mass, noon lunch

**Location:** Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption

**Cost:** \$7 for lunch

**Presenters:** Bishop Robert Gruss

**To register:** Online, only if you will attend the lunch

**For more information:** [saginaw.com/events](http://saginaw.com/events)

Each First Friday of the month, Bishop Robert Gruss will preside at Mass followed by a meatless lunch and an informal presentation. The presentation topics vary. Those who can attend only Mass or the lunch/presentation are welcome.

BY DR. DAN OSBORN



## IS THE EUCHARIST TRULY THE *Body and Blood of Christ, or just a symbol?*

### QUESTION:

*Many Christian denominations teach that the communion wafer offered in their services is only a symbol of Jesus. Why, then, does the Catholic Church teach that Holy Communion offered at Mass is not merely a symbol, but is really the Risen Christ disguised as bread and wine?*

### ANSWER:

In the last issue of *FAITH Saginaw*, we looked at a key biblical foundation for the Catholic teaching that the Eucharist is not just a symbol of Jesus – but that we actually receive the Lord’s body, blood, soul and divinity when we go to Holy Communion. Jesus spoke about the Eucharist in his “Bread of Life” sermon in John 6.

Jesus taught some challenging truths that day: “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink”.<sup>1</sup> Many disciples walked away from Jesus when they heard these words because they took them literally, not symbolically. If Jesus was only

speaking symbolically, he would have been obliged to chase after these disciples to clarify that he was not speaking literally. However, he did no such thing. Jesus, who elsewhere calls himself “the Truth,” chose to let these disciples walk away.

We can also find references to the Real Presence in the writings of some great early Christian authors who are called “Fathers of the Church.” Indeed, the teaching that the Eucharist is truly the body and blood of Christ has been part of the Catholic Church’s faith since her beginning, as we see in a letter written around 110 AD by St. Ignatius of Antioch. This bishop is the first known writer to use the term “Catholic Church,” which appears in an epistle he composed en route to his martyrdom in the Roman Colosseum, where he was thrown to

wild beasts. He wrote: “Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by the bishop or by one whom he ordains [i.e., a presbyter]. Wherever the bishop appears, let the people be there; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic Church”.<sup>2</sup>

In this same letter, we see the strong faith of the early Church regarding the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. St. Ignatius laments that “those who hold heretical opinions about the grace of Jesus Christ...refuse to acknowledge that the Eucharist is the flesh of our savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins and which the Father by his goodness raised up”.<sup>3</sup> And in a separate letter to the church in Rome, he shares: “I have no taste for corruptible food nor for the pleasures of this life. I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David; and for drink I desire His blood, which is love incorruptible”.<sup>4</sup>

In conclusion, both Scripture and other early Christian writings affirm that Jesus was not speaking symbolically when he said the Eucharist is truly his body and blood. We, too, can have supreme confidence in Jesus’ Real Presence when we receive him at Holy Communion. †

Vatican II declared that the Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life” in *Lumen Gentium* (11).

As dioceses across the U.S. embark on a three-year Eucharistic Revival, each issue of *FAITH Saginaw* will explore the Church’s doctrine on the Eucharist: faith that the bread and wine actually become the body, blood, soul and divinity of Christ at every Mass.

1 Jn 6:53-55

2 Epistle of St. Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans, 8:2

3 *ibid*, 6:2

4 Epistle of St. Ignatius to the Romans, 7:3





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*Sunday, June 19, 2 p.m. Mass*

*Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ at the Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption*

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