

THE MAGAZINE

OF THE CATHOLIC

DIOCESE OF

SAGINAW

Issue 1, 2022

# faith *Saginaw*

How the

*Eucharist*

drew me back  
to the Catholic  
Church

**IN THE KNOW  
WITH FATHER JOE**

How can I 'do'  
Lent better?

**FEATURE**

Father Sikorski  
found joy in  
serving the poor

**FEATURE**

Bobbie Davis  
lives according  
to Acts 20:35

*ALL IN*



Danielle McGrew, Tenbausch

# A focus on the Eucharist and Catholic schools

**I**n late 2021, Bishop Robert Gruss named two of his priorities for this year and beyond: Eucharistic revival and Catholic schools.

The vision for Eucharistic revival, set forth by the United States bishops, is intended to be “A movement of Catholics across the United States, healed, converted, formed and unified by an encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist – and sent out in mission ‘for the life of the world.’”

The hope is that our Church, our diocese, will be renewed through a living relationship with the Lord Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. Read more about this revival in Bishop Gruss’ column on the next two pages; be inspired as Emma candidly shares how the Eucharist drew her back to the Catholic Church (cover story, page 16); and check out our new regular offering, Source + Summit, on page 31.

In coming editions of *FAITH Saginaw*, you also will learn a lot more about the efforts currently underway to breathe new life and energy into our Catholic schools through a new and exciting joint effort between the schools and diocese. The hope is to enhance the great things already happening, while elevating the priority areas of Catholic identity (faith formation and evangelization), excellence in academics, extracurricular activities, accessibility and financial viability.

With a minimum of 180 days of classroom instruction, equating to more than 1,000 hours during the year, Catholic schools remain the optimal setting for partnering with families and parishes to form and equip young people as intentional disciples of Jesus Christ.

So look for exciting things to come, particularly in the areas highlighted above, and may we continue to join Bishop Gruss in praying for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon our diocese. With confidence in the Lord Jesus, may we hope for the new springtime Bishop Gruss believes God desires for us! Come Holy Spirit! †



**ERIN LOOBY CARLSON**

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As a teenager, Emma Geis left the Catholic Church and never planned to return. In her own words, she shares her journey home and how she's learned to walk "humbly with the Lord."

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**faith** *Saginaw*

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# Eucharistic Revival needed across our country and in our diocese

**T**his year, one of my priorities for the Diocese of Saginaw is initiating a movement of Eucharistic Revival. Far more than a series of events, this Revival aims to be a movement that renews the Church through our love of Jesus Christ, truly present, in the Eucharist.



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

**Why is this needed and perhaps necessary in our current times?** In late 2019, a Pew Study revealed that only approximately 30 percent of self-described Catholics fully believe in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. This past summer, through the assistance of Catholic Leadership Institute, every parish in our diocese participated in the Disciple Maker Index, a survey tool that allowed parishioners

to reflect upon their spiritual growth and discipleship, helping pastors and parish leaders to have a sense of where to focus their evangelization efforts. One of the questions on that survey tool was also related to the belief in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. Of those who took the survey across the diocese, what was revealed was that 30 percent of the people who regularly attend Mass **do not** believe in this truth.

So far, no parish in the the diocese has returned to pre-pandemic Mass attendance. Recent Mass counts reveal that approximately 8,000 people have yet to return to active participation at the Sunday Eucharist, the central mystery of the Church. There could be many reasons for this. I suspect that some of the reasons are not related to the pandemic. Therefore, the planning for the Eucharistic Revival is very timely.

This stark reality has inspired the bishops of the United States to action. More than an event or a program, they envisioned a true Revival to rediscover the source and summit of our Faith through a deep commitment to prayer, pilgrimage and worship

*“I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.” (John 6:51)*

on part of the entire Church in the United States.

The mission of this three-year grassroots Revival is to renew the Church by enkindling a living relationship with the Lord through devotion and belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. The vision is to create a movement of Catholics across the United States, healed, converted, formed and unified by an encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist—and then sent out in mission “for the life of the world.”

**When will this Eucharistic Revival begin?** The implementation will take place over a three-year period. The planning process will begin in this diocese in the near future. The first half of 2022 allows for time to create a vision for the Diocesan phase of the Eucharistic Revival with a formal launch on Corpus Christi Sunday, June 19, extending for a year at the diocesan level. This year includes opportunities to host diocesan events centered on the Eucharistic Revival.

The parish year begins on Corpus Christi Sunday, June 11, 2023. During that year, the Revival will take place at the local parish level in order to re-enkindle a living relationship with the Lord through catechesis and devotion regarding the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

These three years will culminate in the first National Eucharistic Congress in the United States in almost 50 years. There will be regional or provincial events leading up to the 2024 National Eucharistic Congress. The National Eucharistic Congress, taking place from July 17 to July 21, 2024, with both in-person and virtual dimensions, aims to form

and send forth more than 80,000 Eucharistic missionaries.

As shepherd of the Diocese of Saginaw, I long to help others come to know and experience Jesus in a more personal and life-changing way, especially through the celebration of the Sunday Mass. The Eucharist, the Church’s greatest treasure, is to our spiritual life what food and water are for our physical life. We must help Christians to encounter once again this Jesus, who is “the living bread that came down from heaven.” The Holy Eucharist brings us into communion with him, enabling us to live with him in the life of the Trinity, and to not only be transformed by this love, but, with him, to transform the world through our lives made holy by this union. This is why this Eucharistic Revival is important for the Church, both nationally and locally.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has published a recent document on the Eucharist, the doctrinal source text for the Eucharistic Revival, “The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church.” In support of this recent teaching document, Bishop Andrew Cozzens has recorded a course based on the Eucharistic document, which could serve as a very helpful resource. Please visit [usccb.org/eucharisticrevival](https://usccb.org/eucharisticrevival) to access these resources and more.

More information regarding what is being planned for our diocese will be provided in the future. Until then, please pray for the fruitfulness of this Eucharistic Revival, both nationally and here in the Diocese of Saginaw. May Christ’s peace and love be with all of you. †

## Prayer for the Revival

My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love you! I beg pardon for those who do not believe, nor adore, nor hope, nor love you.

Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I adore you profoundly. I offer you the most precious Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, present in all the tabernacles of the world in reparation for the outrages, sacrileges and indifference by which he is offended. And, through the infinite merits of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg of you the conversion of sinners.

Our Lady of Fatima, pray for us!

DEAR FATHER JOE:  
EVERY YEAR,  
LENT

COMES AND GOES  
AND I ALWAYS FEEL  
LIKE I SOMEHOW MISS  
IT OR BLOW IT.

HOW CAN I  
MAKE LENT BE WHAT  
IT IS SUPPOSED TO  
BE THIS YEAR?

**PRAISE GOD FOR YOUR HUNGER.** This is the key to the whole thing! Remember Jesus' words in Matthew: "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, they shall have their fill." I also urge you to remember God's words through the apostle Paul: "He who started this good work in you will see it to completion." (Phil 1:6)

This is a reminder that the hunger in you for holiness came/comes from God, and he will finish this!

Even with God's promises, it is important that we cooperate. It's not a matter of simply trusting God will get it done, we need to help God help us! So now, I'd like to walk us through some ideas about how to let God transform us in this Lenten season.

I'd like to begin with this marvelous quote from a holy bishop in Canada, Bishop Scott McCaig. Here is what he wrote:

"Don't just choose. Pray first. Ask the Lord where you are most vulnerable to the enemy - your greatest vice. Then identify the opposing virtue and embrace a discipline that will strengthen it. God doesn't want your chocolate ... He wants you. He wants your heart. He loves you!"

I found this to be one of the most succinct, powerful summaries of Lent that I have read.

What's the first step? Prayer.

I know, I know, I always type this, but it's so important. There is nothing that defines the Christian experience like prayer. Prayer is how the soul breathes. Prayer is how we hear the voice of God. Prayer is everything.

So, our first step is to take time and make a simple prayer to God, asking him to guide our thoughts and reveal to us where the biggest gap in our coverage is. One of the interesting things that I experienced as I pondered this revolved around fasting. Fasting is hard for me, as you might be able to tell by looking at me. I get frustrated with my eating and I get embarrassed about how big I am.

As soon as I started thinking about Lent, that's where my thoughts took me immediately and so I really didn't think more about it until I read Bishop McCaig's quote. My priorities might not be God's priorities and, as important as it is for me to reject gluttony, I need to ask God what he wants me to focus on this Lent.

So, take some time today and offer God this prayer or some prayer like it:

"God, I love you. Because I love you, I want to be like you, but that is impossible without your help. As I approach this Lenten season, I am asking you to guide me. Show me where you want to work in me so that I can be holy. Let me hear your voice and respond with love."

Once you sense God leading you, either through circumstances or thoughts, follow that lead. Maybe God wants to work on your temper. Maybe he wants to work on your gossip. Perhaps he wants you to not be so uptight about getting everything right — who knows? He will show you if you let him.

When you see where God wants you to go, then prayerfully and consistently pursue the virtue that will tame that beast. If lust is your struggle, pray for purity and commit to being pure in word, thought and deed. If greed is your struggle, pray for the grace of generosity and sacrifice until it hurts.

This is the way to live Lent well.

A couple of things to keep in mind: There really is no substitute for tenacity. When you and I commit to the fight for holiness, we need to cowboy up because it is going to be a fight. Holiness is not for those who get easily discouraged. When we ask God to help us and we commit to changing, then we need to be ready for the distinct possibility that we will strike out more times than we get on base. We need to be absolutely relentless in our pursuit and not focus so much on our performance as the inevitability of God's victory in and through us.

Another thing to keep in mind is that the work of holiness is about more than us.

Too often, we are obsessed with "those people" and what they need to change. We are painful, infinitely, minutely aware of the faults and failings of others and how those wound us.

# Quietness is a grace



Shy-Chesesi/Shock/Getty Images Plus

However, we have to remember that we have no control over other people, we only have control over ourselves and, if we take a good, hard, honest look at reality, we see that we hurt others because of our faults and failings. We are, each individually, a significant part of the problem.

For our society to heal, for our Church to heal, for our families to heal, for our schools to get better, we each personally and individually need to change. We need to be radically committed to letting God heal and change us.

The more of us who commit to personal holiness, the better our Church will be, our society will be, our families will be.

So, the stakes are the highest they ever could be, and the beautiful truth is that when we engage the fight within and decide to be holy, we will find healing in our hearts, peace in our minds and joy all around us.

Lent is a season where you and I simply must ask for God's guidance, commit to the fight for holiness and then simply refuse to give up until God breaks down the walls of sin in our hearts.

I pray Jesus blesses your Lent. I pray that, during these days, each of us double down on our joyful commitment to be like God.

I can't wait to see what he does!

Enjoy another day in God's presence! †

In the 19th century, John Henry Newman was ordained as an Anglican priest, and he became well known as a poet, scholar and teacher at Oxford University in England. His studies and prayer led him to seek reformation within the Anglican Church. Although the Anglican Church ostracized him, his convictions and studies stimulated his own painstaking assessment of God's path for him. In 1845, at the age of 44, he left the Anglican Church, his position at Oxford University, friends and the familiar life he had previously embraced and was soon ordained a Catholic priest.

Many in the Catholic Church received this gentle intellectual with skepticism and even with rejection. His was a path of isolation and purification of intention, seeking the way of God despite human obstacles. Pope Leo XIII created John Henry Newman a cardinal at the age of 78 due to his work for the Catholic Church in England. He died at the age of 89, but his writings live on. Pope Francis canonized him in 2019.

I write the above as a context for the following:

*Quietness is a grace, not in itself, but only when it is grafted on the stem of faith, zeal, self-abasement, and diligence...*

*The first grace is faith, the last is love; first comes zeal, afterwards comes loving-kindness; first comes humiliation [or self-abasement], then comes peace; first comes diligence, then comes resignation. May we learn to foster maturity of all graces in us – fearing and trembling, watching and repenting, because Christ is coming...*

When edged with anger, frustration and retaliation, quietness is a temptation, which perhaps most of us have experienced at one time or another. The silent treatment by an unhappy person feeds on the worst in oneself as the person turns away from God and others.

On the other hand, Newman's quietness is founded on holy fear of the Lord: "Christ is coming." He recognizes the continual work of God's goodness within us, leading us from faith, through the trials of life which test faith, to love.

I have been thinking about the phrase, "first comes diligence, then comes resignation." A farmer labors long hours. Will he or she have a successful growing season? Only the diligent farmer – the one who tries to fulfill his or her responsibility – experiences the result of inner peace and resignation in reliance on God. The person must work earnestly toward a goal in order to be resigned to God's will.

The labor of relationships, prayer, thoughtful decision-making and even anguishing situations bring a certain peace of accepting God's will. This challenging, often painful, rendering to God is the fruit of sacramental grace.

Diligence and careful fulfillment of responsibilities help us mature spiritually as we become increasingly aware that we cannot control the results. We turn uncertainty over to God's providence. We wait on God's good will. And a kernel of His love draws us into the quietness of grace. Resignation isn't giving up; it is placing our efforts within God's love. †



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# INTROVERT OR EXTROVERT?

## DITCH THE LABELS FOR YOUR CHILDREN

Every parent wants their child to be healthy and happy. We want them to have good friends and feel like they are safe and they belong. We seem to live in a world that rewards the outgoing, extroverted kids who make friends easily, demonstrate leadership and seem confident. If that doesn't describe your child, here are some thoughts to help put your mind and heart at peace.

**First things first.** God created each of us in his image and he has designed a perfect plan for our life. Pray often *with* and *for* your child to discover God's plan for them, which will perfectly use each and every gift, talent and personality trait with which they are blessed.

**Toss the labels and ditch the comparisons.** Words such as shy, introverted or withdrawn don't paint an accurate picture, and when we use them, they can often be interpreted as a second-class version of cheerful, outgoing or extroverted. Be extra careful not to use these labels in the presence of your kids.

**Ask the questions.** If you are worried that your child isn't playing with friends at recess, ask them to tell you how they feel about that? Very often kids need lunch and recess time to clear their head and enjoy some peace and quiet. Class time is full of thinking, talking and action. Some kids play alone because they need to sort, sift and decompress. If they wish they had friends to play with, try the next strategy.

**Friendship 101.** If they wish they had more friendships, there are things you can do to help. Role-play the conversations. Kids who are shy or experience some social anxiety need to practice what it sounds like to invite someone to play or ask if they can be included in a game. This is also a great place to ask for the help of the teacher who observes your child interacting with others all day long and can offer insight.

**Think quality.** One or two good friends with many like interests is more powerful than a dozen acquaintances. Help your child come up with a list of things they like to do, play, learn about and experience. Then find out who else in school or their social circle has a list that's similar and put them together. Think short-term play date or outing. If you have a quiet child who loves Avengers movies, invite a classmate or neighbor who shares that interest to a movie and popcorn at your house. The movie will fill the silence and afterward give them common ground for conversation and friendship-building. Don't interpret their quiet interaction in the beginning as negative, we communicate in many ways and sometimes getting comfortable takes time.

**Send the message:** It's OK to be who you are! Our Church history is full of quiet, thoughtful, contemplative, peaceful souls. St. John Paul II was a former actor who was full of conversation and powerful charismatic leadership, while St. Teresa of Calcutta was quiet, peaceful and dreaded being in public. Both changed the world and demonstrated holiness in completely different styles. God is inviting each of us to do the same ... including our children. †



# Setting the foundation for a culture of life



**A**bortion has been front and center in recent months following the oral arguments before the Supreme Court for *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*. The case concerns the Mississippi law banning abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy. It is therefore a direct challenge to *Roe v. Wade* and also *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*. Abortion is a great evil in the world. Let’s together pray that *Roe v. Wade* will be overturned. A decision on the case will come in June or July.

temptation is to see the child as being a burden, leading to more work, less financial stability and an inconvenient presence in one’s life.

The second improper way of viewing a child is more subtle and is dominant in our culture. It is to view the presence of a child as first and foremost a product of one’s choice, like choosing options at a grocery store. But children are not commodities; they are precious gifts, and gifts imply the priority of receptivity, that is, of a giver.

Rather than thinking “How many children do I want?” it is better to ask “How many children do you wish to give me, Lord?” This involves discernment, requiring prudence and generosity in taking account of one’s circumstances. I believe courage is needed to combat the contraceptive mentality that has gone unquestioned in the West. We have never been more materially prosperous, and yet never more afraid that we do not have enough. The effects of this are being played out, as the United States and a host of other nations experience birth rates below replacement levels.

May God, the author of this beautiful and wonderful life, help us to see that each child is a gift. †

We are called to build a culture of life and a civilization of love. This means respecting and treasuring life from conception until natural death.

In 1994, St. John Paul II wrote in his Letter to Families that the newborn child is a gift who “gives itself to its parents by the very fact of its coming into existence. Its existence is already a gift, the first gift of the Creator to the creature.” We are accustomed to think of a newborn as being totally dependent. We tend to think of the parents giving themselves to the child, rather than the child to the parents. How is the newborn child a gift? He or she can’t do chores or even say “I love you.” The child is not a gift because of what he or she can do. The child is the gift. His or her entire existence says to his parents, “I love you” and “I am God’s gift to you.”

This is important to building a culture of life. I pray that *Roe v. Wade* will be overturned. It is an unjust law that has led to countless deaths and broken lives for the men and women bearing the scars from it. But the culture of life will never simply be won through the courts or legislature. It must be won through hearts and minds. It requires an intellectual and moral conversion. To build anything properly, one needs a firm foundation. So, what is the foundation for building a culture of life?

Is the child, born or unborn, a gift? There are two improper ways of viewing the unborn child.

The first is to see the child as a threat. Globally, people may be afraid of overpopulation and dwindling resources and the negative effect of humanity on the health of the environment, so the child is viewed as a threat. For individual couples, the



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D.Kelme / iStock / Getty Images Plus

## BOBBIE DAVIS LIVES ACCORDING TO ACTS 20:35:



# Words to live by

BY ERIN LOOBY  
CARLSON

PHOTOGRAPHY  
BY JEFF SCHRIER

Bobbie Davis, 89, of Saginaw, has been making clothes and other items on the Sears sewing machine she bought in 1974.

**T**he kitchen and dining rooms of Mrs. Bobbie Davis' Saginaw home are sacred spaces. These are the rooms where she gives her heart to baking and creating for others.

"I've sewed everything," Bobbie said. "I've made altar cloths, pants and shirts for people in need, every suit I wear to Sunday Mass ...

Father Moeggenberg still wears the robe I made for him 30 years ago."

Generously sharing her gifts of sewing and baking with members of her parish and community, Bobbie, 89, has offered warmth and welcome for decades, never accepting any money. As a child, her mother taught her the Lord's words,

"It is more blessed to give than to receive," and those words inspired and filled her heart. They define the way she lives her life.

"She's the most giving, generous person I know," said longtime friend Patti Bolyard.

Born in Oklahoma City during the Great Depression, Bobbie grew up in a two-bedroom home with her parents, four sisters and two brothers. The "bathroom" was outdoors and Bobbie remembers

waking early to heat water for the tin tub so she could use it before anyone else in the family.

"Never had a car, never had a television. We knew no other way," Bobbie said.

Her parents worked hard to support the family and Bobbie never felt like they were going without. In fact, she recalls neighborhood friends gathering at her family's home because they were more fortunate than many others.

"We lived good."

Her father worked in a meat packing plant where his job was slaughtering cows, and her mother

# ‘IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE’

was a “sunshine nurse.” Bobbie said the role of a “sunshine nurse” was to be in the hospital room with members of a family who were losing a loved one.

Years later, Bobbie too would accompany and bring comfort to the grieving by coordinating, cooking and serving food at countless funeral luncheons at the parishes she has belonged to.

“I’ve known her for 18 years and she likes to get in there and roll up her sleeves,” said Father John Mancini, OSFS, her pastor at St. Francis de Sales Parish in Bridgeport. “She’s always been generous with her cooking and a hard worker in the kitchen; she’s been very generous to me personally ... I take her all my sewing problems and she fixes them gladly.”

Singing brought Bobbie to Saginaw in the 1950s. Between the ages of 13 and 19, she was one of seven members of her church choir who traveled across the country during the summer months to put on Gospel music concerts in Baptist churches. When the choir was in Michigan, their 29th state, Bobbie was asked by a mentor and friend who was living in Saginaw to remain with her during the summer and help care for her newborn baby. Bobbie agreed and never left.

In Saginaw, she met her husband Lavonne Davis, a Catholic, and they were married for 42 years before he died. They had two sons and an adopted daughter. When their oldest son was young, Bobbie converted to Catholicism.

Lavonne worked as a barber, but to afford a Catholic school education for their children, Bobbie needed to work, too. She spent nearly 30 years at Kroger, as head cashier and

later managing the deli, to provide the Catholic education she and her husband desired for their children.

On days off, Bobbie volunteered at the Catholic schools teaching children to sew, something she herself began doing at age 11. For years, when her parish operated the Christmas Store to provide items for families in need, she helped students sew hundreds of pairs of pants and shirts to stock the shelves.

“I loved teaching,” she said.

In addition to clothing and blankets, school and athletic uniforms, Bobbie has made many other needed items over the years. Most recently, she has sewed and given away more than 5,000 masks since the spring of 2020.

She’s also shared her gift of singing in her parishes and as a member of the diocesan choir. For years she helped coordinate her former parish’s annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. community event, and she has served on the Bishop’s Black Catholic Advisory Board.

“I’d like to see more young people in the parishes and more involvement in parish life,” Bobbie said. “We need to evangelize. There’s not that many Black Catholics left.”

Acknowledging a great need today to reach out, Bobbie stays busy generously giving in every way she can. Her greatest hope in doing so is to share with others the gift which has sustained and blessed her entire life.

“Faith. It has meant everything to me. I’m a believer.” †



Bobbie Davis makes blankets that she gives away.



Bobbie Davis has a display of some of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren on the side of her refrigerator.



Bobbie Davis displays some of the Sunday suits she made for herself. She made them with the Sears sewing machine she bought in 1974.

*“She likes to get in there and roll up her sleeves.”*

— FATHER JOHN MANCINI, OSFS

# Uniting to overcome ‘morality by geography’



“Flight into Egypt” By Eugene Girardet. Is Licensed with CCO

**T**wo encounters have had a significant impact on my life. One occurred on the crowded streets of India, the other at a parking lot in my hometown of Buffalo, New York. Together, these experiences led me to reflect on a phenomenon which I’ve come to call “morality by geography.”

## Ministry in Mumbai

In the late 1990s, I was involved in lay mission service in Mumbai, India (“Bombay” under British rule) with a Catholic group that ministered to a very special group of people whom locals call “the ragpickers.” These are children who spend most of the day on garbage heaps looking for pieces of cloth to turn in to their “boss” for a little milk and bread. Day after day, often in scorching heat, this is their existence. Our ministry in Mumbai was quite simple. We gave the children more nutritious food to eat and taught them English, hoping this skill might help them rise out of the dire poverty into which they were born.

When I first met these children, what struck me was their eyes. They were not Christian, as far as I know, but I have never seen the light of God shine as much as it did in these young eyes that looked up at mine. Later, I discovered where these children and many other poor habitants of Mumbai live: along train tracks, in shacks or cardboard shelters which could never withstand the fierce Indian

monsoons. The cliché that every human being is our brother, our sister stopped being a cliché when I met the ragpickers of Mumbai. The light I saw in their eyes made the cliché become very real for me – not just at the head level, but at the level of my heart.

## A Rosary in Buffalo

My decade of international lay mission service in the 1990s would not have happened without a turning point in 1989. That year, God mercifully awakened me out of my lukewarm ways with a special grace. I was convicted that he wanted me to serve him and people in need. Some grandmothers at Our Lady of Victory Basilica in Lackawanna, New York, invited me to adoration of Jesus in the Eucharist, something I hadn’t known about before. I also joined a rosary group. Then some members invited me to pray at an abortion clinic near Buffalo General, the hospital where I was born.

One day, while praying the rosary by myself in the parking lot of another clinic, I saw a young man frantically sprinting around the building. He came up to me, breathing heavily, and I noticed the pain and desperation in his gaze. He asked if I knew of any way he could get into the building. “My girlfriend is about to let them take the life of our baby,” he said. Despite the fact that his child’s life was on the line, he was not allowed to enter the clinic. I had to watch as this devastated young dad walked away, his head hanging in defeat.



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

## Morality by geography

At the Last Supper, Jesus prayed that his Church would be preserved in unity: "I pray not only for [the apostles], but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you..." (Jn 17:20-21). The enemy of God is always looking for ways to attack this unity that Jesus desires for his Church. (A number of linguists believe the word "demon" comes from the Greek verb *daiesthai*, "to divide.")

Recently, there have been noticeable divisions between some Catholics who are passionate about defending the lives and human dignity of children in the womb and other Catholics who are passionate about defending the lives and human dignity of refugees and immigrants. The Church, of course, rejoices in both of these noble causes, and recognizes both as urgent pro-life ministries. It is therefore tragic that these two groups can at times fall into a kind of tribalism, failing to appreciate and even looking with disdain at one another. How could this happen, since the missions of both groups are authentically Catholic?

The culprit, I fear, is frequently one of two things (or both): an excessive attachment to partisan political views, or a divisive use of politically-loaded labels regarding fellow Catholics. I often reflect: Jesus never boxed himself in with the labels of "liberal" or "conservative"... so as his disciples, why would we ever want to do that to ourselves or to others – especially if these labels promote division rather than foster the unity Jesus prayed for?

We are at a dramatic moment when our Supreme Court is weighing the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* case, arguably the most promising challenge yet to the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling that legalized abortion in our country. This is also a time when decisions are being made in various states about accepting refugees from Afghanistan, including in our own diocese (in Alma). How can we overcome the divide between some Catholics passionate about defending children in the womb and other Catholics passionate about standing up for refugees and immigrants?

In addition to praying for an increase in unity and charity, it's important to recognize that both groups are seeking what is good and just – and both groups are trying to overcome the same evil: morality by geography. The unborn human person behind the uterine wall is still a human person. Her geographical location within the womb should not take away her dignity or right to life. Similarly, the human person behind the wall of a border is still a human person, even if his skin and nationality are different from ours. (I again see the faces of the ragpicker children as I write these words.)

While Catholic teaching recognizes every nation's right to have borders with reasonable procedures

***"Jesus never boxed himself in with the labels of 'liberal' or 'conservative'... so as his disciples, why would we ever want to do that to ourselves or to others – especially if these labels promote division rather than foster the unity Jesus prayed for?"***

about who enters the country, the Church's overarching encouragement is to welcome immigrants and refugees whenever possible. The geographical location of refugees and immigrants cannot take away their dignity and their right to the basics of human life such as safety, food, shelter and employment. After all, Jesus, Mary and Joseph were themselves refugees when they had to emigrate from Israel to Egypt to escape Herod's murderous wrath. In summary, moral decision-making about the fate of a human being should never be exclusively determined by geographical location, whether that person is born or unborn.

## Two modern saints

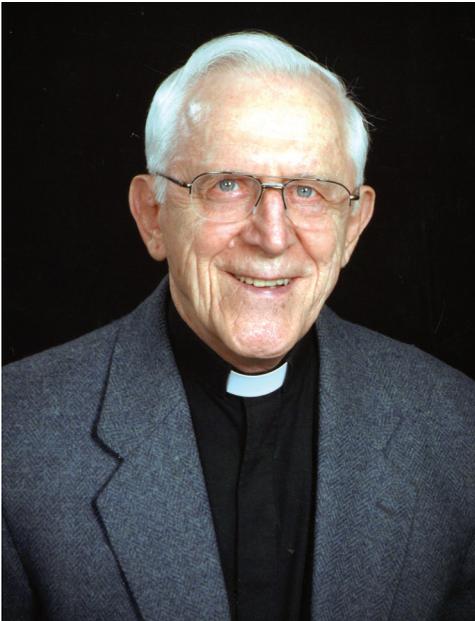
Two recent saints shed powerful light on these issues. The first is St. Josephine Bakhita, whose canonization I attended on Oct. 1, 2000, just as I was starting studies in Rome. Around the age of 8, Josephine was captured by slave traders in Sudan and suffered years of horrible abuse. She eventually ended up finding refuge in Italy where she became Catholic and, in 1896, she made final vows with the Canossian Daughters of Charity. This dark-skinned immigrant became a beloved saint in a country that was not her own.

In 2004, St. John Paul II also canonized St. Gianna Molla, an Italian pediatrician who, in 1961, became pregnant with her fourth child. Doctors discovered a fibroma in her uterus, and she was faced with a decision to try to save her baby's life or save her own. She chose to remove only the fibroma – to give her child the best chance to survive. Gianna told her husband and family: "If you must decide between me and the child, do not hesitate: choose the child. I insist on it. Save the baby." On April 21, 1962, her daughter was born, but Gianna died from an infection a week later. She is now a patron saint of mothers, physicians and unborn children.

Let's ask these two saints to intercede for the Church, so that all those who strive to defend the dignity and lives of the unborn, the immigrant and the refugee will be united, and that their efforts will be blessed. †

# From local taxi driver to foreign missionary, Father Sikorski found joy in serving the poor

From the Diocese of Saginaw to the coast of Brazil, Father Harold (Harry) Sikorski exemplified the Gospel call to live humbly and charitably.



He appeared in a short documentary film, "Mission at Recife," produced by the Archdiocese of Detroit.

In 2006, Father Harry Sikorski celebrated the 50th anniversary of his ordination with a special Mass at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Recife, Brazil.

owned his own vestments. "Every church has a set of vestments, so he had two albs, two clerical shirts and one pair of shoes. He would only own what he absolutely needed—except books."

With an ever-inquisitive mind, Father Harry spent much of his free time in the library at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit pouring over books and studying.

"He was always interested in primary sources," said Father Timothy Laboe, dean of admissions at the seminary.

Father Harry studied the early Church Fathers and documents in their original language, comparing the translations over time. He was especially interested in Church history. Not only did he study in original languages, he was fluent in several: he spoke and read Flemish, Portuguese, Latin, Greek, German and French.

"He could have been an ivory tower theologian, but he had this heart for the poor and that's really predominantly where his ministry was," said Father Bert Gohm, senior priest of the Diocese of Saginaw. "It's just a fascinating dichotomy in a sense, because rarely do you find someone with

BY DENYSE SHANNON

COURTESY PHOTOS

According to his sister, Sister Darlene Sikorski, O.P., Father Harry lived Jesus' words: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me," (Mt 19:21).

Born in 1929 on Saginaw's East Side, Father Harry grew up attending St. Rita Parish. He completed theology studies at the University of Louvain, Belgium and was ordained to the priesthood there in 1956. As a priest, Father Harry made it his life's work to serve people in need.

"He wanted to be with the poor," Sister Darlene said. "When he could be with the poor, he was the happiest person he could be. He had a real uncanny understanding

of their lot in life."

Though Father Harry felt the call to the priesthood at a young age, his love of the poor likely started through the example of his parents. One of seven children born to Peter and Antoinette Sikorski, Father Harry saw his parents give generously what they could, and they always had enough.

"Harry lived a very simple lifestyle," his sister said. "He gave everything away and kept very little." As a parish priest, she said he never

Father Harry Sikorski, who attained senior priest status in 1987, spent years as a missionary priest in Recife, Brazil.

that much interest in Church history and language and all of that, who is also so passionate about the poor.”

He had an archive of documents and books, but never wanted to be a writer. Sister Darlene said he wanted to use what he learned from the early Church Fathers, the saints and literature to benefit others.

“It had a deeper purpose,” she said, adding he wanted to use what he learned to make a difference.

For most of his priesthood, Father Harry served in the Diocese of Saginaw. Throughout his ministry, he served the marginalized and needy, even forgoing life in a parish rectory to live with the people he ministered to. He didn’t wait for people to come to him, either; Father Harry reached out in unprecedented ways— like being a midnight cabbie when he was pastor at Sacred Heart Parish in Saginaw.

“He got a job working for the Red Ball Cab Company,” Sister Darlene said.

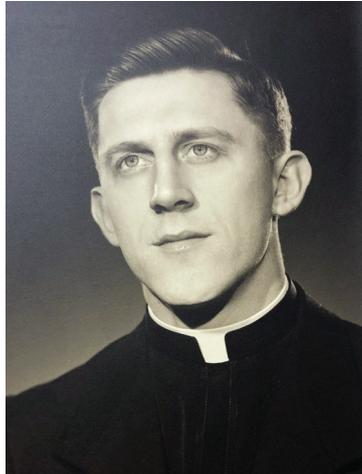
He drove during the midnight hours because, as a priest, he wanted to be able to serve at any time he was needed, Sister Darlene explained.

“If he could at least listen to them, they would be able to see that there was a God who loved them,” she said.

Father Harry also had an old van with “Noah’s Ark” painted on the side. Sister Darlene recalled he drove the van full of bicycle parts to Daniels Heights Apartments to repair bikes for local kids, hoping to counter the influence of gangs.

“He didn’t do it for free,” she said— but he wouldn’t take money either. “He gave them each a trash bag and had them pick up trash as payment. He always came up with practical ways to help people.”

Those practical ways stretched far beyond the Diocese of Saginaw to the coastal city of Recife, Brazil, where the Archdiocese of Detroit



had established a mission in the 1960s. Named the Our Lady of Lourdes Mission, it was located in one of the city’s poorest areas.

“The struggles there are very difficult, but he had a real passion for it. He loved to be with the people there,” said Father Timothy, who first met Father Harry when the Saginaw priest came to the mission during a two-week leave.

Once he retired to senior priest status in 1987, Father Harry left for Recife, some 4,700 miles away from his home. He spent the next 17 years there, ministering to and praying with the people, until health issues brought him back to mid-Michigan.

Over the last several months of Father Harry’s life, Sister Darlene stayed with her brother. While she worried about making sure he had his finances in order, he was still giving his things away. “Darlene, I’m not going to need anything,” he told her near the end of his life.

“He had enough – didn’t have too much—only what he needed,” she said.

Even then, he was asking himself, “Did I squander any of what I was given? Did I do enough?”

In “Mission at Recife,” a short documentary film produced by the Archdiocese of Detroit, Father Harry joyfully shared a discovery made while serving the poor.

“The great discovery is the people, who are really people of



God,” he said, and despite the poverty and suffering, “there’s a joy here that you find nowhere else in the world.”

He gestured around at the bustling open-air market, filled with people.

“This is where the church is,” he told visitors.

“He loved to listen to people,” said Father Timothy. “I think he was that way, just very interested in the people living that life – not necessarily in the streets, not just in poverty and the struggles they had. He had a heart for the poor.”

Father Harry strove to spread the love of God, living simply and following Christ. He wanted to make a difference in the lives of God’s people around him, especially those in the margins.

“He took the Gospel to heart,” said Sister Darlene. He confided in her that his image of the final judgment was the Good Shepherd, and he knew the Good Shepherd was going to come and carry him home.

Father Harry died Oct. 10, 2021, at age 91.

*Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May the soul of Father Harry, and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. †*

Father Harry Sikorski was ordained on July 1, 1956 in Louvain, Belgium and served in the Diocese of Saginaw before spending his later years as a mission priest in Recife, Brazil.

“The void that I once had  
in my heart has been

*filled with unending  
joy, love and mercy.”*



*Editor's note: This essay was  
written by Emma Geis, Director  
of Evangelization, Discipleship  
and Youth Ministries for St.  
Agnes Parish in Freeland.*

# ALL IN

## How the **Eucharist** drew me back to the Catholic Church

*God, you prove to me that this is real, or I'm done.  
I cannot continue on with this inner struggle.*

That was my prayer at Mass on Saturday, Oct. 22, 2016. For nearly two years, I had been fighting the ever-stronger draw of Catholicism, even though I'd vowed not to return to the faith I'd been raised in. Yet here I was. Restless, struggling, tired.

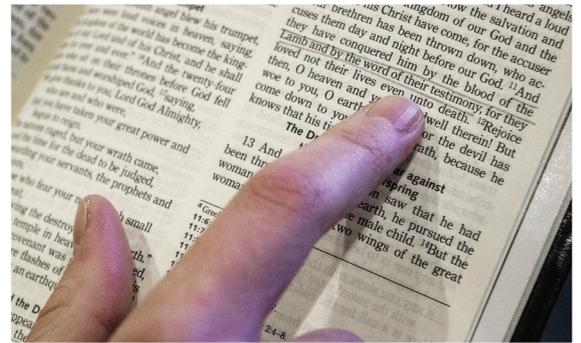
*God, you prove to me that this is real, or I'm done.*

Through God's goodness, my life would be changed during that Mass.



Emma Geis prays before the tabernacle at St. Agnes Parish, where she works.

Inset: Emma Geis points out a verse from the Book of Revelation — “They defeated him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony” (Rev. 12:11) — that inspired the Cause for Joy podcast.



**But first ...**

It was a long and winding road away from, then back to, the Catholic Church. I grew up in a small village in northeastern Ohio, raised Catholic by my Catholic mother and Protestant father. We went to Holy Mass and Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) class, but otherwise did not have a strong faith life outside of Sunday.

When I was a child, my aunt and uncle, who are also my godparents, bought me the Adventure Bible (NIV translation). I cherished that Bible with my whole heart. I couldn't put it down. I wanted to serve God— all because of that Bible.

During my youth, I got involved with the United Methodist Church through friends. There, I was actively engaging with the Bible and growing in my faith. I believed the Catholic Church could not offer me what I was looking for: a relationship with Jesus.

I no longer wished to continue attending the Catholic Church, but my mom wanted to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. Though I was unhappy about it then, now I am beyond thankful. I didn't believe that Jesus was truly present in the Eucharist. I didn't understand why Mary was a big deal. I didn't feel like I got anything out of Mass. I was hurt by a priest's harsh words about my desire to preach and be a pastor. Between those difficulties and the growing desire to be with my friends at the United Methodist Church, I was happy to leave the Catholic Church.

So I left.

**'She'll be back ... and on fire for the Catholic Church.'**

My love of Scripture and my faith life grew as I continued to attend the United Methodist Church and pursued degrees in health studies and religious studies at the University of Findlay in Ohio in 2012. One paper I wrote focused on a verse that kept appearing through my journey: “He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8, RSV Second Edition).

I later realized God was using it to speak to the depths of my heart. God wanted surrender and obedience to him.

In November 2014, I began preaching at a weekly faith gathering called The Alley. Two guys, Gregg and Matt, provided music as well.

When I learned these two men were devout Catholics, I panicked. I tried to hide that I'd grown up Catholic, but one night Gregg mentioned eucharistic adoration and something within me churned, even though I didn't believe in the Real Presence.

Gregg realized I knew what he was talking about. “I know you used to be Catholic; no one else had that look in their eye when I was talking about adoration,” he said.

I was caught. I simply said, “Yes, I was, but not anymore. I don't believe in that kind of worship.”

Unknown to me at the time, Gregg later said to Matt, “She'll be back. You watch. She will be back, and she will be on fire for the Catholic Church.”

**An invitation that changed everything**

After The Alley, my heart started to change. I was active in many ministries, yet felt an emptiness.

Over winter break my senior year, I joined a service program in the Dominican Republic and became fast friends with one of the leaders, Jenise. Herself a devout Catholic, Jenise knew that I was a fallen-away Catholic, but she was more interested in becoming my friend than trying to convince me to come back to the Church. Slowly, I found myself opening up to her about my struggles with the Catholic Church and my restlessness in searching for where God wanted me. Micah 6:8 ran through my head.

Jenise encouraged me to attend a young adult Catholic women's group, and I went specifically to ask questions. Try as I might to prove the Church wrong, I could not compete with the richness and depth of the answers the group provided. I was just talking myself in circles, and they were talking in a straight path that drew them closer to Jesus.

As my undergraduate college graduation neared, I spent many hours in prayer,

“The very things I studied in the Bible were in the

# Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.”

expressing my frustrations with God. How could my life plans to become a Protestant pastor seemingly come to a crashing halt? Jenise invited me to join her for Sunday Mass. Despite great hesitation, I agreed.

I remember awkwardly sitting in the pew. I felt uncomfortable, and yet there was peace within my heart. Mass began and I went through the motions. I had flashbacks to my childhood and the prayers flooded back to my memory. I sat there in awe – all my studies in Sacred Scripture were unfolding before my eyes. The very things I studied in the Bible were in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

However, I still viewed the Eucharist as just a symbol. During Communion, I stayed in the pew, but the one thing I noticed is that the restlessness in my heart was subsiding.

I saw the musicians Gregg and Matt there, too. After the closing hymn, Gregg came to me and loudly declared, “Called it!” (We laugh heartily about it now.)

In the car, Jenise asked me, “So, what did you think of Mass?” I couldn’t even look at her because I was so frustrated that I had found what I was looking for in the Catholic Church – the very church I promised never to come back to. Through gritted teeth I said, “I cannot tell you what I thought, but it is everything I’m looking for.”

## “God, please make this whole Catholic adventure just a phase.”

Over the next few months, I continued both attending Mass periodically and pursuing my path in Protestant churches. I fully believed this was just a phase and I still needed to move forward with preparing for seminary to become a United Methodist pastor. Yet I couldn’t shake the draw of the Catholic Church. The more I went to Mass, and watched others going up to Holy Communion, I realized that my heart was longing to participate.

At a friend’s encouragement, I went to confession (which I didn’t believe was necessary, but something in my heart

told me I needed to do.) The next day, I received Holy Communion for the first time in eight or nine years. While I didn’t believe in the Real Presence, the void that I had been experiencing within my heart was finally gone.

The summer of 2016, I traveled to Lima, Peru to serve as a missionary intern with a non-denominational pastor. I frequented the nearby perpetual adoration chapel. I ran off to Mass as much as I could. I was so attracted to it, even though my prayer was, “God, please make this whole Catholic adventure just a phase.”

The desire to be Catholic only grew. Again, Micah 6:8 echoed, “walk humbly with your God.” I started to really see what God was meaning in that verse. My heart was softening. The Eucharist was the one thing that was still a struggle.

## Seeing with eyes of the Lord

That’s where my heart was when I found myself praying before Mass on Oct. 22, 2016.

And God proved to me that this is real.

During the Eucharistic Prayer, I looked up to the altar and it was as if the Last Supper was painted before my eyes. I sat there in shock and awe, wondering what was happening. Then, during the distribution of Holy Communion, it looked as if everyone in line was dressed in rags, yet so eager to eat this “bread.” After they had consumed the Host, they were dressed in long white robes and radiated light.

A ray of grace and life pierced my soul. I began to sob. I knew at that moment this was REAL. All of it. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Eucharist, Mary, the Catholic Church, everything – it was true, real, life-changing.

I walked out of that Mass changed. There was a new life in my soul, a clarity that I had never had before. I enrolled in a theology and ministry master’s program at the Franciscan University of Steubenville. I was still able to pursue

my dream of serving the Church. I was at complete peace with it.

There were still challenges. Conversion is a continual process. No one is ever done.

Yet I am convinced of the Catholic Church and her strength and truth. I have found the Food that lasts for all eternity. I cannot help but lose my breath every time I gaze at Jesus in the Eucharist because he is so beautiful. Nothing brings my heart greater joy than the Eucharist. I have fallen in love with the liturgy. It was the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the beauty and tradition of the liturgy, that brought me back.

I remember praying through my journey, asking God why I went on this path. This is what he said to me in that moment (in part):

*My daughter, I allowed you to leave so that you could study Sacred Scripture and bring what you learned back to my Church. I allowed you to leave so that you could learn from your Protestant brothers and sisters how to reach out to people, evangelization efforts and how to lead groups. I allowed you to leave so you could improve your public speaking skills. I know you were not well-educated when it came to picking a Confirmation patron saint. I told St. Clare of Assisi to pick you as a Confirmation saint, because I knew it would be the power of the Eucharist that would bring you back Home. Hold fast to her intercession for you, and she will create in you a warrior heart, never afraid of drawing close to my Eucharistic Heart. Your witness to my Church will inspire many.*

I sat there with tears of overwhelming joy at the goodness of God. He truly is everything. And his Church only helps us grow closer to Jesus. I am thankful for the journey I have had, and desire nothing else than to serve the Church, sharing the mercy and love of Jesus.

I can never leave the Eucharist again. The void that I once had in my heart has been filled with unending joy, love and mercy. †



Father Kevin Wojciechowski, Mary Kate Payne and Emma Geis co-host the locally-produced Cause for Joy podcast.



Young adults share

# CAUSE FOR JOY

in new podcast

**EMMA GEIS** has always had a heart for sharing the Good News.

STORY AND  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
BY DANIELLE  
MCGREW  
TENBUSCH

After coming to the Diocese of Saginaw to serve as the director of evangelization, discipleship and youth ministries for St. Agnes Parish in Freeland, she began asking the Lord in prayer what he wanted her to do. Several months later, she said the Holy Spirit put the idea of a podcast, an online audio program, on her mind.

“I had a podcast with a friend a couple of years ago and I loved it. So, I knew that I could do it and I wanted to do something that could be fruitful for others,” she said.

Emma also believed the podcast was a response to St. John Paul II’s call for a new evangelization, which encourages all Catholics to deepen their own faith and go forth to evangelize others as well.

Everything about the podcast began—and begins—with prayer.

“When I was praying about a name, someone suggested that I pray with the Litany of Loretto, [a Marian prayer] for a name. When I prayed, ‘Our Lady, cause of our joy,’ I knew that I had the name – it leapt off the page and my heart had peace with it,” Emma said. “Everything that we would be talking about in the podcast would point to growing in relationship with Jesus, who is the cause of our joy!”

The foundation of the podcast lies in a verse Emma prayed with one evening: “They defeated him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; love for life did not deter them from death.” (Rev. 12:11).

“I was deeply convicted at that moment that this is what the podcast should aim for: to share knowledge and love of our Triune God, the Church and the sacraments, but to also be a space for others to share testimony of how God has worked in their lives through the Church and sacraments,” she said.

Together with a team of young adults— Father Kevin Wojciechowski, Mary Kate Payne, Steven Sandoval, Jonah Israel and Craig Seward—the Cause for Joy podcast launched Sept. 29. For the first season, they released one episode per week for 14 weeks, plus one bonus reflection during Advent. Each episode aims to be thoughtful, funny and, of course, joyful as the hosts



Emma Geis, Father Kevin Wojciechowski and All Saints Central Middle and High School principal Krista Willertz discuss hope in an episode of the Cause for Joy podcast. Mary Kate Payne, also a co-host, listens in the background.



Father Kevin Wojciechowski laughs during a Cause for Joy podcast episode.



Assistant director and fact-checker Steven Sandoval and producer and audio engineer Jonah Israel work behind the scenes of the Cause for Joy podcast recording.

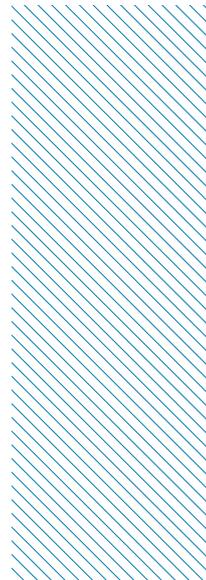
and guests explore the Catholic faith and individuals' lived experience of how Christ works in their lives.

"One of the many things I've come to appreciate about this podcast, from the perspective of a priest, is that it was initiated by a young lay woman and is made up of a crew of mostly young lay men and women," Father Kevin said. "I hope young lay men and women listeners in our Diocese can be inspired by that model and realize they too have the potential for initiating similar efforts within our Diocese."

Cause for Joy exists "to share the love and mercy of Jesus and the beauty of our Catholic faith through solid catechesis of the Church, practical application and sharing of personal testimony," Emma summarized.

The team follows the Holy Spirit's lead to determine each week's podcast content. Guests also bring their own stories, such as Madison Velez speaking about the Hopeful Future Scholarship for pregnant women and new mothers. (See page 31 for a story on this initiative.)

"Overall, the topics we discuss all point to having a joyful Eucharistic witness," Emma said. "The Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith, and we desire nothing else than to point people to Jesus through the beauty of the Blessed Trinity and Holy Mother Church." †



## CAUSE FOR JOY TEAM

**EMMA GEIS:** Producer, director, co-host and co-writer | St. Agnes Parish, Freeland

**FATHER KEVIN WOJCIECHOWSKI:** Co-host and co-writer | Parochial vicar of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, Saginaw

**MARY KATE PAYNE:** Co-host and co-writer | Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption, Saginaw

**STEVEN SANDOVAL:** Assistant director, webpage manager and fact-checker | Holy Spirit Parish, Shields

**JONAH ISRAEL:** Producer and audio engineer | Holy Family Parish, Saginaw

**CRAIG SEWARD:** Editor | Our Lady of Czestochowa Parish, Bay City

**CAUSE FOR JOY** can be downloaded or streamed on SoundCloud, Apple Podcast, Spotify, Stitcher and Google Podcast, and it will soon be available on YouTube. Like them at [facebook.com/causeforjoypodcast](https://facebook.com/causeforjoypodcast) to stay updated on new episodes. [causeforjoylife.wordpress.com](https://causeforjoylife.wordpress.com) | [causeforjoy.official@gmail.com](mailto:causeforjoy.official@gmail.com)

# Diocesan re-envisioning process focuses on better serving parishes



**U**nder the leadership of Bishop Robert Gruss, the Diocese of Saginaw is looking to move from “maintenance” to “mission mode.”

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIELLE MCGREW TENBUSCH

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***“It’s not about fruits in the chancery; it’s about fruits in the parishes, where our people are.”***

- Bishop Robert Gruss

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This “mission mode” includes the creation of new teams to better listen to and meet the needs of the parishes and people throughout the 11 counties in our diocese.

“The overall goal of the re-envisioning was to create a chancery [diocesan offices] that best serves the people entrusted to our care, which are the parishes, and to provide adequate and meaningful resources as they carry forth the mission of Jesus Christ in their own parishes,” Bishop Gruss said. “The whole role of the chancery is to provide ministry that meets the needs of our parish communities.” The re-envisioning

process, then, was geared towards meeting those needs in the most effective and most efficient way.

After months of traveling, listening and learning, as well as surveys and support from the Catholic Leadership Institute, Bishop Gruss had a significant amount of feedback and data to work with.

“We’re still looking at all that data and asking ourselves: How do we use all this information? How do we become the best that we can be from a ministry standpoint?” said Tammie Hunt, chief of staff.

A key area identified was the need to improve communication between the chancery and parishes. To address this, five members of the chancery staff now have, as part of their responsibilities, the role of vicariate liaison. There is one liaison for each of the five vicariates (geographic regions) in the Diocese of Saginaw.



**Tammie Hunt** serves as the chief of staff at the chancery. “In this role, I have the unique opportunity to minister and interact with all of our chancery staff and parish leaders, as well as affiliated Catholic and community organizations throughout the diocese,” Tammie said.

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The re-envisioning process also restructured parts of the chancery by merging old departments and creating three new ones to support Bishop Gruss’s vision for the Diocese and the relationship-centered model of administration.

Bishop Gruss recalled the excitement when he shared the plan with his vicars (priests who serve as an administrator on the bishop’s behalf).

“It was very encouraging,” he said. “Then we shared it with all the priests and the directors of parish life, and there seemed to be a very positive reaction to this process— not just the vicariate liaisons, but the whole re-envisioning process as well.”

Another goal with the re-envisioning process, Bishop Gruss said, is to promote unity and better communication throughout the diocesan staff— essential for effectively carrying out ministry.

“When we work in silos, we really can’t carry out this mission in the best way, in a coordinated way,” he said. “So I was trying to get people out of silos ... Now, hopefully, people are communicating with each other, they’re collaborating and they’re coordinating services to our parishes.”



**Kellie Deming** serves as the director of the newly-formed Office of Parish Life and Evangelization. “I’m thrilled about the work our parish life and evangelization team is already doing. They are gifted ministers who embrace the concept of servant leadership. They are excited to be part of Bishop Gruss’ re-envisioning and to be of service to the people of the Diocese of Saginaw,” she said.

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Many diocesan employees on staff now have different job titles and descriptions, some positions which had been vacant through attrition were filled, and several new positions were created.

This, Bishop Gruss explained, helped fill in some of the “gaps” in ministry where there simply was no staff member to provide a specific ministry or support. Adding new positions, such as the evangelization coordinator, helped to eliminate those gaps.

“These changes have called us to be creative in the way we reach out, minister and serve our parishes,” Tammie said. “In doing so, we have found a sense of renewed energy. I am excited to be serving in this role for Bishop Gruss and part of the re-envisioning underway in our diocese.”

By making decisions after receiving feedback from parishes, the diocese will be able to better meet ever-changing needs in an ever-changing world. Through improved communication, a comprehensive diocesan calendar, which is in process, and providing resources and education for clergy, parish staff and parishioners, the re-envisioning will



**Joe Stong** was named the director of the Office of Stewardship and Development in the diocesan re-envisioning process. Joe is examining demographic data in the region throughout the years and strategizing how to strengthen the Catholic community.

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impact parishioners’ faith lives.

With the re-envisioning process, as well as the ongoing synod and the forthcoming priority planning process (which determines what the Diocese most needs), Bishop Gruss hopes the parishes will continue to be strengthened and grow. Through these, the hope is to discern God’s will.

“It’s not my vision; it’s the Lord’s vision,” he pointed out.

Even as the culture becomes more secular, Bishop Gruss’ hope and prayer is that churches will be full again and more children will be enrolled in Catholic schools.

“I believe that the Holy Spirit has led us to the point where we are today, and will continue to lead us,” Bishop Gruss said. “Certainly, this new springtime is really... a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit.”

Bishop Gruss emphasizes that the re-envisioning is to benefit all the parishes throughout the Diocese.

“The goal of this really is to be more effective ministers of the Gospel,” he said. “It’s going to take some time... ”

But the result of it will be the people and the parishes begin to see fruits within their own parishes. It’s not about fruits in the chancery; it’s about fruits in the parishes, where our people are.”

**“We’re all in this together  
because we’re one Church.”**

## **OFFICE OF PARISH LIFE AND EVANGELIZATION**

*Includes Offices of Vicariate Liaisons,  
Multicultural Ministry, Diocesan  
Outreach and Diocesan Liturgy*

Through the Office of Parish Life and Evangelization, director Kellie Deming hopes to amplify and strengthen the work of individual parishes.

“Parishes are already doing wonderful things,” Kellie said passionately. “And, if they have the resources they need from the diocese behind them, think of the greater things we can accomplish together.”

The Office of Parish Life and Evangelization, which was formed from the Offices of Christian Service, Faith Formation and Liturgy, includes all of the offices that focus on ministry.

The team includes vicariate liaisons for each of the five vicariates (geographic regions) who serve as a bridge between the parishes and the chancery.

“The vicariate liaisons build a relationship with parish leadership and their vicariates, and together they can discern what are the resources that the parishes need that our chancery staff can provide for them,” Bishop Gruss said.

“They’re listening; they’re gathering best practices; they’re gathering ideas that worked well in one area,” Kellie explained. “It’s the networking and the support and recognizing that we’re not in this alone. We’re all in this together because we’re one Church. We’re one body.”

This structure is intended to make it easier for parish leadership to connect with diocesan staff. Each parish is paired with one liaison to contact for any questions that may arise or to seek support from the diocese. For example, if a parish secretary has a question about finances, she/he can contact her liaison, who will get her/him in touch



with the appropriate people and ensure any questions are answered.

As the liaisons recently met with parishes, they heard of many people struggling with grief, especially over these past two pandemic years. With that information, the liaisons connected with team member Lori Becker, coordinator of diocesan outreach, who brought grief recovery resources to parishes.

While each vicariate liaison works with a specific region, they also oversee a specific area of ministry: evangelization, marriage and family life ministry, youth and young adult ministry, lay ecclesial ministry and faith and catechist formation/Order of Christian Initiation for Adults (OCIA, formerly RCIA). These areas of ministry used to be in separate offices working independently of each other, but now they are part of one team that meets regularly, coordinating their efforts and connecting with parishes.

“We need to be collaborators, not competitors. We need to be partners. We need to have a relationship of mutual trust and respect and grow our

parishes ... and help them in any way that we can,” Kellie said. “The parishes are not here to serve the diocese; we are here to serve the parishes.”

While this new structure is only a few months old, Kellie said they have already been getting positive feedback from parishes throughout the diocese, particularly regarding the vicariate liaisons.

Crucially, the Office of Parish Life and Evangelization isn’t only to help each parish’s administration. It seeks to support all parishioners to grow in their faith through its ministries and parish support. By strengthening the relationships between the chancery and the individual parishes, a stronger system will be in place to provide the faithful with ministries.

“The desire that we have is ... to empower the parishes to help the parish reach out to those parishioners and help them build that relationship with Christ, because ... once you encounter Christ in a significant way, your life is changed,” Kellie said. Once a person encounters Christ, the parish is there to help him or her grow in relationship with Christ.



**“The diocese exists to serve the parishes.”**

**OFFICE OF STEWARDSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT**

Who will be the great saint of the Diocese of Saginaw?

That’s the question Joe Stong has in mind.

“Every place in every century, every decade— there’s been a great saint. Thing is, we don’t know who they are,” said the director of the Office of Stewardship and Development.

Joe believes in the new springtime Bishop Gruss has spoken of, and focusing on tilling the soil now will help grow the saints of tomorrow.

“The Bishop is committed to making some major changes to re-envision the diocese. He doesn’t accept the idea that we just continue to shrink,” he said. “We’re committed to growing the parishes. When (parishioners) look around and they see big empty spaces in the pews, I want them to imagine they’re

The Office of Parish Life and Evangelization team meet at the chancery. “It’s fun walking down the hall and hearing laughter and hearing the excitement, and just feeling the Spirit working in our diocese. It’s just a blessing. And I’m humbled to be a part of that,” said Kellie Deming, director.

full. We’re going to get there together.”

Formerly the Office of Development, the new iteration has a two-pronged focus of stewardship and development.

“The goal of stewardship is to help people to become intentional disciples, where they see everything that we have is the gift from God,” explained Bishop Gruss. “Out of gratitude and thanksgiving, our faith calls us to give back and return a portion of the blessings that he has given to us. Whether that be our time, talent, treasure, whatever it may be— it’s a way of thinking about a life of faith and discipleship.”

The spiritual mindset of striving to be a good steward of the gifts God has entrusted one with is just as important to the people in the chancery as the people in the pews, he added.

“There’s a colossal difference between stewardship and fundraising,” Joe said. “Stewardship is what happens once you become a disciple.” Or, to put in another way: “If you care about the King, you’ll care about the kingdom.”

Joe knows there will be challenges, but he is confident.

“If you’re just looking at it from a development perspective, it’s hard to be optimistic, because there’s a lot of demographic headwinds approaching,” Joe said, referring to a shrinking number of practicing Catholics, aging clergy and a growing number of people with no religious affiliation. “But if you’re looking at it from a stewardship perspective, there’s grounds for great hope.”

One of the greatest opportunities lies in younger generations, who generally are less catechized and in need of the healing and hopeful message of Christ.

“Stewardship is about people in the pews. It’s about discipleship. What can we do to bring people back to the

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***“The parishes are not here to serve the diocese; we are here to serve the parishes.”***

- Kellie Deming

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Church? In that sense, there’s huge signs of hope,” he continued.

To meet these ambitious goals of reversing the past several decades’ trend of declining Catholic populations, active parishioners and financial support, Joe plans to first work with a few parishes to be pioneer “stewardship parishes.”

This early work, he said, is like assembling tinder to start a fire. He hopes to help support parishes in their stewardship goals so they can be on fire for Christ. More resources (time, talent and treasure) will help strengthen individuals’ faith lives, and in turn the overall parish, with more opportunities for prayer, youth and adult faith formation, more people involved in parish life and stronger parish finances.

Additionally, Joe will be helping parishes to increase giving, as well as overseeing the annual Christ’s Mission Appeal. He will also facilitate educational programs and retreats for parish leadership.

“My aim is to not waste their time and not cost them money,” he summarized. “The diocese exists to serve the parishes. The Church exists through the parish. They’re the front lines, and we exist to help them.”

And by building stronger parishes, we can help form the great saints of our region. †

# Ongoing re-envisioning includes chancery staff changes

In addition to the Office of Parish Life and Evangelization and the Office of Stewardship and Development, a number of other changes reflect the overall re-envisioning.

- The **Office of the Chief of Staff** is now separate from the **Office of the Bishop**. It includes reception, the Office of Communications and the Office of Stewardship and Development. Christ's Mission Appeal and special events are also overseen by Stewardship and Development.
- The **Office of the Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia** includes ministry to parish life directors, clergy support, campus ministry and priest continuing education. Its suboffices are the Office of Permanent Diaconate, Office of Seminarians, Office of Vocations, Office of Ecumenism, Ministry to Priests and the Diocesan Theologian.
- **The Office of Chancellor and Canonical and Civil Affairs** includes the Office of Child and Youth Protection and Archives.
- The **Office of Finance** includes the Office of Accounting, Information Technology Services and Parish Finance Outreach.
- The **Office of Catholic School Education** and **Office of Judicial Vicar and Tribunal** each have no suboffices.
- The **Office of Administrative Services** includes Parish Administration, Office of Property and Facilities, Center for Ministry and Office of Human Resources.
- The **Office of Parish Life and Evangelization** includes the Office of Vicariate Liaisons, Office of Multicultural Ministry, Office of Diocesan Outreach and Office of Diocesan Liturgy.
- The **Office of Catholic Cemeteries** oversees six Catholic cemeteries in the Diocese.

Dr. Dan Osborn, who has served on the diocesan staff since July 2011 as director of the Center of Ministry, will continue to serve as the coordinator of permanent diaconate formation and ministry, while picking up new responsibilities as **diocesan theologian** and the bishop's delegate in ecumenical and interfaith relations. As diocesan

theologian, Dr. Dan will work with staff, regional vicars and parish leadership to develop sound curriculum and accessible content for faith formation and education for all ages and stages.

Jason Rasmussen joined the diocesan staff as the **information technology (IT) manager**. In his position, Jason manages, plans, directs and oversees activities dealing with computers and information systems. He will also coordinate activities related to the hardware, software and network used by the Diocese and its parishes, ensuring all electronic networks are running smoothly and fulfilling requirements.

Lori Becker, who has been on staff since 2015 as respect life coordinator, is now the **coordinator of diocesan outreach**. She will serve as a resource to all parishes to help put Catholic social teaching to work. Diocesan outreach will focus on education, planning, and collaboration with and among parishes for food pantries and mission stores; rural life ministry; pro-life advocacy; prison/juvenile detention ministerial care, aftercare and family care; mental health support services and other specialized ministry as determined by parishes.

As **coordinator of marriage and family life ministry**, Beth Bauer will support and train employees and volunteers for marriage and family life ministry, organize marriage preparation and enrichment programs, gather natural family planning and pro-life resources and provide ongoing educational opportunities for couples, families and ministers. Beth is also the vicariate 1 liaison.

As **coordinator of faith and catechist formation/OCIA**, Peg McEvoy, who has served on staff since 2014, will help design formation programs for catechists and parish leaders and support parishes in their faith formation efforts, including the Order of Christian Initiation for Adults (OCIA, formerly RCIA). Peg will also oversee diocesan faith formation events. She is also the vicariate 2 liaison.

As **coordinator of lay ecclesial ministry**, Deb Popielarz, who has served on staff since 2017, will oversee the lay ministry program. This includes working with parish leaders to support individuals called to adult lay ecclesial education, coordinating the program and ensuring all lay ministers receive proper faith formation. She is also the vicariate 4 liaison.

As **coordinator of evangelization**, Don Buchalski will work closely with parish leaders to spread the Good News and promote spiritual growth. He will also advise parish leaders on ways to effectively communicate with parishioners, including using digital media, and design strategies to reach regular Mass-goers, non-parishioners and everyone in between. Don is also the vicariate 5 liaison.

The Diocese of Saginaw continues to post job openings on its website, [saginaw.org/employment](http://saginaw.org/employment). †

## Hopeful Future Scholarship established in memory of Helen Marsden



**D**edication to protecting life and a generous donation have given birth to a new endowment to fund college scholarships for women who are pregnant or new mothers.

BY JOAN RAMM

The Hopeful Future Scholarship will help pay tuition and other school-related expenses, thereby encouraging pregnant women to continue their education at Saginaw Valley State University or Delta College.

Michael Marsden of Saginaw Township made a generous \$20,000 donation for the endowment in memory of his wife Helen, who died Nov. 16, 2020 at the age of 72. She was well-known in Saginaw for her pro-life volunteer work and was honored

by President George W. Bush as Michigan's only recipient of the President's Volunteer Service Award for Lifetime Achievement.

"Helen was a life saver," said Michael, describing his wife. "She spent four or five days a week volunteering at the Abortion Alternatives Information facility in Saginaw, working with clients, coordinating services and organizing donations and supplies."

Helen and her husband also prayed outside the abortion clinic in Saginaw, reassuring women that there were resources available so they could keep their child.

"She was no different than a firefighter rushing in to save a child from a burning building," Michael said. "She saved babies. I always think of her as a hero."

After his wife died, Michael, who is a member of Holy Spirit Parish in Thomas Township, was looking for a way to keep her memory alive.

"This scholarship fell right in line with what Helen worked for her whole life," he said.

SVSU students Madison Velez and Matthew Bartels, who proposed the scholarship and initiated the drive to fund it, said the project addressed a long-time criticism of the pro-life movement: not supporting mothers after they gave birth.

"Starting this scholarship is a way to help new mothers finish



their education," said Matthew, a past president of Protect Life SVSU, who organized the effort with Madison, another SVSU student. "It is a way to take action. It also provides tangible hope and support to mothers and children, both born and unborn."

The endowment was set up last summer during a meeting with Michael, the student organizers and Kristin Smith, executive director of CCFMM.

"You could tell that the Holy Spirit was at work during the meeting," Kristin said. "All things came together."

Scholarship applications will open in June for distribution in the fall. The minimum \$1,000 scholarships can be renewed one time. Matthew said future plans are to include all 10 colleges in the Diocese of Saginaw.

Helen's Presidential Award recognized her more than 4,000 hours of volunteer work, Michael said, and was presented to her during a ceremony in Washington, D.C. She was one of 20 volunteers from across the United States to receive the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008.

In her nomination letter, she was credited with keeping Abortion Alternatives Information afloat in Saginaw for nearly two years when the agency lacked leadership and was in danger of closing.

Michael said his wife of 49 years also spent hours knitting and crocheting baby blankets and educating new mothers.

"She was a real trooper. I am so proud of her."

Through the Hopeful Future Scholarship, Helen's legacy will continue supporting mothers and babies. †



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**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.*



# Novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe is rooted in devotion and tradition

Julia Velasquez, center, prays with her family after offering roses to Our Lady of Guadalupe at All Saints Parish, St. Boniface Church, on Dec. 12. Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch

feature

**T**he annual novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe is more than a series of Masses and prayers. For many Hispanic Catholics, it is an expression of deep love and devotion for our Blessed Mother and a tradition that goes back generations.

STORY BY DANIELLE MCGREW TENBUSCH

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF SCHRIER AND DANIELLE MCGREW TENBUSCH

Julia Velasquez, a member of All Saints Parish in Bay City, remembers attending the novena at St. Joseph Parish in Bay City (now part of St. Jude Thaddeus) with her parents as a child and later at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Bay City (which has since merged with All Saints.)

“We were brought up going to the novena with my parents, and I just carry this tradition with my children,” she said.

Together with her children and grandchildren, Julia knelt before a statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe to offer prayers and roses during the mañanitas serenade on Dec. 12 at All Saints Parish, St. Boniface Church.

“To have her here and to have the young ones and all of us here to see her, you really can’t put into words what you feel for her. In our culture, Virgencita is so special,” she said. “She is our Mother ... She is the Mother who brings us to-

gether, the Mother of peace, the Mother who will never leave us, the Mother of all.”

St. Francis of Assisi and St. Joseph Parishes, both in Saginaw, also hosted novenas. Each day from Dec. 4 through 12, Faithful gather to pray the Rosary and celebrate Mass. After last year’s hiatus, the festive gatherings with Mexican chocolate and pan dulce (sweet bread) followed each Mass.

Traditionally, the mañanitas serenades to Our Lady would begin at midnight on Dec. 11 as a way of welcoming the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, but mañanitas are now sometimes sung during the day or at Mass. Men, women and children offered roses to her and knelt in prayer, some with tears in their eyes as they sang to their Mother.

The feast day commemorates the final apparition of the Virgin Mary to St. Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin, an indigenous Mexican. During this final apparition, she requested Juan Diego gather roses in his tilma (cloak) and bring them to Bishop Juan de Zumárraga. When he opened the tilma, the roses fell to reveal the miraculous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Over the next few years, millions of indigenous people and European immigrants, especially the Spaniards, were converted to Catholicism.

“The Catholic Church has universally attributed a special piety to the Virgin Mary, Mother of God. The piety to Mary under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe is based upon the Christian history of Mexico and the support Our Lady has given to the evangelization of the Church throughout the North American continent, if not the world,” said Deacon Librado (Larry) Gayton, director of multicultural ministry for the Diocese of Saginaw. “Our Lady of Guadalupe continues to lead new generations of families to her son, Jesus Christ. Que maravilla!”

Faithful were able to pray with the parishes hosting the novena, as well as participate via livestream on St. Joseph Parish of Saginaw’s Facebook page.

“After a long stretch of dealing with public health concerns, this year, it was amazing that people returned to pray our Novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe in parishes throughout our Diocese. I was overjoyed to see people in substantial numbers in the parishes that I was able to visit during the Novena Masses. Some parishes had 200 to 300 in attendance!” Deacon Larry said. “I also want to thank Father Alberto Vargas, Father José María Cabrera and Father Frank Voris for allowing me to celebrate this novena with their parishes and all the priests and organizers that helped.”

Back at All Saints Parish, the cry and response “¡Viva que Virgen de Guadalupe!” “¡Que viva!” rang out in joyful celebration in honor of Our Lady.

“If you ever go into any kind of Hispanic home, you’ll always find the Virgencita,” said Monica Garza, the daughter of Julie Velasquez. Monica held out the medal of Our Lady of Guadalupe she received for her quinceñera. “She will always protect you. She will always look over us.”

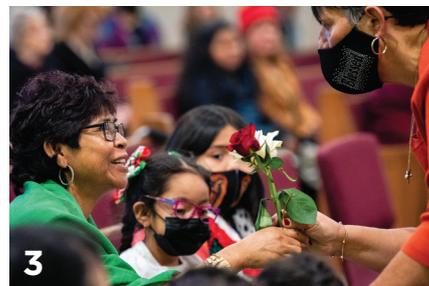
“She’s the mother of all mothers, and she’s the mother of the poor,” Monica continued. “You may not think you have everything, but with her, you’re a millionaire. ... We’ll never be alone.”

For Hispanic Catholics like Julie, the chance to share their devotion to the Virgin Mary and their Mexican heritage is a special grace.

“Our Virgencita is not just here with us. (The devotion) has spread around the world,” she said. “They all know Our Lady of Guadalupe.” †

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*Note: When Dec. 12 falls on a Sunday (in 2021, 2027, 2032, 2038, etc.), the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe is not liturgically celebrated that year, though the diocesan bishop may make alternative provisions to honor Our Lady of Guadalupe. Consult the diocesan liturgical office for more information.*



**1.** Faithful pray before a statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Juan Diego at All Saints Parish, St. Boniface Church, on Dec. 12. *Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch*

**2.** Juan Diego Gomez brings flowers to Our Lady of Guadalupe during a novena Mass in her honor at St. Joseph Parish in Saginaw on Dec. 11. *Photo by Jeff Schrier*

**3.** Kathy Mahaffy, right, hands a rose to a Maria Cruz before Mass at St. Francis of Assisi, St. Anthony of Padua Church, in Saginaw on Dec. 12. During Mass, those gathered serenaded Our

Lady of Guadalupe, whose statue was surrounded by roses. *Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch*

**4.** Siblings Annalicia, Jose, Natalia, Flor and Cecilia Costilla, along with cousin Adelaila Costilla, pray and play with roses before Las Mañanitas, begin at All Saints Parish, St. Boniface Church, on Dec. 12. *Photo by Danielle McGrew Tenbusch*

**5.** Some of the Faithful wear festive clothing depicting Our Lady of Guadalupe, like this parishioner at St. Joseph Parish in Saginaw on Dec. 11. *Photo by Jeff Schrier*

## Local teens energize their faith at National Catholic Youth Conference

In a busy, noisy world, local teens spent three days surrounded by fellow Catholics experiencing the joy and love of Christ at the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis.

Representing 11 parishes from around the Diocese of Saginaw, 94 high school students and adults joined others from around the country for NCYC to take a step back to reconnect with God and other young Catholics.

NCYC offers an opportunity for youth to encounter Christ, experience Church, and be empowered for discipleship. NCYC provides teens and their leaders time for prayer, service, reconciliation, Eucharist, and recreation.



This program is supported by your generous donation to **Christ's Mission Appeal.**

## Beacons of Light:

*Detroit Province Council of Catholic Women Convention*



**Date:** April 29-30

**Time:** Noon on Friday to 3 p.m. on Saturday

**Location:** Bavarian Inn Lodge, 1 Covered Bridge Lane, Frankenmuth

**Cost:** \$95, includes event speakers, banquet, snack and lunch. \$45 includes only the Friday banquet.

**Presenters:** Father Patrick Maher, Elizabeth Gengle, Sister Janet Schaeffler, O.P., Bill Richart and Sheri Wolfert and Mass with Bishop Robert Gruss

**To register:** Contact Rita Maher at 989.635.7072 or rfmaher48453@yahoo.com

**Registration deadline:** April 1

**For more information:** Contact Rita Maher, above

The two-day event will include prayer, Mass, fellowship and inspiring presentations by Catholic speakers. Topics are "Discernment: Light for the Interior Life," "Beams of Hope in Today's World," "Priests that Change the World" and "Being a Daughter of God: How to Turn Your Flicker Into a Flame." Women can expect to be spiritually enriched as they come together as sisters in Christ.

Convention attendees may commute or take advantage of a group rate at the Bavarian Inn Lodge.

GeorgePeters / iStock / Getty Images

## Our Lady Consolata parishioners offer 1,800 Rosaries

After learning of a parish in Wisconsin challenging parishioners to pray the Rosary for vocations, Our Lady Consolata Parish, Cass City/Gagetown/Sebewaing wanted to try a similar initiative.

Though the goal was to have parishioners pray 1,000 Rosaries in October (traditionally the month of the Rosary), they far exceeded the target.

"We are so proud of how our parishioners have responded to our "Rosary challenge." In the end, we prayed just over 1,800 rosaries for vocations," wrote Deacon David Gillespie, director of parish life.

Each Rosary was offered for the intention of an increase in priestly vocations in the Diocese of Saginaw.

"We are prayerful that in some small way our parish will contribute to an increase in vocations to the priesthood. Even if we do not see the increase immediately, Our Lady Consolata Parish is trying our best to practice our faith not just on Sunday but every day," Deacon David said.

## Synod on Synodality

The Faithful of the Diocese of Saginaw are invited to participate in parish listening sessions in the diocesan phase of the Synod on Synodality, formally titled "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission."

"The Holy Father wants to hear from the people of God around the world," Bishop Gruss said. "Synodality means 'walking along together.' So, the Synod is a process by which the people of God walk along together."

Visit [saginaw.org/synod2023](http://saginaw.org/synod2023) to learn about the latest developments related to the synod.

## New date in March! You're invited to First Fridays with Bishop Gruss

**Date:** March 11\*, April 1, May 6

**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.

*\*The March gathering will be the second Friday of March due to the episcopal ordination and installation of bishop-elect Jeffrey Walsh as the sixth bishop of the Diocese of Gaylord on March 4. Join us in praying for bishop-elect Jeffrey Walsh and all the faithful of the Diocese of Gaylord.*

BY DR. DAN OSBORN

## EXPLORING CATHOLIC TEACHING ON THE EUCHARIST

*What is the  
REAL PRESENCE?***QUESTION:**

*According to a Pew Research Center survey released in 2019, many Catholics do not accept the Church's teaching on the Real Presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. Almost 70 percent of self-described Catholics in the survey said they believe that Holy Communion only involves "symbols of the body and blood of Jesus Christ." What exactly does the Catholic Church mean by the term "Real Presence"?*

**ANSWER:**

In Catholic teaching, "Real Presence" refers to the reality that the Risen Christ is truly present in the Holy Eucharist. At Mass, the bread and wine become the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. This miracle happens when a bishop or priest takes the bread and wine and prays the prayers of consecration that Jesus prayed at the Last Supper ("This is my body," "This is the chalice of my blood"). The Eucharist, therefore, is not merely a "symbol" of Jesus - it is truly the Lord himself, disguised as bread and wine.

Our taste buds still taste bread and wine. Our eyes still see bread and wine. But despite these appearances, the Church has taught from the beginning that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist. In general, our senses are dependable in helping us know reality, but not always. For example, our eyes may see a star in the night sky, but science clarifies that this star no longer exists. Our senses, therefore, sometimes do not allow us to perceive the true reality, and this is the case when we receive Holy Communion or adore Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

Accepting the doctrine of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist largely depends on our trust in what God has revealed to us in Christ, who promises us that "whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day" (Jn 6:54).

After hearing these words of Jesus, "many of his disciples who were listening said, 'This saying is hard; who can accept it?'" (Jn 6:60). "As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him" (Jn 6:66). If Jesus had only been speaking "symbolically" about eating his flesh and drinking his blood in the Eucharist, he would have been bound in justice and charity to chase after the disciples who were walking away and say: "Wait... come back - I was only speaking symbolically!" As we see, Jesus did no such thing. Rather, he chose to let many disciples depart from him precisely because they took his words literally and found them too hard to accept. †

*For further reading: John 6; Catechism of the Catholic Church nos. 1373-1381*



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.

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All Saints Central High, Bay City	989-892-2533	9-12
All Saints Central Middle, Bay City	989-892-2533	6-8
All Saints Central Elementary, Bay City	989-892-4371	P-5
Our Lady of Lake Huron, Harbor Beach	989-479-3427	P-8
St. Brigid of Kildare, Midland	989-835-9481	K-8
Sacred Heart Academy Elementary, Mount Pleasant	989-773-9530	K-6
Sacred Heart Academy, Mount Pleasant	989-772-1457	7-12
St. Joseph the Worker, Beal City	989-644-3970	K-6
St. Michael, Pinconning	989-879-3063	K-8
St. Elizabeth Area, Reese	989-868-4108	P-8
Nouvel Catholic Central Elementary, Saginaw	989-399-2230	P-5
Nouvel Catholic Central Middle, Saginaw	989-399-2230	6-8
Nouvel Catholic Central High, Saginaw	989-399-2230	9-12

