

THE MAGAZINE  
OF THE CATHOLIC  
DIOCESE OF  
SAGINAW

May/June 2021

# faith *Saginaw*

**IN THE KNOW  
WITH FATHER JOE**

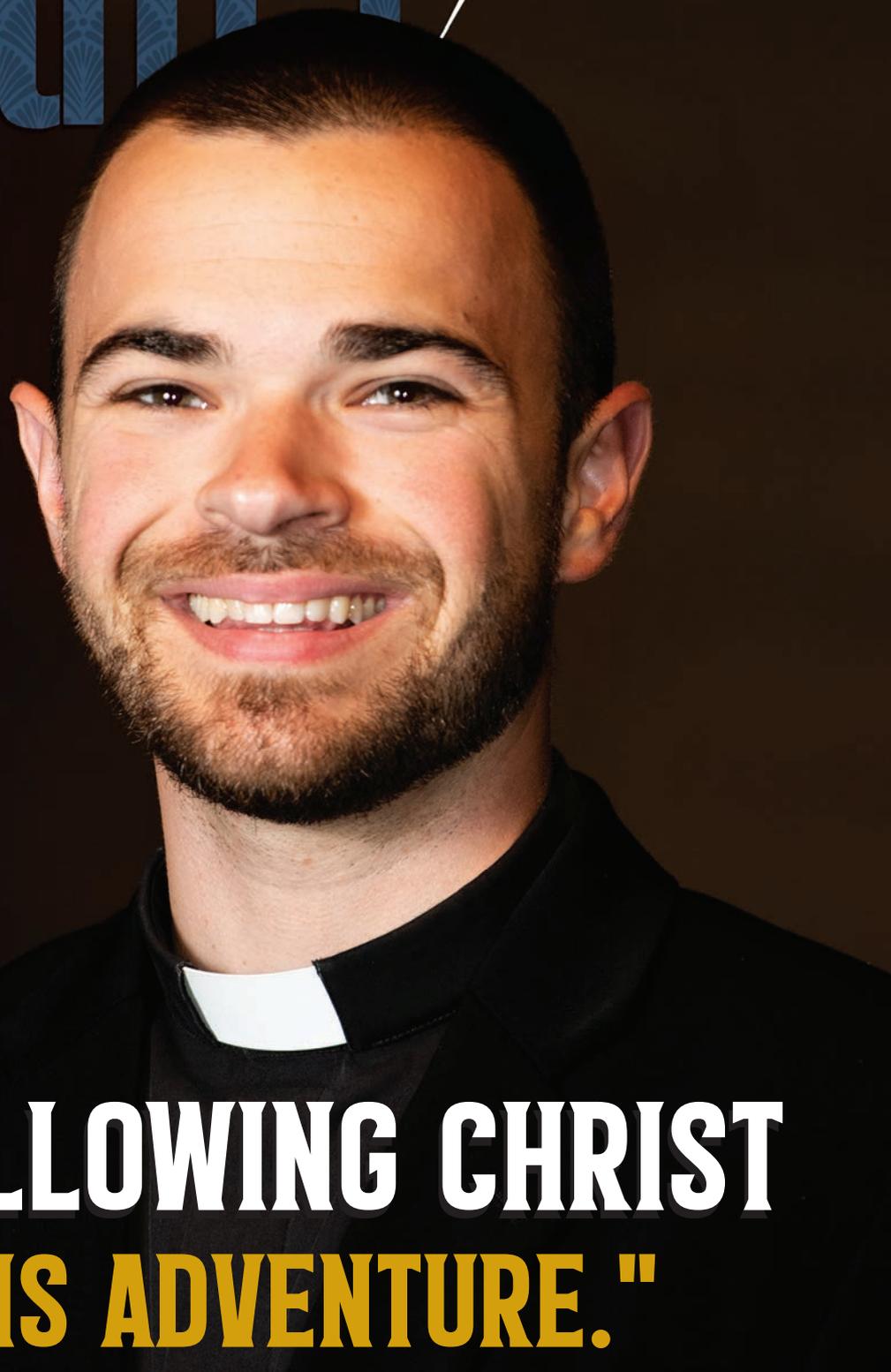
I felt abandoned  
during the pandemic

**FEATURE**

Son's dream inspires  
mother's drawing

**FEATURE**

Faith renewed at Saginaw's  
East Side Soup Kitchen



**"I'M FOLLOWING CHRIST  
ON THIS ADVENTURE."**

*Surrender to God's will leads Father Kevin Wojciechowski  
to the priesthood*

# Surrendering *and* discerning *God's will*



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**I** remember hearing a joke about a pastor who got up one Sunday and announced to his parish: “I have good news and bad news. The good news is we have enough money to pay for our new building project. The bad news is the money is still in your pockets.”

While meant to be humorous, no doubt, there is obviously some truth to the joke above. And, to a certain degree, we can relate a similar concept to vocations. In his column, Bishop Gruss assures us with the good news that the Lord is still calling men to the priesthood and both women and men to consecrated life. There are no shortages of vocations, he writes! These vocations are already in our homes and in our parishes ... it is just that they are waiting to be discerned.

What can we do to help? Beginning on page 4, Bishop Gruss shares some ideas about our role in helping men and women in our diocese hear, discern and respond to God's call in their lives.

In this issue, Father Kevin Wojciechowski also shares his beautiful witness and testimony. He talks about surrendering to God's will, which brought forth deep joy, peace and freedom to live out his vocation. This message of surrender is an important one.

Yes, it can be difficult, even a little scary, to surrender to God's will. Yet, if we believe that God is good and loves us unconditionally, we can trust that his plan for us – and for our children – is better than our own. Following Christ is an adventure that will ultimately lead to our happiness, fulfillment and, most importantly, holiness in life.

Come Holy Spirit, give us the courage to surrender to God's will.



**ERIN LOOBY  
CARLSON**

*is editor of  
FAITH Saginaw  
magazine and  
director of  
communications  
for the Catholic  
Diocese of  
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# *We must all be* **VOCATION RECRUITERS**

Nathaniel Hawthorne once said, “Time flies over us, but leaves its shadow behind.” As I look back over these two years and think about my vocation to the priesthood and my life as bishop, the shadow left behind has covered me with God’s love and mercy. I give thanks and praise to almighty God for allowing me to be a part of your lives in this diocese. What a gift I have received from all of you. My love for you and your support for me has been an expression of God’s love. God oftentimes loves us through the people he places in our lives along our pathway of faith.

Because of the worldwide pandemic, this past year and a half presented challenges we have never had to face before, at least in modern times. But it has allowed us to be creative in reaching out to others so that the Good News of Jesus Christ could still be proclaimed. Thankfully time (and a vaccine) has brought us to the other side. At least we hope so.

## **BLESSING OF VOCATIONS**

In the meantime, our diocese has been blessed with the ordination of a new priest and four permanent deacons. This is one of the great blessings for any bishop and the diocese he serves. We congratulate Father Kevin Wojciechowski and Deacons Jacob Huysentruyt, Dale Sisson, Andrew Waligorski and Alan Wright. These men have chosen to respond to a call to surrender their lives, each in their own particular way to a mystery – a vocational mystery. Jesus has said to each of them: “It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you” (John 15:16).

**W**here has the time gone? It is hard to believe that I have been the bishop of the Diocese of Saginaw for just short of two years. With the vast majority of my time in this diocese under COVID conditions, in spite of the challenges, I have come to deeply appreciate all the diocese and her people have offered me. I have felt welcomed by priests and laity alike. I have greatly enjoyed the ministry handed over to me on July 26, 2019, as I was installed as the seventh bishop of this diocese. I feel richly blessed.



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

To live out one's call to the priesthood or diaconate is a tremendous gift because it comes from the heart of Jesus. Living such a call is also a great challenge and oftentimes difficult. To truly walk in the ways of Christ takes great courage. It is not for the weak and timid. It requires this: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). And I have found the episcopal ministry to be even more challenging.

I am deeply grateful for the many priests of this diocese who continue to generously serve after their 70th birthdays, some well beyond. They are a great gift to all of us, especially to the people they serve. The same must be said of our women and men religious, who continue to serve the people of God after they could retire. We depend on the generosity of these men and women and are very grateful for their service. But we need more priests, just as we need more religious, more talented and dedicated women and men, to serve us today – and our children and grandchildren tomorrow.

## WE ALL HAVE A VOCATION

The word vocation is a very good definition of the relationship that God has with every human being in the freedom of love, because "every life is a vocation" (Pope Paul VI, *Populorum progressio*, 15). In that relationship, God calls each person to love and serve him and his Church in a particular state or way of life. Each person's vocation flows from the grace of Baptism.

But in all vocations – priesthood, consecrated life, marriage and single life – the Lord not only chooses us to belong to him, he also chooses us for his mission. He wants to use us to go and bear fruit for his Kingdom by bearing witness to his Gospel. Every vocation is meant to serve a sacred purpose and is a divine calling. The Lord sees the infinite potential within each of us and chooses to use that potential for the building up of his Kingdom if we open ourselves to his will and direction.

While these new priests and deacons are a wonderful blessing for our diocese, and while we currently have a number of seminarians, we must not merely wait for the next priesthood ordination in 2023. We have work to do. "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest" (Matt. 9:37-38). We all must play our part in the work of vocations.

We live in a radically secularized society where things of God and the practice of faith are diminishing year after year. Religion today

is held in little esteem. Yet, just as he is calling couples to the vocation of marriage, the Lord is still calling men to the priesthood and women to consecrated life.

## VOCATION RECRUITERS

Families and local parish communities are the seedbeds for priestly and religious vocations. There are no shortages of vocations to the priesthood. They are in your families and parish communities. But they must be called forth and supported. The only shortage is that of vocational discernment. If more Catholics were to intentionally engage the Lord in a conversation about what his plan for their life might be— in other words, seek out their personal vocation— many would discover a call to the priesthood or religious life. This is precisely why families and parish communities must be engaged in the work of vocations. We must all be "vocations recruiters."

I encourage you to make praying for vocations a priority in your prayer life, personally and communally. Taking personal responsibility for doing our part to further Christ's mission defines true discipleship. Together, may all of us in the Diocese of Saginaw joyfully accept the grace and responsibility of being "vocations recruiters."

In the Catholic community, it used to be a great privilege to be a parent of a priest or religious. It still is! †



### Is God calling you to a priestly vocation?

To learn more visit [saginaw.org/vocations](https://saginaw.org/vocations) or contact the Priesthood Vocations Office at **989.797.6633**

**Look for coverage of our diocese's four new permanent deacons in the next issue of *FAITH Saginaw!***

## PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

**God our Father, we thank you for calling men and women to serve in your Son's Kingdom as priests, deacons and consecrated persons. Send your Holy Spirit to help others to respond generously and courageously to your call. May our community of faith support vocations of sacrificial love in our youth and young adults.**

**We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.**

**Amen**

( PRAYER FROM USCCB )



**I FELT  
ABANDONED  
DURING THE  
PANDEMIC**

break time, let me say on the Church's behalf that I am so sorry.

But there were priests to whom God gave good lungs and hearts. There were priests to whom God gave an abundance of imagination, and I urge you to remember that those priests were able to continue ministering in life-giving and beautiful ways. There were priests who tried their best to be present in whatever way God called them to.

Now, let's look at bishops:

Our bishops have an awesome and monumental responsibility. They are entrusted by God to do their best to care for their flock and,

**Q** DEAR FATHER JOE: Unlike in most parishes, my priest did not appear to minister during the COVID pandemic. I feel abandoned, so why should I go back to my parish?

**A** I understand the sense of betrayal and sorrow, I do. I ministered to many people during the height of the quarantine who expressed the same feelings. I know what it is to feel abandoned or betrayed and I pray to God to heal that wound.

What I would like to do now is offer you a perspective that may help you move through this. We'll look at priests, bishops and laity and how I saw each respond during the crisis.

We'll start with priests: Why did some priests not minister during the COVID crisis?

For some priests, they simply couldn't do it: physical limitations among priests are the same as those among laypeople. Some

of us have bad lungs, some bad hearts — for many health reasons, some of us simply couldn't minister without getting seriously sick or infecting other people. Other priests have limitations of imagination; God did not give them the gift of reimagining a way to minister beyond what they are used to. Because of that, they weren't able to step out of the norm and find a different way to do things.

I hope we all realize that none of these things are sins or failings. They are a reality of broken people like myself being called by a God who requires dependence, not dependability.

If there were some priests who decided that this was basically a

honestly, I don't think we often consider what a grave responsibility that is. Some people have implied or outright said that our bishops' decisions to temporarily suspend public Masses was caving in to secular pressure rather than caring for the good of God's people. This is an incredibly harsh judgment. Jesus flat-out told us that the measure with which we measure others will be measured back to us. I look at my bishop and believe with all my heart that he did (and does) his absolute best to do the right thing. I am proud of him.

Finally, let's look at the laity.

I worry sometimes that because of the way we priests sometimes minister in parishes, we leave God's people with the impression that it is our job to take care of things and it is the role of the laity to support that. This is trouble.

The fact is, for every priest that didn't minister there were innumerable lay people who could



**FATHER JOE KRUPP**

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

@Joeinblack

# Purity of heart

## BEGINS WITH OUR LORD

have. It doesn't require a priest or even a parish employee to call a lonely parishioner. It doesn't require a priest or parish employee to deliver groceries or to pray with people over the phone. As long as we act as if only priests can do these things, our Church will suffer.

Beyond that, some of us at times made the problem worse: we reposted our conspiracy theories on social media, we attacked other people who didn't agree with us — many of us Catholics were absolutely indistinguishable from those who don't know or love God. Our fear and anger were our defining traits — when instead we are called to show the world what it is to be loved by God and how that changes us.

There is room for all of us in the Church to repent for our attitudes and actions during the crisis, and also to celebrate our attitudes and actions during the crisis.

But, even then, if I may, I'd like to suggest that none of these are reasons to stay in or leave the Church. There is only one reason to stay in the Church — because what we believe is true.

That's it.

Priests come and go, bishops come and go, laypeople come and go. Here's what doesn't come and go: The truth of Jesus Christ and his bride, the Church. If these things are true (and I obviously believe they are), then we should never let our failings or the failings of others deter us from it.

My sure medicine for the moments when the failures of the Church threaten to overwhelm me is to ask myself a simple question: Do I believe what the Church believes?

With this, I invite you to take a moment and read over the Apostles' Creed. Take some time and read it, pray through it and then ask yourself if it is true. If so, then forgive those who failed you, forgive yourself for any failures and press forward with a heart filled with joy, knowing that our Lord will never allow our sin to be a reason to abandon us.

Enjoy another day in God's presence. †

**W**hen the distribution of Communion is over, while he carries out the purification of the paten and chalice, the priest quietly says:

*“What has passed our lips as food, O Lord,  
May we possess in purity of heart,  
That what has been given to us in time  
May be our healing for eternity.”*

Recently, while accompanying another religious sister on a parish visit, I had the grace-filled opportunity for a Sunday of prayer and spiritual reading — a nun's holiday! Throughout the day I periodically returned to the post-Communion prayer above.

In an undertone heard only by himself, a priest celebrant prays in the name of the Church on behalf of the Faithful assembled and also in a personal manner. Perhaps this quietly spoken prayer is a gentle reminder to the priest of the gift of the Eternal Priest.

Because of awareness of sin in our lives, we are often hesitant to desire purity of heart. Yet Sundays and quiet moments provide an opportunity for us to set aside daily concerns and to trust in the Lord with a childlike faith. This prayer teaches us that purity of heart begins first with our Lord. As we are nourished by the Eucharist, we are prepared for eternity.

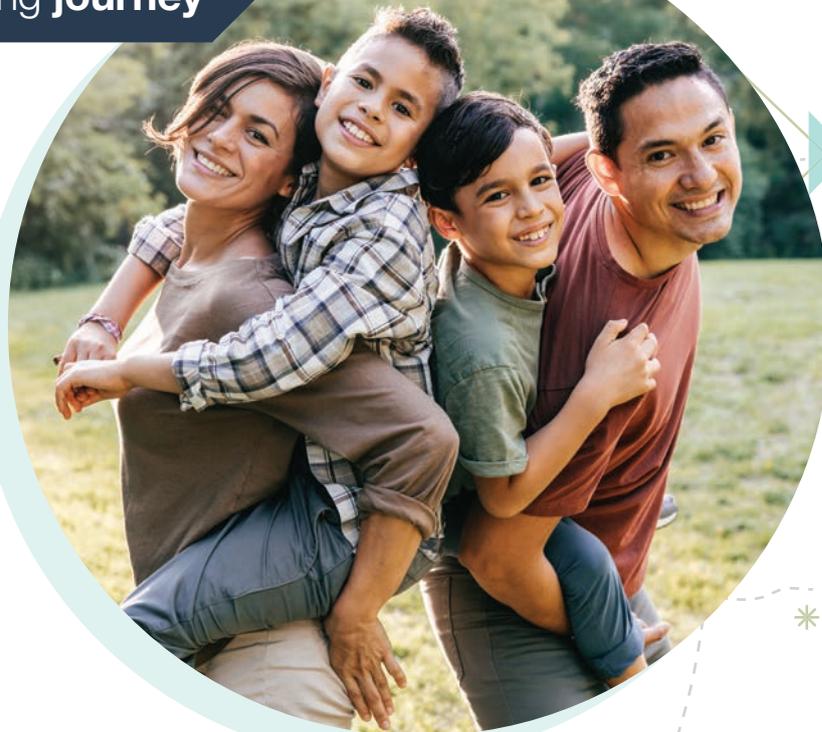
May the Eucharist be “our healing for eternity.” May the Eucharist help each of us look toward our eternal salvation and the salvation of others.

No matter my efforts, my life will always be reliant on God for steadfastness. Today... today, let us set aside attitudes that make faith a burden. Let us entrust ourselves, with the strength of the Eucharist, to his healing for eternity. †



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





PARENTING 101

## HOW TO BE BOTH consistent & loving

(A FEW MORE TIPS)

AS WE DISCUSSED IN OUR LAST COLUMN, OUR KIDS NEED LOTS OF THINGS, including fun, adventure, faith, good nutrition and consistent structure. Our children will not always agree with this list, but the evidence is strong that these elements create strong, healthy kids. One thing parenting experts agree on is that children thrive when they are in an environment where things are structured, dependable and consistent. Here are a few more tips for maintaining consistent, loving parenting even when giving in and making the kids happy would seem easier.



**SHERI WOHLFERT**

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

### **BOUNDARIES HELP KIDS**

**SUCCEED.** If they know a misbehavior is going to be met with a consistent response, they can begin to focus on their own behavior rather than yours. We want to raise kids who can look at their own behavior and take responsibility for their actions. If whining and sassing doesn't get them out of their chores or get their screen back, they begin to take a second look at their behavior.

### **REMEMBER, IT'S ABOUT THE LONG GAME.**

Today it may be a battle over toys, bedtime or chores, but, eventually, it will become about bigger issues, such as curfews and car keys, so demonstrating consistent follow-through and consequences with the little things paves the way for the bigger things.

### **PREPARE YOUR PEACEFUL, CALM RESPONSE.**

Think of it as your mantra. It might be something like, "I love you too much to let you act this way," or "in our family, everyone helps" or "we use words that are kind." If they consistently hear your response in a calm, loving tone each time, things don't escalate.

### **MAKE SURE CONSEQUENCES ARE REASONABLE AND LOGICAL.**

Don't threaten giant consequences to try to shock your child out of a behavior. Threatening to take away a five-year-old's iPad for a month so they pick up their socks just won't work.

**GET BACK UP!** Everybody who loves your child wants what's best for them, so work together.

Consistent discipline is how we raise great humans, and we do it out of love. Don't forget to ask for the help of the Father, who loves our kids even more than we do! †

# INCARNATION and EXCARNATION

As a seminarian, one of my greatest experiences was my pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The Scriptures vividly come alive when one walks where Jesus walked. One of the churches we visited was the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth, where the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would bear a son, and that she would name him Jesus. In the church is a sign that says *Verbum Caro Hic Factum Est* (The Word became flesh here). I found that word “here” so powerful. “Here” is where God chose to become incarnate, to enter into our human experience so as to redeem it— not from afar, but from within. We call this event the Incarnation, when the second person of the Blessed Trinity, the Son of God, took on our humanity. The Word became flesh, and he did it here.



**FATHER ANDY  
LAFRAMBOISE**

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

A contemporary Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor, has coined the term “excarnation” to describe a modern phenomenon in religious practice: “the transfer of our religious life out of bodily forms of ritual, worship, practice, so that it comes more and more to reside in the head.”

I thought of this in light of our experience of faith during the COVID-19 pandemic. This time has helped us appreciate the value of technology. The Cathedral has livestreamed Mass daily. Many parishes have done similar things. These Masses also help us nourish faith for the sick and the homebound. There is much for



which we should be grateful. As we slowly transition back to a new normal, I simply want to point out a danger of having an excarnate faith. We do not want the tool of technology to enslave us.

Remember two things.

**First, watching Mass virtually is not the same as worshipping the Lord in person.** We do not want the virtual to supplant the real. We may be grateful for Facebook friends, but we also do not want this concept of “friend” to become our operating definition of the word. We do not want this to happen with the Mass either. Jesus does not love us virtually. He did not virtually die on the cross or virtually walk among us.

Nazareth remains a reminder to the world that Jesus is not a myth.

He is here. The tabernacle and the altar remind us of his sacramental presence among us. We don't invite our families over for a virtual Sunday dinner, only watching *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives* instead of sharing a meal.

**Second, you are part of the living stones of your parish.** You are a member of the body of Christ.

For the body to function well, all the parts must be in union. Your face is part of what makes your parish a masterpiece, your hands and feet part of how the love of Jesus is spread, your words part of how his message resounds to all the earth.

Reality can be very challenging. Having an excarnate faith softens the demands of the Gospel. It takes courage to not only profess, but also to make incarnate such prayers like “Thy will be done” or “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Reality can be scary, tiring and boring at times, but it is also the only place where we can get a good meal.

The next time you are tempted to be content with a virtual Mass at home, comfortably on your recliner with coffee in hand, I encourage you to remember the words of Pope Benedict XVI, “The world offers you comfort, but you were not made for comfort. You were made for greatness.” Love involves our whole person, body and soul. So too does our worship: “Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1). †

## Two dreams, two drawings and one goal:

*Evangelization*

Ann Urban works on a portrait of Jesus in her Saginaw home on May 3. She primarily uses pastels in her portraits, like this drawing of Jesus.



**F**orty years ago, Ann Urban had a dream that changed the course of her life. In August, her son Tad had a dream that he hopes will change others' lives through the artwork Ann created.

adoration; I try to remember that face and those eyes."

At that time, Ann had been attending daily Mass at St. Helen Church (now Christ the Good Shepherd Parish) but she was afraid to drive and had health problems. That dream, she said, changed things.

"It was almost like a calling," she said. "I got brave and started to drive and got involved."

Along with her husband Marion "Butch" Urban and their two children, Ann joined St. Thomas Aquinas Parish.

"Things just fell into place for what God wanted me to do," she said.

"Then I got involved in artwork."

### Art as evangelization

While sharing her talent with others through the arts and environment committee at her parish, creating Christmas cards for those in nursing homes and other generous projects, Ann continued drawing portraits.

"God gave me a gift for doing portraits or faces. I found that I had that gift when I was in grade school," she said.

She hoped one day she'd be able to draw Jesus and Mary. In her thirties, she began creating religious drawings.

"It's like a meditation when you do a religious picture because it's like a prayer. I pray while I'm working on it that it'll inspire somebody or touch somebody," she said. "I mostly do what I'm inspired to do ... I share it to get it out there, to evangelize."

### "I saw Jesus"

Ann's voice is quiet and calm as she describes her 1981 dream.

"I saw Jesus," she says.

At first, Jesus was in an upper room and Ann was below, in the dark.

"I looked up and I saw his face, and he was smiling, like that, with his teeth," she said, gesturing to an open-lipped portrait of Christ the Good Shepherd hanging over her mantle. "And I said, 'Why is he looking at me like that?' And then I thought, 'Oh, I better kneel down.' And so I was going to kneel down and he was really close, and I looked into his eyes. It was just so pure. That's all I can remember, is how pure his eyes were."

"He said, come with me, and we went down the hall and into a small room. ... I sat next to him and he sat next to me ... and I asked him questions," she continued. "It was a dream that I go back to when I go to

STORY AND  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
BY DANIELLE  
MCGREW  
TENBUSCH

Ann also drew portraits of Jesus based on how he appeared in her 1981 dream. One such portrait she gifted to her friends John and Marian Moll's son, Dan, who was discerning the priesthood.

"Her pictures have inspired me to help contemplate the face of Christ," said Father Dan Moll, a Saginaw native who was ordained in 2007 and serves as a pastor and canon lawyer for the Diocese of Marquette.

Father Dan particularly remembered a huge picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus that hung in his parents' house, as well as a portrait of St. Pio of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio.)

"I think having those in our house helped orient me towards the Lord. The images there helped me to seek God's will in my life," he said.

Father Dan said art has historically been a powerful evangelization tool.

"Having images in our house helps throughout the day to draw our mind back to the Lord," he said.

### Inspiration from her son

Last autumn, Ann was hoping to draw another religious picture that could help draw people's hearts and minds to the Lord.

"I usually pray for inspiration," she said. "I didn't have any ideas."

She attended a First Saturday Marian devotion in August, which included confession and Mass, at the Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption in Saginaw. She again prayed for an idea.

That inspiration came soon from her son, Tad, who has the genetic condition Klinefelter syndrome and lives semi-independently. Each Sunday during the pandemic, he would watch Mass with his parents.

"When he came over the next morning, he said, 'I think God wants you to draw a picture,'" she said.

Tad described the picture he dreamed.

"He saw Jesus with his arms outstretched with the Sacred Heart and the wounds in his hands, and there was a globe. At first he said he saw the Blessed Mother, but afterwards he said he just thought of her ... the rosary was wrapped around the globe," Ann said. "I said, 'I've got to get to work on that right away!'"

Not knowing how the picture would turn out, Ann chose to draw it in black and white first. When she finished, she knew it was meant to be shared. Ann made a few copies, and Tad gave them to his landlord, a non-Catholic staff member at his living facility and several priests. Others began asking for copies as well—his roommate. A neighbor. An acquaintance's mother.

"(The pictures) were getting around to people who don't go to a Catholic church. Most of the reactions were, 'wow,'" Ann said.

She decided to make a second version in color. A few months later, Tad was admitted to Ascension

***"If everyone can consecrate themselves to the Blessed Mother, there will be peace."*** TAD URBAN

St. Mary's Hospital with COVID-19. While he was recovering, he shared the words Ann wrote on the third version of the drawing: "Come back to me and I will heal you. Remember my mother's promise."

"When he said 'Remember my mother's promise,' I thought of the triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary," Ann said, adding that she would pray for the triumph of the Immaculate Heart and the reign of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus each week during her parish Rosary group.

Ann believes that this is also a call to make the First Saturdays devotion.

"If everyone can consecrate themselves to the Blessed Mother, there will be peace," Tad said. He said he believes Jesus wants the picture to be seen by many.

He thinks the picture "will go a lot of places and will bring a lot of people back. A lot of people will be healed."

Tad wasn't surprised by seeing Jesus in his dream; he said Jesus is often in his dreams.

"Sometimes I can see Jesus smiling at me. Sometimes Jesus plays with me," he said. "He's been like a best friend to me."

"I think part of it was the dream and part of it was inspired. ... I think it comes from the Holy Spirit," Ann said. "When he prays, God hears. God hears special people like him." †

Ann Urban of Saginaw drew three versions of the piece based on her son Tad's dream. The third version includes Jesus, his Sacred Heart, the Blessed Mother, a rosary around the globe, and an exhortation to return to Christ.

Tad Urban and his mother Ann Urban sit for a portrait in Ann's Saginaw home on March 2. Tad's dream inspired one of Ann's recent drawings.



# CATHOLIC TEACHING ON SAME-SEX ATTRACTION

*The call to holiness is the same for all*



BarryKearney / iStock / Getty Images Plus

Imagine St. Peter's Square packed with visitors as the pope declares that someone who openly experienced same-sex attraction is now a saint of the Catholic Church. This is not a pipe dream, and in many ways it would be a blessing if this could actually happen in our lifetimes.

This canonization scenario comes to mind when reading a reflection by (then) 22-year-old Avera Maria Santo in her 2018 open letter to Catholic bishops: "I used to want to be in a same-sex relationship. The desire was overwhelming at times, to the point where I could see no other way to get through the day. But I know now, from the good and gracious teachings of God through his Church, that such a relationship hinders not only my freedom to love authentically, but also my ability to achieve holiness. Taking it a step further, being in such a relationship could ultimately block me from spending my eternity with my one true love, Jesus. My dear bishops, there is no one on this earth that

isn't called to a life of chastity; that includes my brothers and sisters who experience same-sex attractions. This is not because the Church is oppressive and wants us to be miserable and passively submissive to her, but because each and every one of us is invited to enter into the divine life of our Creator, a life where no sin can remain."

According to Catholic teaching, the path to holiness is the same for all people: to do God's will with generous love and lead a life of profound union with Christ. The "hard teaching" that many struggle with, of course, is that only a husband and wife are permitted by God and the Church to engage in sexual activity; unmarried people

are not. Just as heterosexual single people are called by God to lead a celibate life, so too are those who experience homosexual inclinations. This is not easy, and they are encouraged to use the help offered by the Church to "gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2359). At the same time, the Church has the responsibility to find more meaningful ways to accompany them.

The Church is often viewed as unfair for her teachings. It may therefore come as a surprise that the Catholic Church is arguably the largest organization on our planet that speaks out against discrimination towards homosexual persons: "They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided" (CCC, 2358). The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops reminds us: "All people are created in the image and likeness of God and thus possess an innate human dignity that must be acknowledged and respected.... 'It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs.'" **To be humble and honest, though, we Catholics often fail to live up to our own teachings, including this one about treating persons experiencing same-sex attraction with the love and respect they deserve. And we need to acknowledge the pain they have often experienced in feeling alienated from the Church.**



**DR. DAN OSBORN**  
is director of the Center for Ministry for the Catholic Diocese of Saginaw.

There are a number of key milestones on the journey towards accepting the Church's teachings about homosexuality as being loving. Here are seven of them:

**1. God exists and “God is love” (1 John 4:16); and true love wills the good of others.**

**2. Out of love, and for love, God created everything (including human beings).** He not only created us, but he revealed to us a plan for our authentic happiness. This plan is partially laid out in the Old Testament, especially in the 10 Commandments, and comes to fulfillment in the New Testament with the moral teachings of Jesus, the second person of the Holy Trinity incarnate. The Church he founded hands down these teachings to us, not to confine us but to set us free.

**3. It is actually a loving thing that God gave us a plan for our authentic happiness that goes beyond mere pleasure and the satisfaction of our desires for sex, food, etc.** Imagine going to a car dealer and the owner tells you that the car you just bought does not come with a manual. God is not like that. Through the Church, he offers us a plan of morality to keep our lives running well and happily, even when difficulties come our way.

**4. Out of love, and for love, Christ founded his Church on Peter (aka Cephas – “rock” in Aramaic.)** Christ gave this first pope (and his successors) the authority to teach infallibly about faith and morals, promising that the “gates of hell” would not prevail against the Church – a divine promise that would prove false if the pope and the bishops united with him ever officially taught error about faith or morals. We trust in the authority of the Church's moral teachings because this authority comes from Christ, who is God.

**5. The perennial moral teaching of the Catholic Church is well known: marriage is only between a man and a woman, and only a husband and wife may engage in sexual activity.** Their sexual union is both for spousal unity and for procreation (i.e., having children). This means all single people, whether heterosexually or homosexually inclined, are called to “fight the good fight” and, with God's help, remain celibate. “Blessed are the pure of heart,” says the Lord. For a wife and husband, “purity of heart” normally includes uniting sexually; for unmarried people, it means saying no to sexual activity out of love for God, trusting in his plan for human happiness.

**6. The Church's teachings about homosexuality do not mean that the Church is against sex or that she is singling out homosexual persons unjustly.** Rather, the Church believes human sexuality is such a precious gift that it is actually holy, and needs to be guided by God's plan for its use.

**7. True love wills the good of the other.** If a father and mother saw their child was about to take a handful of candy – and they knew there was something harmful inside – they would grab the child's hand, out of love, and say: “Stop!” The child would certainly enjoy the pleasure of eating the candy, but the parents understand that the child would be harmed. In a sense, this is the way God the Father and Holy Mother Church view human beings who are tempted to enjoy sexual activity outside of a valid marriage between a man and a woman.

**“The Church seeks to enable every person to live out the universal call to holiness. Persons with a homosexual inclination ought to receive every aid and encouragement to embrace this call personally and fully.”**

*(“Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination,” USCCB).*

We are made for authentic happiness in God, not just pleasure (hedonism). What the French poet Paul Claudel said about young people really applies to us all: “Youth was not made for pleasure, but for heroism!” And his fellow countryman Léon Bloy wisely noted: “The only real sadness, the only real failure, the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint.”

If there is one thing the saints show us, it is this: the path to sanctity is often filled with setbacks, stumbling and imperfections. No wonder so many saints emphasize the beauty of going to Confession frequently – to receive the Lord's forgiveness in what Pope Francis calls “the sacrament of mercy.” All of us, no matter which gender we feel attracted to, can always find refuge in God's merciful arms. †

# "I'M FOLLOWING CHRIST ON THIS ADVENTURE."

## Surrender to God's will leads Father Kevin Wojciechowski to the priesthood

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIELLE MCGREW TENBUSCH

**D**uring an Ordination Mass, the man elected to the priesthood prostrates himself as the assembly prays the Litany of Supplication, invoking God's mercy and the assistance of the saints. Facedown on the ground just before the Prayer of Ordination, he lays before the altar at which he will offer sacrifice to God on behalf of the Church. To Father Kevin Wojciechowski, this aspect of the rite is a visible sign of the same surrender to God that led to this moment.

"Lying prostrate is just a beautiful symbol of the fact that I am laying down my life— but it's in response to (Jesus) laying down his for me," said Father Kevin, who was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Robert Gruss on May 14. "I surrendered myself to him because he first surrendered himself totally to me. Anything that I give is in response to his complete, total love that we see most beautifully exemplified on the Cross."

### FIAT

Part of Father Kevin's inspiration to take the leap of faith and enter seminary was meditating on Mary's

*fiat* at the Annunciation, when she surrendered herself to God's will. After skepticism of God's existence in high school followed by a deepening faith life while at Saginaw Valley State University, the cradle Catholic heard Jesus' call: "Will you follow me?"

He would. Father Kevin entered Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit in 2014.

"I entered seminary, still unsure if this was really God's path for me," he said during a 2018 interview with *FAITH Saginaw*. "Taking the classes and having that daily prayer life started to confirm this call and deepen it all the more."

Father Kevin's parents, Mike and Anna Wojciechowski were supportive of his journey, though it did catch his mother off-guard.

"(Mike) saw it coming. He was totally elated," Anna recalled. "I was surprised— happily surprised. ... I told him, 'If you are as excited and enthusiastic when you go through seminary as you are right now, we know it was meant to be.' And it was meant to be."

In hindsight, Anna recalled that there were hints of God's call to the priesthood throughout his life.

"He always wanted to help people and make a difference in people's lives," she said.

As the parents of a child called to a religious vocation, they too had to give a *fiat*. Anna acknowledged that at first, she had her own dreams for Father Kevin— marriage, children— but then something crucial clicked.

"Once I realized that this wasn't about me and it was more about God and Kevin's relationship, then I was okay with it," she said. "(This is) even better than what I ever imagined for him now."





Bishop Robert Gruss welcomes Father Kevin Wojciechowski to the priesthood during his ordination Mass at Holy Spirit Parish in Shields.

Bishop Robert Gruss anoints Father Kevin Wojciechowski's hands with sacred chrism oil. "Anointing with oil stems from the Old Testament and indicates that someone or something is being set apart for a sacred task or duty. The anointing of the hands signifies that the hands of the newly ordained priest are being prepared for the sacred duties and vessels which will be part of the priestly ministry," writes the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

## CONSECRATED FOR CHRIST

God's plan for Father Kevin was affirmed in a profound way when he was ordained at Holy Spirit Parish in Shields, where he had served as a deacon.

"Ordination was probably the most holy experience I've ever encountered," Anna said. "(It was) overwhelming, but in a good way. There was pure joy."

The Rite of Ordination is rich in symbolism. Following Bishop Gruss' Prayer of Ordination, the priests of the diocese each laid hands on Father Kevin's head in prayer.

"As it was happening, I just had a deep sense of the sacramental brotherhood that I was entering into," Father Kevin recalled. "As they put their hands on my head, it just gave me a chance to pray for deeper unity in our priesthood, in our diocese and around the world—just that we priests would be able

to grow in union with one another as we carry out the mission that the Lord has entrusted us with."

Father Kevin was vested in his priestly garments, a stole and chasuble, by Father José María Cabrera.

"It is a very emotional moment of deep spiritual fatherhood, but also a challenging experience," Father José said of the honor. "Receiving the stole on his neck and shoulders and the chasuble over his body is a symbol of the heavy burden of the priesthood. He received the yoke of ministry, but Jesus said that his yoke is easy and his burden light."

Referencing Jesus' command to St. Peter, "feed my sheep," Father José said vesting Father Kevin is a way of saying: "You are not your own. You belong to Christ. Carry the sweet yoke of Jesus on your shoulders for the sanctification of the people of God."

His hands, too, were consecrated for his priestly ministry when

Bishop Gruss anointed his hands with sacred chrism oil.

"These hands belong to the Lord and for the things that the Lord desires for His church," Father Kevin said. "These are the hands which hold the Body and Blood of Jesus at the altar; these are the hands which grant absolution in the sacrament of Confession; these are the hands that anoint someone who's ill or near death."

As the rite concluded, Bishop Gruss placed bread and wine into Father Kevin's hands, pointing to his duty of celebrating the Eucharist and following Christ crucified. During the Liturgy of the Eucharist, Father Kevin was able to pray the Eucharistic prayers at the altar for the first time.

"It was sinking in for me, 'Oh my gosh, this is real, and these words that I'm saying aren't just for practice. This really is happening,'" Father Kevin recalled.

The day after ordination, Father Kevin celebrated his first Mass at Blessed Sacrament Oratory in Burton, where he received his First Holy Communion. Praying the Mass, he described looking at the family and friends gathered and thanking God for their support and for all the ways God has been working in his life.

## ***"I LOVE TO SEE HOW GOD WORKS THROUGH MY PRIESTLY MEDIATION.***

*As I'm up there saying Mass, or as I hear a confession or I'm anointing, I can see God palpably working in someone. It's like I get a front row seat, particularly through the way that he works through the sacraments."*



"Just like Blessed Solanus Casey says: thank God in advance for all he's going to do," Father Kevin said.

### **FRONT ROW SEAT TO GOD'S WORK**

Father Kevin has loved getting into the routine of administering the sacraments and experiencing them with the faithful.

"I love to see how God works through my priestly mediation," he said. "As I'm up there saying Mass, or as I hear a confession or I'm anointing, I can see God palpably working in someone. It's like I get a front row seat, particularly through the way that he works through the sacraments."

He describes witnessing these moments, such as the visible relief

one feels as God's mercy enters their heart during reconciliation, as "very humbling."

"I just bring my poor simple self, and I pray the prayers the Church asks of me and pray the Holy Spirit works through me," he said.

Whether in the sacraments or pastoral counseling, Father Kevin tries to be attentive to any lies someone may believe about God or about himself.

"I want to bring the truth of Christ into all of those different areas, so that by His truth, I can set captives free," he said, emphasizing the role of the Holy Spirit.

Father Kevin began bringing the truth of Christ to the faithful of the Diocese of Saginaw during his pastoral internship year from August 2017 to May 2018 at All Saints

Parish in Bay City.

"I truly believe that the experience at our parish really sealed his vocation," said Father José, pastor of All Saints Parish. "It is at the parish where the love of God is experienced in real people with real struggles."

During his pastoral internship, Father Kevin experienced not only the sacraments, but all aspects of a diocesan priest's daily life— meetings, retreats, parish dinners, cultural celebrations and fundraisers. Father José watched as he overcame his "shy spirit" to let Christ's love shine through his public ministry.

"As a priest he is ready to switch gears from one thing to the next knowing that in everything, joys and sorrows, he does

**Bishop Robert Gruss ordains Father Kevin Wojciechowski to the priesthood through the imposition of hands and Prayer of Ordination.**

**Father José María Cabrera hugs Father Kevin Wojciechowski after vesting him in a stole and chasuble. Father Kevin spent his pastoral year with Father José at All Saints Parish in Bay City.**



Father Kevin Wojciechowski was joined by his parents, Mike and Anna Wojciechowski, and his sister Valerie and husband John Paul Hendrickson for his ordination by Bishop Robert Gruss at Holy Spirit Parish in Shields.



Father Kevin Wojciechowski hugs his mother, Anna Wojciechowski, following his ordination Mass.

everything for Jesus and for Jesus alone,” Father José said.

During last year’s pandemic lockdown, Father Kevin stayed at the All Saints Parish rectory with Father José, where they celebrated Mass daily. Father José was able to see how then-Deacon Kevin had grown spiritually as well.

“Father Kevin is a very prayerful man. His relationship with the Lord is everything to him. This keeps him rooted in his vocation. Because of his prayerful spirit, he shares the love of the Lord very eloquently with all who meet him. He is a gifted preacher, and he is funny and deep at the same time,” he said.

## LOOKING FORWARD

Father Kevin’s first assignment will be as a parochial vicar at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Saginaw, where he will have the opportunity to learn from Father Rick Bokinskie.

“There are certain aspects of administration or parish leadership that I still have a lot to learn about, and that’s partly why Bishop (Gruss) has assigned me to work with Father Rick, who is a great administrator to learn from,” Father Kevin said. “I’ve met Father Rick a few times, and he’s a very kind man—a good sense of humor, very generous.”

St. Thomas Aquinas was also the parish Father Kevin often attended while at Saginaw Valley State University.

“It’s really cool for me to now be serving in that community,” he said, describing it as a “full-circle moment.”

The parish is also affiliated with Nouvel Catholic Central Elementary School. While Father Kevin doesn’t know yet what his involvement may be, he looks forward to the opportunity to be present, whether by praying with students or getting them fired up at pep rallies and everything in between.

## ABANDONMENT AND ADVENTURE

While on his pre-ordination retreat, Father Kevin often prayed with the theme of surrender, particularly with Blessed Charles de Foucauld’s Prayer of Abandonment.

The prayer begins: “Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will.”

As he begins his priestly ministry, Father Kevin said he wonders, “What particular mission is God going to carve out for me?”

His surrender, his *fiat*, to God’s will has brought him to this point.

“I was struck by the line from a book I read where a priest had just been ordained, and an elderly priest came up to him and said, ‘You just gave God your entire life, don’t spend the rest of your priesthood trying to take it back,’” Father Kevin said. His voice broke as he continued: “So my overall hope is that the same level of surrender I gave to God on ordination day, I pray that I can carry out every day to the end of my life, to be open and docile to his will and not my own (and) follow the Master wherever he goes.”

With all the excitement and unknowns as Father Kevin begins his priesthood, he is confident God is leading the way.

“In all of this, God has not left my side,” he said. “I’m following Christ on this adventure.” †

1

**LEARN WHAT THE CHURCH TEACHES.**

The encyclical speaks of the relationship humans have to creation. Pope Francis summarizes teachings from Scripture, former popes, the catechism, Catholic social teaching and the saints to remind us that we are called to “hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”

# How can I do my part to ‘care for our common home’?



Pope Francis issued his encyclical *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home* six years ago. Here are some ways you can continue to help shape the future of our planet.

2

**EXAMINE YOUR CHOICES AND THE IMPACT THEY HAVE ON THE EARTH.**

Maybe you already have strategies to conserve water and energy or are committed to recycling. Visit [catholicclimatecovenant.org](http://catholicclimatecovenant.org), which suggests 10 ways you can make a difference and provides great resources for learning why Catholics are responding to the challenges of *Laudato Si’*. Catholic Climate Covenant is an organization formed by the USCCB to implement Catholic social teaching on ecology.

3

**MEET OTHER PEOPLE WHO SHARE YOUR CONCERN.**

Dioceses and parishes around the country have formed groups to study the encyclical and take action to become better stewards of the earth’s resources. Catholic Climate Covenant established Catholic Energies to help Catholic institutions determine energy saving solutions and to also help finance earth-friendly projects.

4

**PRAY FOR GUIDANCE ABOUT HOW TO BE A GOOD STEWARD OF THE EARTH.**

In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of understanding the effect our attitudes about creation have on our spirituality. Use the psalms and other Scripture to stay grounded in the call to stay in harmony with God and all of his creation. †

# Holy Family Parish celebrates **Corpus Christi** with cross-county eucharistic procession



A monstrance held by Father Stephen Blaxton led a eucharistic procession for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi between Holy Family Parish's church sites. The procession began at Holy Family Parish, St. Elizabeth Church in Marlette.

On June 6, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi), faithful from Sanilac County took Jesus out into the streets—literally—with a unique eucharistic procession.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIELLE MCGREW TENBUSCH

Standing in the back of a bright yellow open Jeep, Father Stephen Blaxton, parochial administrator of Holy Family Parish, held the Blessed Sacrament in a monstrance and led a procession of the faithful in more than 70 cars between the parish's three church locations: St. Elizabeth, Marlette; St. John, Peck and St. Joseph, Sandusky.

"I hope to renew eucharistic fervor in current parishioners and set for them a missionary tone. The procession is meant to be an icon of the New Evangelization's missionary, outward-facing direction of taking Jesus to those beyond the doors of the church," said Father Stephen. "The procession is meant to be a symbolic (and hopefully more than



Patty Alexander of Holy Family Parish assists Father Stephen Blaxton as they prepare to leave St. John Church, Peck and process in cars to St. Joseph Church, Sandusky.

merely symbolic) gesture of taking the Eucharist out to those in the community reminding them of its importance. The procession also aims at reconnecting with parishioners who have stopped attending by giving the church more visibility in the community."

Eucharistic processions, in which the Blessed Sacrament is publicly venerated, are a powerful witness to the Real Presence of Jesus in the

Eucharist. A common tradition during the feast of Corpus Christi, eucharistic processions generally involve walking, led by the Eucharist, from one place to another. This recalls Christians' lives as pilgrims on a journey.

"To do it in cars is just adapting it to the circumstances of the Thumb," Father Stephen explained. "The idea is this is something that could bring the parish together."

*Clockwise from right*

Faithful gather for benediction at Holy Family Parish, St. Joseph Church, Sandusky, following the eucharistic procession.

Father Stephen Blaxton holds the Blessed Sacrament in a monstrance as Greg and Patty Alexander drive the Jeep leading the eucharistic procession for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi.

Members of Holy Family Parish hold a sign from the back of the Jeep that led the eucharistic procession. "The procession is meant to be an icon of the New Evangelization's missionary, outward-facing direction of taking Jesus to those beyond the doors of the church," said Father Stephen Blaxton.



He added the procession gave some parishioners the opportunity to visit one of the churches they hadn't visited before. He said it was possibly the parish's first eucharistic procession as well.

"I'm grateful to Bishop Gruss for giving me permission to do this procession," Father Stephen said.

At each church, Father Stephen proclaimed a Gospel reading and led a prayer. While driving, participants prayed the Rosary and the Litany of the Most Blessed Sacrament. The faithful were specifically asked to pray for a return of all Catholics to the eucharistic feast and that God would place someone in the lives of each of them to invite to Mass. At St. Joseph Church, the final stop, benediction preceded the repose of the Blessed Sacrament.

"It was very moving," said Greg Alexander of Carsonville, who serves as district deputy for Knights of Columbus Council 711 and is a parishioner at Holy Family. "It was awesome. We had a phenomenal turnout, even more so than we



expected. It was another good idea by Father Stephen."

Greg and his wife Patty drove the vehicle which held the Eucharist.

"It was a blessed day," said Patty Alexander.

She added that as they drove through the streets, every car pulled over when they saw the police escort— then did a double-take when they saw Father Stephen in the Jeep with the monstrance and Blessed Sacrament. A large sign on the back of the Jeep read "Holy Family Catholic Parish."

The Corpus Christi procession was also a joyful reminder that the

faithful can once again gather to receive the Eucharist at Mass and come together as a parish family.

"I think people have a hunger for the Eucharist, and when they're away from it that desire starts to build in them. The people that showed up, that's a testament to the desire that they have for the Eucharist when they're away," Father Stephen said. "I hope the people who came can take this as an opportunity to deepen their awareness as a disciple who is called to evangelize, who is called to take Jesus beyond the doors of the church and be that joyful missionary disciple." †

# The 'Quality of Life' Error

**D**uring “serious illness conversations,” some doctors will ply their patients with this question: “What is your minimally acceptable quality of life?” Behind the question can be the implication that if patients are experiencing a low quality of life, their medical treatments can be discontinued because their life has become “no longer worth living.”

This can even become a shorthand to justify actions like physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia. Making quality of life assessments about ourselves or others can lead us to devalue the gift of human life by insisting it must have a certain amount of “quality” before it can be deemed “meaningful” or “worthwhile.”

The clearest rebuttal of the “Quality of Life” error I’ve come across was from a 64-year-old retired Boeing computer programmer named John Peyton (1945-2009). He lived in Kent, Wash., and had an unusually aggressive form of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, commonly known as Lou Gehrig’s disease. The disease made him totally dependent on

Patricia, his wife of 40 years. She dressed him, fed him and regularly shifted his body position in the living room recliner where he spent his declining months.

As Peyton’s once-strong voice gradually began to fade away, he continued to use it publicly to oppose and lobby against Initiative 1000, the assisted suicide initiative in Washington.

When he was interviewed by Laura Ingraham of Fox News, he said, “I’m one of those people who is somewhat of a target of the initiative and I don’t know how we as a society could really consider making doctors into killers.” Laura countered:

“John, I think a lot of people who are for this type of assisted suicide would say,

‘Look, what about the quality of life?’ ‘Look, you know, people suffering like you — what kind of quality of life do you really have?’ What do you say to those people?”

His reply was as brilliant as it was simple:

“I have a marvelous quality of life! Right now I am totally dependent. I can do nothing for myself. I’m effectively paralyzed. But I have a family. I have friends. I have my church community. I have loving support all around me. I don’t understand how anyone could deny that I have a very high quality of life, and it gets me to understand and be compassionate toward those without the support that I have. Rather than giving them the temptation to kill themselves, we should be trying to figure out how to help them to have the quality of life I enjoy.”

Peyton’s answer cuts to the heart of the matter: if anyone who is sick or dying is facing a low quality of life, we should take steps to raise and improve it. His story also reminds us how

the one-sided category of “quality of life” can easily tempt us in the wrong direction when it comes to basic moral duties owed to our loved ones in compromised states like a coma, ALS, stroke, Alzheimer’s or dementia.

Instead of making quality of life judgments about people, we should be making “quality of treatment” judgments for those who are ailing and vulnerable and, perhaps, “quality of help” judgments against ourselves.

As such, our focus should be on the benefits and burdens of a proposed medical intervention rather than on trying to impose our own conclusion that certain individuals no longer have enough value



**REV. TADEUSZ PACHOLCZYK, PH.D.** earned his doctorate in neuroscience from Yale and did post-doctoral work at Harvard. He is a priest of the diocese of Fall River, MA, and serves as the Director of Education at The National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia. Father Tad writes a monthly column on timely life issues. From stem cell research to organ donation, abortion to euthanasia, he offers a clear and compelling analysis of modern bioethical questions, addressing issues we may confront at one time or another in our daily living. His column, entitled “Making Sense of Bioethics” is nationally syndicated in the U.S. to numerous diocesan newspapers, and has been reprinted by newspapers in England, Canada, Poland and Australia. [www.ncbcenter.org](http://www.ncbcenter.org)

“

**If anyone who is sick or dying is facing a low quality of life, we should take steps to raise and improve it.”**

or meaning in their lives to merit receiving a particular treatment. Their humanity is violated if they are treated according to their functionality or quality of life, rather than according to their personal dignity.

Of course everyone has a certain natural fear or hesitation when it comes to living in a disabled or compromised state. We may also be afraid of “being a burden to others.” When we acknowledge that the gift of life has “absolute value,” that doesn’t mean we must do absolutely everything scientifically available to maintain it, but it does mean that we should exercise good stewardship over it, making use of ordinary means of treatment and receiving supportive care, even in the face of imminent decline.

It also means the decision to refuse or stop a particular medical treatment should be based on the judgment that the treatment itself is extraordinary, that is to say, it offers minimal benefit or is unduly burdensome. It should not be because we conclude that someone’s life itself lacks value and needs to end.

Individuals struggling with grave ailments, even though they may be very compromised and unable to act as their own decision makers, remain persons of great moral worth. They contribute to the common good simply by being, rather than by doing or choosing. Moreover, they continually call each of us to a higher and more beautiful standard of full acceptance, loving support and authentic care, even and especially in the midst of very challenging medical circumstances. They raise the bar for us, and we should respond by elevating their quality of life. †

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Erin Looby Carlson  
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Greg Helmling  
Father Andy LaFramboise  
Sister Mary Judith O’Brien, RSM  
Dr. Dan Osborn  
Joan Ramm  
Danielle McGrew Tenbusch  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Danielle McGrew Tenbusch  
Jeff Schrier  
CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS



FAITH Catholic  
Rev. Dwight Ezop  
CHAIRMAN

Elizabeth Martin Solsburg  
PRESIDENT/CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Abby Feldpausch  
GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Michelle DiFranco  
Rev. Joseph Krupp  
Rev. Tadeusz Pacholczyk, Ph.D.  
Sue Parker  
Sheri Wohlert  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



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update

**Father Dennis Kucharczyk’s name removed from list of clergy with an allegation of child sexual abuse**



Following an investigation, Bishop Robert Gruss removed the name of Father Dennis Kucharczyk from the diocesan website’s list of clergy with an allegation of child sexual abuse on March 26.

On March 17, 2019, Bishop Walter Hurley, who was then serving as apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Saginaw, received information from law enforcement that an allegation of sexual abuse involving a minor had been made against Father Dennis H. Kucharczyk, pastor of St. John XXIII Parish of Hemlock. The allegation dated back to Father Kucharczyk’s early years in ministry.

Following consultation with the Office of the Attorney General in Michigan, and in accordance with diocesan policy, Father Kucharczyk was placed on administrative leave pending further investigation. The Office of the Attorney General chose not to file criminal charges.

At this point, the Diocese continued its internal investigation in February 2020 and engaged an independent investigator, a retired police detective. The investigator presented a confidential investigative report to Bishop Robert Gruss and the Independent Diocesan Review Board. That report included evidence of boundary violations involving Father Kucharczyk. Subsequently, Bishop Gruss consulted with the Holy See, according to proper canonical process. Their report indicated that there was insufficient evidence to proceed further regarding the allegation of sexual abuse of a minor.

Under both canon and civil law, Father Kucharczyk retains the presumption of innocence in regard to this allegation. Father Kucharczyk has denied the allegation of child sexual abuse and is pleased with the conclusion of the investigation. Father Kucharczyk’s name has been removed from the diocesan list of clergy on administrative leave due to the allegation of child sexual abuse.

Father Kucharczyk is taking time to determine his next steps and expresses his gratitude to those who have prayed and supported him throughout this difficult time. †

# Faith renewed

at Saginaw's East Side Soup Kitchen

BY GREG HELMLING  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
JEFF SCHRIER



**D**iane Keenan, the recently-appointed executive director of East Side Soup Kitchen (ESSK) in Saginaw, has experienced more than her share of ups and downs through the years.

Now she knows why.

“Some of the things I went through personally in my life, it was to prepare me for this,” Diane said of her devotion to feeding the hungry people of her community. “I can relate to the folks on a different level. I have empathy for them.”

Among Diane’s challenges has been doubt about her faith. She grew up in Saginaw and was raised through Ss. Peter and Paul Parish, but later fell away from the Church.

“I probably judged myself harder than anyone, and I felt like I wasn’t worthy to be in church and that people looked down on me,” she said. “I’ve been divorced a couple of times and all sorts of things. I wasn’t feeling I could live up to what I thought were the expectations. Now, in the last couple of years, I learned that God was calling me all that time through these trials, to help me see I was where I needed to be.”

Where she needed to be includes both ministering to those in need through

ESSK, as well as befriending parishioners at St. Dominic Parish, whose witness of caring for others without judging them has renewed her faith in the Church. She is working with Father Steve Gavit, president of the ESSK Board of Directors and pastor at nearby St. Dominic Parish, to return to the Catholic fold that she left so many years ago.

Diane has served as ESSK executive director since Jan. 1, after previously spending six months as interim director and one year as president of the Board of Directors.

“Diane’s leadership and giving heart embody the mission of the soup kitchen and is just the right recipe for our guests and volunteers alike,” said Laurie Schell, a regular volunteer at ESSK.

ESSK provides free meals to anyone who needs them, no questions asked, from their customized, handicap-accessible facility at 940 E. Genesee Ave. in Saginaw. Under normal conditions, meals are prepared in the facility’s kitchen and served in the dining area. However, since the outbreak of COVID-19, all meals are served in to-go containers from the facility’s parking lot, with guests able to walk or drive through. Diane said they plan to reopen the dining area in October.

Due to pandemic precautions, service has been reduced to three days a week—Monday, Wednesday and Friday—with an additional cold meal offered on Monday and Wednesday to provide a week’s worth of sustenance.

“I love what I do,” Diane said. “The most enjoyable part is dealing with the guests, the one-on-one interaction with our guests. We provide hot, nutritious meals, but we provide so much more: hope and faith and forgiveness.”

In 2020, ESSK served more than 113,000 meals—more than twice that of the year before. There’s no way to know how many individuals received meals because no one is asked to pay, give their name or even to limit how many meals they take with them.

One thing that is known is the cost to provide those meals. Because of the added expenses brought on by serving to-go meals, such as foam plates, disposable utensils, individual drink containers and other necessities, the ESSK food budget rose in 2020.



ESSK Executive Director Diane Keenan, center, and Father Steve Gavit, president of the ESSK Board of Directors and frequent volunteer, serve walk-up patron Darryl Eiland, left, on May 28. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ESSK is only offering outdoor service to people via drive-up and walk-up. Diane says they plan to re-open the indoor dining facility to people in October.

**East Side Soup Kitchen** is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. For more information, or to volunteer or donate, please visit [www.eastsidesoupkitchen.org](http://www.eastsidesoupkitchen.org) or contact Diane at **989.755.3663** or [essk@eastsidesoupkitchen.org](mailto:essk@eastsidesoupkitchen.org)

“We apply for grants, and more grants, and more grants,” Diane said. “We ask for monetary donations or canned goods. The Catholic churches have helped us tremendously. We would be hurting if it weren’t for their generosity.”

That generosity includes volunteering. Diane’s efforts are bolstered by at least 10 volunteers each day. Over the course of a year, more than 4,000 individuals volunteer at the soup kitchen, including many from area Catholic parishes.

“The folks from the churches come in and volunteer three, four times a week. When other folks wouldn’t come out because of COVID, they kept coming,” Diane said.

And come they did. They came to volunteer, pack lunches, bring food, clothing and monetary donations. They came to be Christ’s hands and feet serving his people.

“If it was not for St. Dominic parishioners, we definitely would not have gotten through the pandemic as well as we did,” Diane said. “Through their actions is how I’m convinced to go back (to church.)”

Though ESSK is not faith-based, prayer is definitely on the menu.

“Diane has a heart for the people. She wants to know their story, and she likes to pray with them,” said Father Steve. “She’ll ask, ‘What is it you would like me to pray for with you?’ It’s a way to open the door for people to share their story and connect their story to God. To not only feed the body, but feed the soul as well.”

It takes a special kind of person to do that.

“The things you hear and the things you see, some of it, if you didn’t see it for yourself, you might not believe it,”

Diane said. “People who say, ‘Can you pray I can get my water turned back on?’ One little girl asked, ‘Can you pray my momma gets out of jail?’ Talk about breaking your heart. One gentleman said, ‘If you knew what I did this weekend and how I live, you wouldn’t want to pray for me.’ I said, ‘No, it’s the opposite. We would want to pray for you more. Plus, you don’t know how I used to live.’”

For Diane, her work at ESSK is a way to let God’s love shine through her, just as she says his love has shone through Father Steve and other St. Dominic volunteers— whom she now considers friends.

“The love, the kindness, the generosity that the St. Dominic parishioners have shown to the soup kitchen and our guests is influencing me to go back to the Church,” she said.

Diane herself is one more example of how ESSK feeds the soul. †

## Feeding the hungry part of Father Steve’s purpose

Father Steve Gavit finds a sense of purpose in Scripture, especially Matthew 25:35: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome.”

As pastor of St. Dominic Parish in Saginaw, he is passionate about strengthening the connection between his parishioners and the community surrounding the church. One important part of that work is to serve as president of the East Side

Soup Kitchen Board of Directors.

“I’ve always tried to do ministry that works with people who are less fortunate than many of us,” Father Steve said.

“When I was younger, I worked in Bay City with migrant ministry. I spent two summers in Appalachia working with the poor.”

Father Steve grew up in Saginaw, attending Carrollton High School, but it took some time for him to find his calling.



“When I graduated from high school, I had this notion that I was going to be a certified public accountant,” he said. “I got a degree in accounting at SVSU [Saginaw Valley State University] and had every intention of doing that, then God called me in this direction. I took a leap of faith, and it felt right at every step.”

Father Steve provides a spiritual perspective to the East Side Soup Kitchen board, but he hasn’t lost the business sense developed in his academic experiences. He is leading development of a five-year strategic plan for the organization.

“We always want to grow, so how can we grow the soup kitchen?” he said. “Needing more space? Expanding the hours when we’ll service the people? The ideal would be that we wouldn’t be needed. But the truth is we’re always going to have hungry people.” †



**MICHELLE DIFRANCO**

*is a designer and the busy mom of three children.*



## Italian Pasta Salad (serves 8)

1 pound spaghetti (or any pasta)

1 English cucumber (diced)

1 pint grape tomatoes (halved)

1 green bell pepper (diced)

1 yellow bell pepper

(diced)

½ cup sliced black olives

½ cup grated Parmesan cheese

½ cup red onion (diced)

1 teaspoon paprika

½ teaspoon garlic powder

¼ teaspoon celery seed

3 tablespoons fresh parsley (chopped)

1 teaspoon dried oregano

1 ¼ cups Italian vinaigrette dressing (store bought or homemade)

Salt and pepper to taste

**Cook spaghetti until al dente. Rinse pasta in cold water and drain. In a large bowl, toss all ingredients to combine. Refrigerate for 1-2 hours before serving.**



# LOST AND FOUND

## Italian pasta salad compliments of St. Anthony

I learned recently that there is a formal prayer one can say to St. Anthony, calling upon his intercession to help locate a lost article. Applying to it my quest to find a missing recipe I had misplaced not long ago, it would read like this:



*St. Anthony, perfect imitator of Jesus, who received from God the special power of restoring lost things, grant that I may find (my pasta salad recipe) which has been lost. At least restore to me peace and tranquility of mind, the loss of which has afflicted me even more than my material loss. To this favor I ask another of you: that I may always remain in possession of the true good that is God. Let me rather lose all things than lose God, my supreme good. Let me never suffer the loss of my greatest treasure, eternal life with God. Amen.*

Of course, in my moments of frustration and angst when I'm trying to find something that is missing, my prayer is not typically so eloquent. I find myself using a 'truncated version,' which is more like this ...

*Where the heck is that dang thing! Come on. St. Anthony, you gotta help me out here. Amen.*

If that sounds too colloquial, it is not for lack of respect. I love St. Anthony dearly. He comes through about 90 percent of the time, and I depend on him so frequently that he and I have developed a special understanding.

I think it's safe to say that *most* Catholics have cried out to our beloved St. Anthony when losing something at one time or another, right? And I'd wager that most would agree with its efficacy. He's very good at what he does. But have you ever wondered *why* he's the patron of lost items?

This actually goes back to an incident in his own life, when Anthony noticed that his psalter (book of Psalms) was missing.

He fervently prayed to God that it would be found. As it turns out, a novice who had left the community had taken it with him. After Anthony prayed, the novice was moved to return to the community along with his psalter.

St. Anthony was born Fernando Martins de Bulhões in Lisbon, Portugal in 1195. His parents, of nobility and wealth, wanted him to be educated at the local cathedral school, but Anthony entered community life and studied theology instead. The martyrdom of five Franciscan friars, whom he'd met, inspired him to join the Franciscan order. In anticipation of his new vocation, he headed to Morocco but fell ill, so he journeyed to Italy, the epicenter of his new order.

While attending an ordination, he was unexpectedly called upon to give the homily. The sermon was so powerful, it changed the course of his ministry and even gained the attention of St. Francis (of Assisi). He went on to preach the Gospel in northern Italy while also teaching theology. He assumed more responsibilities and was appointed provincial superior, all while finding time for contemplative prayer in humble Franciscan fashion. In 1231, he became ill and died at age 36 in Padua. His feast day is June 13.

As it turns out, I didn't find my recipe in time for my gathering. Maybe I *should have* paused to employ the longer formal version of the prayer. But the replacement recipe idea that I found, along with a few additional ingredients of my own, tasted even better than the original lost recipe. It was an Italian version I had never tried before. Maybe that was how he answered my prayer after all ... by asking the Lord to find me something better than what I had actually lost! St. Anthony is a miracle worker! †

## local events

### “Road to Emmaus: God’s Presence Changes Everything” webinar

**Date:** Available any day and time

**Location:** Online

**Cost:** Free

**Presenters:** Hank Messing, director of administration and parish life at Christ the Good Shepherd and St. John Paul II Parishes; Carole Watters, Befriender Ministry coordinator, lay minister and spiritual director in Saginaw; and Lori Becker, Respect Life coordinator for the Diocese of Saginaw

**To register:** Follow the Eventbrite link online at [saginaw.org/events](http://saginaw.org/events) or [saginaw.org/news/gods-presence-changes-everything-webinar](http://saginaw.org/news/gods-presence-changes-everything-webinar)

**For more information:** Contact Lori Becker at 989.797.6652 or [lbecker@dioceseofsaginaw.org](mailto:lbecker@dioceseofsaginaw.org)

The Diocese of Saginaw Respect Life Office is offering a free webinar reflecting on the emotions and impact of COVID-19 through a scriptural lens.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our lives in so many ways. It is important to acknowledge the many emotions, feelings of grief and loss experienced during this time. By reflecting on the Gospel passage about Jesus encountering two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we will be reminded that our Lord has been with us the whole time and that there is hope. This free interactive webinar is available on demand and includes handouts, instructions and materials for viewing individually or in small group gatherings. Registration is required to receive the link to the webinar and materials.

### Relationship Inventory Seminar (Prepare-Enrich)

**Date:** Saturday, July 17

**Location:** Online

**Time:** 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

**Cost:** \$50 per couple

**To register:** Call (989) 797-6660 or register online at [saginaw.org/events](http://saginaw.org/events)

This seminar will explore relationship strength and growth areas, strengthen communication skills, identify and manage major stressors, understand and appreciate personality differences and many other topics. Each couple receives a personalized report. A trained and certified Prepare-Enrich facilitator will lead the seminar.



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### Rural Life Celebration Outdoor Mass and Luncheon

**Date:** Saturday, July 24

**Location:** Broilat Farm,  
1681 E. Atwater Rd., Ubyl

**Time:** 11 a.m.

Recognizing the uniqueness of Catholic culture in the Thumb, the Rural Life Celebration will begin with an outdoor Mass with Bishop Robert Gruss, followed by a luncheon and a presentation about Catholic Rural Life. Participants are asked to bring a lawn chair and a dish to pass. Burgers and hot dogs will be provided.

Participants will follow the latest guidelines regarding COVID-19.

### Marriage Preparation Workshop

**Date:** Saturday, July 31

**Location:** Online

**Time:** 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

**Cost:** \$50 per couple

**To register:** Call (989) 797-6660 or register online at [saginaw.org/events](http://saginaw.org/events)

The Diocesan Marriage Preparation Workshop helps engaged couples understand what it means to get married in the Catholic Church. The topics covered include marriage as a sacrament, marital intimacy, natural family planning, communication, conflict resolution and family of origin.

### New Testament Papyri: Exploring the Oldest Manuscripts Yet Discovered

**Date:** Monday, Aug. 23

**Location:** TBD depending on COVID-19

**Time:** 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

**Presenter:** Father José María Cabrera

**For more information:** Check for updates, registration and location details online at [saginaw.org/events](http://saginaw.org/events).

Join Father José María Cabrera for a fascinating glimpse into the early history of the New Testament! When a biblical discovery takes place, the world gets excited. For example, the discovery of new fragments of Dead Sea Scrolls made headlines this year. The Dead Sea scrolls, however, only give us information about the Old Testament. But how about the New Testament?

In this presentation, Father José will explore the oldest New Testament papyri fragments yet discovered. From the Gospels to the Letters of Saint Paul and even a fragment from the book of Revelation, this seminar will look into the oldest copies of these precious texts that Christians proclaim from the ambo Sunday after Sunday. As is customary for Father José, he will use many visuals and even replicas of these manuscripts from his private collection.

Father José received his licentiate in Biblical Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. He currently serves as pastor of All Saints Parish in Bay City.

### Walking with Moms in Need launches in diocese



pregnant women and young families, just by showing our compassion and love,” Lori said.

The program emphasizes a commitment to

service and for parish communities to “walk with” mothers and families. While it specifically does not intend to turn parishes into pregnancy centers, Walking with Moms in Need hopes to build relationships with assistance agencies and help refer mothers to find the help they need.

“Each parish will create a resource inventory of what is available in their community, such as pregnancy centers, food, financial assistance, low-cost or free prenatal care, housing, et cetera,” Lori said. “We will also be looking for where there may be gaps for specific needs and find ways to fill them.”

The Respect Life Office plans to schedule informational meetings, which will be posted on the diocesan website.

To learn more about Walking with Moms in Need or to view the diocesan resource inventory, please visit [saginaw.org/moms](http://saginaw.org/moms).

If a pregnant or parenting mother in need approached you, would you know what resources are available? Would you know where to refer them to find help?

Walking with Moms in Need seeks to ensure everyone in a parish community can answer yes.

An initiative from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Walking with Moms in Need provides guidelines and tools for individual parishes to develop their own unique ministry with the support of the diocesan Respect Life Office, said Lori Becker, Respect Life coordinator for the Diocese of Saginaw.

Though Walking with Moms in Need was originally planned to be a yearlong service project from March 25, 2020 to March 25, 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic required a change of plans. The Diocese of Saginaw’s program launched on Mother’s Day, May 9.

“This ministry is very exciting and has limitless possibilities of helping

### Students participate in May crowning

Just after Mother’s Day celebrated our earthly mothers, All Saints Central Elementary School students honored our spiritual mother, Mary. Teachers and children joined Father José María Cabrera for an outdoor Mass and May crowning on May 11 outside the All Saints Parish rectory in Bay City.

“Our May crowning was beautiful. Our students brought flowers to plant in the garden surrounding our Blessed Mother,” said principal Lisa Rhodus. “Our students always look forward to this celebration. It was a magnificent day.”

A May crowning is a traditional event honoring Mary, our Mother and the queen of Heaven and Earth. The month of May is particularly devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary.



All Saints Central Elementary School in Bay City participated in an outdoor Mass and May crowning on May 11.



Garrett Gregory holds flowers to be presented to Mary. Students brought flowers to be planted around a statue of our Blessed Mother.

### Clerical and parish assignments announced

**Bishop Robert Gruss announced the following clerical and parish assignments, which will take effect July 1.**

#### PASTORS

**Father Alberto Vargas**, from graduate studies in Rome to pastor of Ss. Francis and Clare, Birch Run, for six years.

**Father Michael Steltenkamp, S.J.**, from parochial administrator pro tem to pastor of St. John XXIII, Hemlock and Merrill, for six years.

*The following have been re-appointed to their current assignment for one year:*

**Father Dale Orlik**, pastor of St. Jude Thaddeus Parish, Essexville.

**Father Thomas E. Sutton**, pastor of St. Gabriel Parish, Auburn.

**Father John Cotter**, pastor of St. Michael, Maple Grove and Mary of the Immaculate Conception Parish, St. Charles.

#### PAROCHIAL VICAR

**Father Kevin Wojciechowski** to parochial vicar at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, Saginaw.

**Father Theodore Nnabugo**, from parochial administrator at Our Lady Consolata Parish, Cass City to parochial vicar.

**Father Baltha Raj Bandaru**, parochial vicar at St. John Paul II Parish and Christ the Good Shepherd Parish, Saginaw.

#### SACRAMENTAL MINISTERS

*The following senior priests will be relieved of their assignments as sacramental ministers, effective Aug. 1:*

**Father Robert Byrne**, Ss. Francis and Clare, Birch Run.

**Father Randy Kelly**, Ss. Francis and Clare, Birch Run.

#### DIRECTOR OF PARISH LIFE

**Deacon David Gillespie**, director of parish life for Our Lady Consolata Parish, Cass City

#### COMPLETION OF ASSIGNMENT

**Deacon Steven George**, director of parish life at Ss. Francis and Clare, Birch Run.

# St. Mary's in Alma blows past fundraising goal with support



Jolt Credit Union Board Chair Robert Looby, CCFMM executive director Kristin Smith, Deacon Rick Warner, St. Mary's School business manager Nancy Schultz and Jolt Credit Union VP Community Affairs Bridget Staffleno take a photo with a check showing part of the matching funds contributed to St. Mary's scholarship fund. Photo by Connor Rabine.

It is pretty evident that supporters of St. Mary's School in Alma were up for a challenge this spring.

They raised \$34,000 during their annual Mardi Gras Auction, more than doubling the \$16,000 donation that three organizations, including two funds held by the Catholic Community Foundation of Mid-Michigan, challenged them to match to fund scholarships.

"Many thanks to Jolt Credit Union Robert Adams Tuition Endowment Fund and the Warner Family Advised Endowment Fund of the Catholic Community Foundation of Mid-Michigan and Lux Funeral Home," said Nancy Schultz, school business manager at Nativity of the Lord Parish in Alma. "Because of their challenge to match their combined \$16,000 donation, St. Mary's community rallied to raise \$34,000 for an auction scholarship total of \$50,000."

Schultz said COVID restrictions forced the school to abandon their annual fundraising party and in-person auction. They replaced it with a week-long online auction April 11 to 17. She said things got interesting Saturday night when larger items were on the auction block and friends were texting each other pushing up the bids.

"Our goal was to match the \$16,000," she said. "But the audience topped the challenge for a great cause."

This cause of supporting Catholic education is one of the Catholic Community Foundation of Mid-Michigan's core goals, said Kristin Smith, executive director of the Catholic Community Foundation of Mid-Michigan.

"We are blessed to partner with donors who entrust the CCFMM with carrying out this mission. In 2020, the CCFMM's support of Catholic Education totaled over \$600,000," she said. "I would like to thank all our donors for supporting Catholic education throughout the Diocese of Saginaw. They are more than donors. They are faithful stewards of God's gifts. I consider the work of the Catholic Community Foundation of Mid-Michigan a ministry, and the

faithful stewards of God's gifts who partner with the foundation help to build a ministry of helping God's people."

Schultz said contributors believe in St. Mary's School and trust in the administrators, faculty and staff.

"They have supported all that we have done," she said, adding that contributions from members of Nativity of the Lord Parish were strong. "Parishioners know that the Catholic school is important to the future of the Church and our faith. It's where it starts."

Parents are in the process of applying for 2021-22 tuition assistance. Scholarships will be awarded according to the needs of the families. Schultz said the school expects an enrollment of 87 students from the young 5s program to sixth grade and 60 preschoolers—double the enrollment of five years ago. For the first time next fall, individual classes are expected to replace split classes in first and second grades.

Although COVID has challenged all aspects of school operations, classes have remained face to face during the entire current school year.

"COVID has actually built our program because parents trust us and know that their children are safe here," Schultz said. "They know our kids come first."

Although the new online format was successful, the business manager said she is looking forward to returning to an in-person Mardi Gras Fundraiser next year. "We all missed having a party." †

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

# Local priest honored for commitment to social justice



Coleman, pastor of New Faith Temple Church of God in Christ in Saginaw, who presented the award. “When Ezekiel Project was called, Father Ron Wagner was one of those who answered the call. We would find him leading prayers, speaking and making phone calls to make sure that our message of social justice reached out across all lines to ensure that everybody who needed help found the help they needed.”

The Ezekiel Project is an interfaith, interracial community organizing collective that works for social justice and systemic change within Saginaw and the Great Lakes Bay Region. Ezekiel Project, as part of a larger social justice movement, differs from a direct service organization by seeking to solve the underlying issues of poverty, inequity and injustice. This, Father Ron says, empowers people and honors their dignity.

“(Jesus) cared about the dignity of people... You want to treat people the right way, treat them with dignity and help them take care of their own dignity. They see they’re not worthless,” he said.

Father Ron was involved with the Ezekiel Project for about 20 years while serving as a parish priest throughout Saginaw. During that time, he prayed with people of many faiths at rallies and prayer walks, including in neighborhoods where people were being killed. He also worked on education issues such as truancy intervention and reading mentors.

A major victory for the Ezekiel Project and, by extension, Saginaw was improved public transportation. Over about six years, Father Ron and other Ezekiel Project members met with city

leaders and Saginaw Transit Authority Regional Services (STARS), learned about public transportation systems and helped rally the community to pass a millage to improve the bussing system.

“Working in that area has improved the lives of many people,” he said, pointing out people’s ability to get to jobs, doctors’ appointments and stores.

Though he is currently pastor of Resurrection of the Lord Parish in Standish, where he now lives, Father Ron is confident that the skills he has learned can be applied to his new community.

Jessica Hernandez, executive director for the Ezekiel Project, said Father Ron has taught her to be a more mindful, prayerful and intentional leader.

“He was a leader amongst leaders with us,” she said. “Father Ron is an overall beautiful soul. ... He embodies a man of God, somebody that aspires not only to change his own personal life, but those he works with.”

Jessica said his involvement included not only the executive board and faith leaders’ table, but also working directly with staff and getting the Diocese of Saginaw and area parishes connected with the Ezekiel Project. The Rev. Dr. Hurley G. Coleman Sr. Award simply affirmed what members of the Ezekiel Project already knew.

“It was a well-deserved award. He is a man of justice, a man of faith, and a man that invested in not only the leaders, but in the community,” she said.

For Father Ron, he will continue to join the fight for social justice and systemic change.

“This work for justice... is never an easy work, but it’s God’s work,” he said. “Sometimes it feels impossible to do, but I’m always reminded that nothing is impossible for God.” †

**I**nspired by the social justice work of a teacher, Sister Mary Pineau, and the civil rights movement, Father Ron Wagner has always had a heart for service.

“There’s something inside of me that just says ‘I’ve got to keep doing this,’” he said.

His decades of social justice work were recognized by the Ezekiel Project of Saginaw at their annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration on March 21, which was held virtually this year due to the pandemic. Father Ron was presented with the Rev. Dr. Hurley G. Coleman Sr. Award for Community Service.

“Over the years, Father Ron Wagner has been one of the anchors for the Ezekiel Project,” said the Rev. Dr. Charles

STORY AND  
PHOTO BY  
DANIELLE  
MCGREW  
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Banquet and silent auction tentatively\* set for  
Thursday, Sept. 16 at Saginaw Valley State University

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*\*Will be decided in advance based on COVID-19.*

