Laura Keener
Kittie

In the quiet, peaceful moments before Mass, a single candle glowed. Friday, Sept. 11, before an icon of Our Lady of Sorrows as she wrapped her mantel around the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center as smoke billowed from its top floors. The Oratory of St. Paul at the Diocese of Covington was prepared for a memorial Mass on the 19th anniversary of the worst terrorist attack on United States soil.

Instead of the green vestments for Ordinary Time, Bishop Roger Foys, celebrant, and Father Jordan Hainsey and Father Michael Norton, concelebrants, wore purple vestments — the color of penance and sacrifice. The Mass was being offered for the preservation of peace and justice for all those who died as a result of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks as well as for all those who have died from COVID-19 and for all police officers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, nurses and doctors.

“Everyone here remembers where you were on that day when the planes hit the New York towers and the Pentagon and the empty田野 in Pennsylvania,” Bishop Foys said as he began his homily.

Bishop Foys described the days following the terrorist attack as days of “renewed enthusiasm and patriotism” with churches filled “that the enthusiasm and patriotism and the coming together of our nation as one, our churches filled with prayers to the Almighty have passed,” he said.

The terrorist attack on our nation was and is, Bishop Foys said, “horrible and there can never be any justification for it. It was criminal, it was sinful.”

But he said, the terrorist attack, like the current COVID-19 pandemic, is an opportunity that calls for an examination of conscience “as a nation and as individuals.”

“What is it in our nation, in our life, in our lifestyle that would cause someone to do something so horrific?” he asked.

Reflecting on the day’s Gospel reading, Bishop Foys said, “Jesus, in the Gospel message, said, why remove the splinter from your brother’s eye when you have a beam in your own? Remove the beam first from your own eye.”

“When we point out someone else’s fault we don’t have to do any thing, we don’t have to change. But when we look into our own consciences and our own hearts for our own faults … it’s more difficult because we may have to change,” he said.

In the early days of the pandemic, Bishop Foys recalled Pope Francis addressing the people of the world from the balcony in St. Peter's Square before an empty piazza, trying to make sense of the pandemic. He said, “This pandemic is not a punishment from God but, perhaps, it’s a call for us to live differently.” Of all the words he has ever written and said, those are some of the most important, Bishop Foys said.

“God doesn’t exact punishments like this, but he does call us to live a different way,” he said. “During this pandemic, in our country and our own diocese, we hear from people how they have the right not to wear a mask or follow other restrictions. ‘I don’t care about your rights. I don’t care about your well being. I have the right to do what I want,’ he said.

“Nineteen years, what have we learned? Where are the flags? Where is the patriotism? Where are the churches filled with people begging God to lift this scourge from us — begging God to make us one nation under God?” he said.

Bishop Foys ended his homily imploring for God’s mercy.

“We offer this Mass for all those who have died in Nine-eleven, for all those who were injured, for all those who have died of the coronavirus and for all the police, firefighters, EMTs, doctors and nurses. We pray also for all those who are hard of heart and do not accept this pandemic for what it is, who will not take the precautions we are called to make — if not for our own sake but for the sake and safety of others,” Bishop Foys said.

“Nineteen was a dark day in the history of our nation. Unfortunately we have made it darker by our behavior since then. God have mercy on us.”

Sacrifices of 9/11 and pandemic are a call to examine conscience, live differently

Laura Keener

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Missed an edition? Current and back issues of the Messenger are available online at covdio.org/messenger.
My dear Friends,

In the reopening plan for Catholic schools, I announced that, during the week after Labor Day, the four Kentucky bishops would evaluate the experiences of our schools as they welcomed students back to classrooms for in-person instruction. I met with the three Kentucky bishops virtually on Friday, 11 September, 2020.

Every day during those first four weeks of school, Kendra McGuire, associate superintendent of Schools and Laura Keener, COVID coordinator, have kept me informed of every contact, close contact and positive case of COVID-19 that has been reported from our schools. On Thursday, 10 September, 2020, I met with the principals of all of our elementary and high schools to learn from them how their school communities — students, teachers, staff and parents — were holding up under the COVID-19 protocols. I cannot minimize the amount of work and the sacrifices our school communities are undertaking, and I commend them for their perseverance. Despite the trials and tribulations it was their unanimous opinion to continue with in-person instruction.

Likewise, the other three bishops are affirming our plan to cautiously move forward in offering in-person instruction at Catholic schools in Kentucky’s four dioceses.

Each of our Catholic schools is unique. So, while following the general guidance offered by each diocese — which is based upon the school protocols from the Centers for Disease Control, the Kentucky Department of Public Health and the local health departments — school re-entry plans employ a variety of models, schedules, use of facilities, and so on. We support our principals in their efforts to create sustainable models and recognize that principals will need to make adjustments to protect the safety and health of their school community. These adjustments include changes to instructional models and schedules, including periods of non-traditional instruction as conditions change and when students or teachers need to enter quarantine.

In our Diocese of Covington, Mrs. McGuire and Mrs. Keener work closely with the Northern Kentucky Health Department and the public health departments in other counties to help streamline the process of reporting and contact tracing in an effort to mitigate the spread of the virus in our schools. Our Return to School Requirements document continues to be updated based upon feedback from our public health partners. We greatly appreciate their partnership and counsel.

In closing, I would like to extend my profound thanks to our principals, staff, teachers and parents, as well as the staff of our Department of Catholic Schools and the members of the Diocesan COVID-19 Task Force. I know that everyone is working double time on all kinds of extra tasks to keep everyone safe.

As always, I thank you for your commitment to Catholic Schools and for cooperating with your principal and school staff during this health care crisis. Know that I pray for you each day. Please pray for me.

Yours devotedly in the Lord,

Most Rev. Roger J. Foys, D.D.
Bishop of Covington

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Coronavirus Report
(As of Monday, Sept. 14)

Positive Cases
Active positive cases: 4
Recovered positive cases: 12
Total ever positive cases: 16

Self-quarantined
Symptomatic/pending testing: 2
Contacts: 22
Close Contacts: 91

Returned to class after quarantine/self-quarantine:
From Sept. 9– Sept. 14: 64 students
(including 25 from St. Henry District High School and 23 from St. Paul School)
Total ever: 215 students

Schools reporting: (25 of 39 schools)
Bishop Brossart High School
Blessed Sacrament
Covington Catholic High School
Holy Cross
Holy Cross District High School
Holy Family
Newport Central Catholic High School
Notre Dame Academy
St. Henry District High School
St. Agnes
St. Augustine, Covington
St. Cecilia
St. Edward
St. Henry
St. Joseph, Cold Spring
St. Joseph, Crescent Springs
St. Mary
St. Patrick
St. Paul
St. Pius
St. Therese
St. Thomas
St. Timothy
Sts. Peter and Paul
Villa Madonna Academy

(above left) In preparation for his Sept. 11 virtual meeting with Kentucky’s bishops, Bishop Roger Foys gathered principals, Sept. 10, from all high school and elementary schools to learn how the school communities were holding up under the COVID-19 protocols. (above center) Kendra McGuire, associate superintendent of Catholic Schools, clarifies elements included in the Diocesan Return to School Requirements. (above, right) Matt Grosser, principal, St. Mary School, Alexandria, was one of several principals that asked questions, raised concerns and shared what has gone well so far this year with the COVID-19 protocols in place.
Anniversary couples honored with certificates

Messenger staff report

“The annual Anniversary Vespers, normally held in late September, has been cancelled due to COVID-19. Bishop Roger Foy’s said it is one of the most well-attended services of the year, but it simply wasn’t safe to invite that many people to come together this year.

“I miss that gathering,” said Bishop Foy’s, “because it speaks to the whole idea of the sacredness of marriage and the fact that these couples have taken their vows really seriously and have loved all these years together. I can look at these couples who have given themselves to each other all these years … and it gives me a chance to thank them for their example and for the depth of their faith, and their faiths in each other.”

Three or four years ago, Bishop Foy started inviting couples married one year to the celebration along with those celebrating milestone anniversaries. He said it gives the newlyweds the chance to observe couples who have faithfully lived their marriage vows and be inspired by their commitment.

Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington
Oakley and Eva Farris, 70
George and Mary Donovan, 60
Albert C. and Mary E. Czarnecki, 25
Kathleen and James Collins, 25
Ronald and Aynn Hohen, 1
All Saints Parish, Walton
Joseph and Cathy Schreiber, 50
Richard and Mary Lou Schihl, 50
James and Anita Ward, 60
H. Walter and Jinny Steigerwald, 60
Mary, Queen of Heaven Parish, Ft. Mitchell
John and Virginia Neal, 72
Tony and Nancy Gallo, 60
Gary and Patricia Eglian, 60
Greg and Susan Turner, 1
Rick and Peggy Hampton, 50
Gary and Kathy Menne, 50
Harvey and Charlotte Rahmiles, 50
Charles and Joyce Tappan, 50
Joseph and Virginia Watkins, 50
Mike and Mary Jo Wheelan, 50
Gregory and Jackie Durrett, 25
John and Maria Martin, 25
Robert and Kathryn Steck, 25
Frank and Pamela Sutthoff, 25
Jay and Cheryl Davis, 1
Andrzej and Catherine Focht, 1
Patsy and Cyndy Proctor, 1
Joyce and John Hahn, 50
Mary Lou Smith, 50
Don and Mary Lou Schuh, 50
Joseph and Cathy Schreiber, 50
Tom and Jackie Weber, 50
Joseph and Eva Lukens, 50
Richard and Mary Lou Schuh, 50
Joseph and Cathy Schreiber, 50
Tom and Jackie Weber, 50
J. Gregory and Diane Wehrman, 25
Thomas and Elizabeth Alcim, 25
Dan and Julie Botsch, 25
Rodney and Susan Black, 25
Eric and Sharon Black, 25
Thomas and Stephanie Breining, 25
Brady and Cindy Burns, 25
Joe and Tamara Cahlil, 25
Kevin and Angela Piegaus, 25
David and Linda Hohn, 25
Michael and Cynthia Cahill, 25
Robert and Kristin Holt, 25
Oscar and Melisse Hur, 25
Jeff and Stephanie Jobini, 25
Robert and Holy Klosterman, 25
Steven and Deborah Langseth, 25
Robert and Heather Lucas, 25
Ray and Anita Menon, 25
Jeff and Stu Meyer, 25
Robert and Kelly Newman, 25
David and Christina Nol, 25
Douglas and Cheryl Ralph, 25
Eric and Katie Schlegel, 25
Dan and Karen Shipherd, 25
Timothy B. and Mary Seaman, 25
Kevin and Christina Spritcher, 25
Gary and Tray Stegman, 25
Matthew and Angela Stegman, 25
Kurt and Jennifer Summe, 25
Peter and Mario Thein, 25
Kevan and Jennifer Triesch, 25
Gregg and Wendy Vonderhaar, 25
Chris and Amy Wagner, 25
Neil and Susan Winter, 25
Timothy and Kelsey Chandler, 1
Scott and Megan Martin, 1
Frank and Linda Polemger, 1
Brian and Samantha Toppan, 1
Divine Mercy Parish, Bellevue
Apollos and Kathryn Garbutt, 50
Edward and Janet Usos, 50
Chris and Jaimes Burkat, 25
Timothy and Heather Hopper, 25
Luke and Bridget Dishar, 25
Paul and Courtney Klister, 25
Bradley and Anna Trelfa, 25
Kirby and Charlotte Wood, 1
Holy Cross Parish, Covington
Ard and Shin Yon, 72
Frank and Suzanne Gronowski, 60
Donald and Joyce West, 60
William and Anna Wamack, 50
Jeff and Melissa Gudzick, 25
John and Mary Hackett, 25
Charles and Michele Schuler, 25
Patrick and Vickie Thomas, 25
Joy and Cheryl Davis, 1
Briant and Jennifer Hauenstein, 1
Adam and Morgan Hicks, 1
Pry and Erin Tarpey, 1
Holy Spirit Parish, Newport
Timothy and Betty Deaton, 50
Charlie and Barbara Feldman, 50
Lou and Kathleen Lucia, 50
J. Joseph and Charlene Mason, 50
Stephen and Barbara Sauer, 50
Christopher and Karol Tuka, 25
Erich and Megan Black, 1
Kristofor and Alisa Meel, 1
Zach and Keilah Washburn, 1
Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Burlington
John and Virginia Neal, 72
Gay and Patricia Eglian, 60
Dave and Deborah Girdens, 50
Dale and Linda Holocher, 50
Kenneth and Rita Kopp, 50
William and Lynn Lockhead, 50
Dan and Joan White, 50
Richard and Lori Vallenlandong, 50
Derek and Michelle Bernard, 25
Greg and Lori Fahey, 25
Michael and Jennifer Wood, 25
James and Mary Ehrenfels, 71
Quintin and Emily Hauser, 1
Gay and Susan Turner, 1
Mother of God Parish, Covington
Paul and Margie Klee, 71
Jerome and Susan Beling, 60
John and Elizabeth Henderson, 60
Gregory and Suzanne Benziger, 50
Ronald and Carol Collins, 80
David and Joan Cotty, 50
Sept. 18
Individual meeting, 9:30 a.m.
Sept. 19
Maas, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, St. Augustine Parish, Covington, 10 a.m.
Installation of pastor, Father Eric Boelscher, St. Joseph Parish, Crescent Springs, 5 p.m.
Sept. 20
Maas, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 10 a.m.
Sept. 21
COVID-19 briefing, 9:30 a.m.
Sept. 22
COVID-19 briefing, 9:30 a.m.
Episcopal Council meeting, 11 a.m.

Prayer of a Couple on the Anniversary of Marriage

We praise you, O God, we bless you, Creator of all things, who in the beginning made man and woman that they might form a communion of life and love.

We also give you thanks for graciously blessing our family life so that it might present an image of Christ’s union with the Church. Therefore look with kindness upon us today and as you have sustained our communion amid joys and struggles, renew our Marriage covenant each day, increase our charity, and strengthen us in the bond of peace, so that we may forever enjoy your blessing. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

The annual Cemetery Visitations, which normally take place during the month of September, have been restructured due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

Instead of public prayer services, Bishop Roger Foy will hold private ceremonies at each cemetery to honor the dead in November.

In the publication before the Feast of All Souls, the Messenger will publish a list of names of the dearly departed from the last year.

“For resources on Marriage and family life please visit https://coco.org/catechists-and-evangelization/

[Image 223x742 to 555x965]

[Image 286x299 to 555x994]
Mystical experience and everyday people

There was an old saying among computer program-
ners years ago that said “garbage in, garbage out.” That
means that if you put bad data into a computer, the result
would be bad. The same thing can apply to us as well.
We can be influenced by what we watch on tele-
vision, the things we read in books, magazines or on
the internet, what we listen to on the radio can
have a profound influence on our thoughts. Our
doctrine and the words we use when we com-
municating with others and even our own self. The
thoughts we have and the words we use then
influence our actions, how we treat others and again
our own self. All of this —
thoughts, words and
actions — then make up the character of who we are as
humans.

Character is most accurately determined in times of
crisis. Like many, I’ve had an opportunity to reassess what’s
important in my life. The pandemic has given me time to
step back and see how God has been working in my life.
It’s given me the chance to appreciate more the conven-
cience that life has given to me, yet at the same time, has
allowed me to see how insignificant some of that conven-
cience can be. It’s allowed me the opportunity to place
things like sports in proper perspective. Professional
games don’t seem so important to me now. I really don’t
think about that for a moment. He doesn’t say All
things are unimportant in my life. The pandemic has given me time to
step back and see how God has been working in my life.

This time has also allowed me and my staff the oppor-
tunity to redo some things at St. Anne Retreat Center. The
2020-2021 schedule for retreats was going to be the busiest
since I came here four years ago. Retreats were soaked
from August until April. Of course, that was greatly
impacted by COVID-19. Instead of fretting about it, we
decided to make the Retreat Center even more beautiful.
We’ve undertaken a number of projects to give the
Retreat Center a make-over of sorts.

The outside gathering areas have been reconfigured to
allow more space. We’ve moved benches, cleaned up the
landscaping and added more flowers and plants. We’ve
moved the offices to the first floor to be closer to the
retreats once they resume and have created new gather-
ing spaces for people while they’re on retreat. We’re
painting, adding signage and making sure we’re ready to
go when we resume. We miss the people who come here on retreat —
the high schoolers and adults that make this place special.
But we’ve decided that our character demands that we
use this time to reenergize our commitment to making St.
Anne Retreat Center the best facility it can be. We contin-
ue to ask for prayers that we can accomplish what we
hope to get done.

Deacon David Profitt is director of the St. Anne Retreat
Center.
The readings for the twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle A are: Isaiah 55:6-9; Philippians 1:20-21, 27A; and Matthew 20:1-16A.

Most of the preaching I have heard on the Gospel passage for this Sunday has focused on the last part of the story, the significance of this part of the story, let us recall how the Jews reckoned their day. The twenty-four hours of the day were divided into eight periods of three hours each, called “watch.” There were four daylight watches and four night watches. The first daylight watch began, not strictly at six a.m., but at sunrise, and ended at nine a.m., when the second watch began. The second watch ended noon, the third at 3 p.m., the last watch ended, again not strictly at six p.m., but at sunset, when the weekday ended and the night watches began.

It makes sense that the landowner goes out at dawn, the beginning of the day to work for workers for his vineyard. It is even understandable that he goes out in the middle of the morning, but one might think, in the 21st century, three in the afternoon? And still again as the workday was drawing to a close? Was his vineyard that large? Was there that much work?

The vineyard, in the Old Testament, was sometimes used as an analogy for Israel. It would be logical for the vineyard of the Lord of hosts to be the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting. (Is 5:7) But we know that God’s plan was not limited to Israel, Jesus commands his apostles, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.” (Mk 16:15) If the whole world is God’s vineyard, then, yes, there is that much work. Jesus needs a lot of workers for his vineyard.

Are you at work in the Lord’s vineyard? What are you doing to care for and/or extend it? Have you been standing all day, waiting for someone to have you? Jesus wants and needs you to get to work. His vineyard needs to be extended. Jesus wants His Gospel to be heard (and seen) by everyone.

Is there another reason the owner of the vineyard went out after time working, seeking workers? I am leaving the singularity of the story, here, but perhaps the “owner of the vineyard” needs to be extended. Jesus needs workers, workers who are willing to work in the vineyard, in the world, in the world’s vineyards, hearing the Gospel and working in the vineyard.

Perhaps you think it is too late for you? It is never too late to start working. The translation we have the vineyard owner going out about five o’clock; literally, he went out “at the eleventh hour,” a phrase with which we are familiar. No matter how late it is, there is time for your contribution.

I have referenced one American literary classic (did you know it?), let me reference another. Let us not be like the cat, the goose and the rat, refusing to help grind the wheat and make the flour; and so not allowing to be eaten the bread the goose and the rat, refusing to help grind the wheat and so not being allowed to eat the bread the goose and the rat, refusing to help grind the wheat and make the flour, and so not being allowed to eat the bread that too was a time when the world was convulsed in anger and hatred. That too was a time when the challenges we faced were monumental. But how did our grandmothers and great-grandfathers respond?

Millions put their lives on the line to preserve freedom and more than 400,000 Americans died doing so. Our soldiers, sailors and Marines, our WAVES and WACS, preserved our freedom and the emotional toll of war to fulfill our common national purpose: to help save the world.

And their families and friends back at home did their part too, even as they anxiously waited a letter from a remote island in the Pacific or some small village in Italy or France that would let them know their loved one was still alive and whole. Without complaint, they accepted the rationing of meat and sugar, tires and gasoline, coal and firewood, nylon and silk, diary and coffee, jams and jellies and a host of other items. They accepted all this because these were the ways they could support the war effort, these were the ways they could help the nation achieve its common goal, these were the ways they could help save the country and their countries.

They had learned to do without during the Great Depression and when the war came, they shouldered that burden as well. Contrast that with today, when people have marched on state capitols carrying assault rifles because they have been told to wear a mask that will protect them and everyone they come into contact with from a deadly virus; when people have used peaceful protests against racism as permission to burn and loot. Where is that spirit of self-sacrifice that sustained our nation during the most critical years of the war? Is there another reason the owner of the vineyard went out after time working, seeking workers? I am leaving the singularity of the story, here, but perhaps the “owner of the vineyard” needs to be extended. Jesus wants His Gospel to be heard (and seen) by everyone.

As a nation, we have it within us to sacrifice our personal desires in favor of the common good, to be united in pursuit of a common goal. Our nation has done it before. We need only look to the example set by the Americans young and old, rich and poor, our grandmothers and our great-grandfathers, who won World War II. The character and heroism of our World War II generation is defined in the Tennessee Register, the newspaper of the Diocese of Nashville, Tenn., and has been presented by Catholic News Service. The views or positions presented in this or any guest editorial are those of the individual publication and do not necessarily represent the views of Catholic News Service or of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Life has gone to the dogs

August 26 was National Dog Day. It sounds like another made-up celebration to me, but that’s ok. I don’t mind. We need things to celebrate these days. And I sure didn’t mind celebrating National Dog Day.

If a person meets me for the first time, chances are I will tell you about my little dogs, Murphy and Trudy. While not with me now at the monastery, the two of them have been my faithful friends for fifteen and ten years, respectively. I took care of them and they took care of me. They helped take care of me after a series of injuries refusing to leave my side. They instinctively knew I needed attention when I was sad, were always willing to enjoy a walk, and traveled to the University of Notre Dame several times to visit a friend (of course, Murphy is an Irish fan!). We were a pack. And they get super excited for me doing something more than showing up.

Benedictine Sister Eileen O'Connell is a professed member of the Benedictine Sisters of St. Walburg Monastery, Villa Hills, Ky. Her reflection is available on the community’s blog “Reflections from the School for the Lord’s Servant,” online at stwalburg.blogspot.com.

1938-1945, Japan’s leaders, on the dock of the battleship USS Missouri, signed official surrender papers.

Emperor Hirohito’s announcement nearly three weeks before that Japan would accept the conditions of surrender had touched off celebrations of exuberant joy and heartfelt relief in every city, town and hamlet in this country. Our national sacrifice of blood and treasure, the loss of so many lives and human potential, had finally been rewarded with victory over our enemies’ despotism and totalitarianism, over their unimaginable cruelty.

Today we look back across the decades and can only marvel at the nation’s endurance, and the nation that America of the story, though, is also interesting. It’s never too late to have the chance to share in God’s blessings and to have the chance to work for the coming of your Kingdom, make the flour, and so not being allowed to eat the bread.

As we look back on the lives of those who endured and persevered through hardship and pain and fear and the emotions that brought us victory in World War II? Like today, that too was a time when the world was convulsed in anger and hatred.

Today we look back across the decades and can only marvel at the nation’s endurance, and the nation that America of the story, though, is also interesting. It’s never too late to have the chance to share in God’s blessings and to have the chance to work for the coming of your Kingdom, make the flour, and so not being allowed to eat the bread.
Among the many blessings that God has showered upon us in Christ is the blessing of marriage, a gift bestowed by the Creator from the creation of the human race..." — USC01, "Marriage Love and Life in the Divine Plan" (2008)
Scratching the surface of an ‘inexhaustible mystery’

Under the direction of Bishop Roger Foys, the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization has teamed up with the Messenger to produce this and four subsequent special sections on the Eucharist. Long-term readers of the Messenger will recognize these articles since they were published previously. However, they have been re-structured by themes and re-designed as “pull-outs” in the hope that you will consider collecting them and keeping them for future reference. This series on the Eucharist covers a variety topics, but, of course, with limited space and the fact that this is an exploration at the very center of theology, we are only scratching the surface here. I hope that reading these short articles inspires you to explore more and to take every opportunity you are given to meet our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

Our faith is born from and expressed in theology (speech about God). Theology, in turn, remains, as St. Anselm once defined it, a matter of “faith seeking understanding.” What we believe, we try to understand further; when we understand further, we believe more deeply. To grow in faith means to engage in this cyclical process of seeking God. The reason we want to grow in faith is so that we can love God all the more.

Not long ago a Pew Research study reported that “Just one-third of U.S. Catholics agree with their Church that the Eucharist is the body, blood of Christ.”

This particular study noted that “… nearly seven-in-ten Catholics (89 percent) say they personally believe that during Catholic Mass, the bread and wine used in Communion ‘are symbols of the body and blood of Jesus Christ.’ Just one-third of U.S. Catholics (31 percent) say they believe that ‘during Catholic Mass, the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Jesus.’

This, understandably, caused shock waves to resound throughout the Church for anyone who was paying attention. However, there is reason to believe that we shouldn’t panic — yet. In this case, hopefully at least, things don’t seem to be as bad as they first appear. One factor to consider is sample size. The Disciple Maker Index, administered by the Catholic Leadership Institute, has currently surveyed 131,845 Catholics around the country about multiple themes connected with parish life. (By contrast, the Pew survey was based on 1,835 Catholics in a total sample population of 10,971.)

When asked about doctrines of the faith, 72 percent of the DMI respondents strongly agreed with the statement “I personally believe the Eucharist is the body and blood of Jesus Christ.” Another 19 percent agreed with that statement. That’s almost 120,000 Catholics claiming they do agree with what the Church teaches, compared to the 569 respondents highlighted in the PESV results.

Also, when considering the Pew study, it has been pointed out that phraseology may have been an issue. The word “actually,” used in the Pew study, may have been interpreted as referring to a physical change, which would explain why few Catholics chose that response. If so, they were correct, in that the Church does not teach that there is a physical change in appearance.

Long before the word “coronavirus” was part of our daily speech, our Catholic churches weren’t exactly over flowing with people on a weekly basis. With the exception of Christmas and, maybe, Easter, most people weren’t worried about arriving early to Mass so that they could find a seat. There are many factors and explanations for this that could be explored. But I think it’s fair to say that the general long-term trend in the Eastern and Northern parts of our country has been a steady decline in numbers.

Now, in the post-pandemic-2020 world, there is, understandably anxiety among those who care for souls what Mass attendance numbers will look like when all of this is over, and what the long-term effects will be on the sacramental life of the Church. Being forced away from the sacraments, even if it was only for a short time, could easily cause confusion for the faithful, or even, God forbid, a notion that the sacraments are not needed for salvation. For believers, the Catechesis of the Catholic Church does not mince words about this and affirms that “the sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for salvation.” (n. 1129)

There’s a story about an evangelical Protestant preacher who once said, “If I truly believed what you Catholic say you believe, you would have to pull me away from the tabernacle. If I believed that my Lord was physically present in the church building I would never leave.” Now, of course, we can’t just stay in front of the tabernacle any more than Peter, James and John could stay up on the mountain with Jesus after he was transfigured (Mt. 17:1-10), but the message remains the same and the point is well taken. For us believers there is kind of a paradox: People don’t go to Mass because they don’t believe in the Real Presence, and they don’t believe in the Real Presence because if it were true, then wouldn’t the churches be full?

Like everything else in our lives, “it’s complicated.” But, here is one thing we can be sure of: Catholic theologians and teachers, as well as parents and Godparents, will always have work to do in communicating belief in the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, since the notion and reality of transubstantiation remains “an inexhaustible mystery.” You have to start somewhere and these editions of the Messenger are the perfect place.

— David Cooley, Co-director and Office Manager, Office of Catechesis and Evangelization
Real Presence in the Eucharist

Father Jeffrey VonLehmen

In the Gospels Jesus says, “This is my body” and “This is my blood.” What does that mean to each of us?

How is Jesus present in the Eucharist?

Most of us, at one time or another, find ourselves either asking that question or trying to explain the mystery for someone else. Catholics believe that the Body and Blood of Jesus are present in consecrated bread and wine. We do not say the Eucharist is like the Body and Blood of Jesus, but that it is the Body and Blood of Jesus.

In the Gospels, Jesus says, “This is my body” and “This is my blood.” That is strong language. It is language Christians have sought to understand for many centuries.

In the Eucharist, we proclaim the mystery of faith. And it is a mystery! But the mystery of the kingdom of God and the Eucharist is meant to be obvious although it cannot be reduced to human logic. Sometimes, what is most obvious is most overlooked.

I invite you to look at the obvious — our ordinary human experiences — to help make sense of the Eucharist and Real Presence. Why does it make sense for Catholics to believe in what traditionally has been called transubstantiation (the changing of the whole substance of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ)? Why is it important to say that the Eucharist is a concrete encounter of the community with Jesus and not just a spiritual thing between an individual and God? In our own human experience, we can discover why real presence and the body-and-blood presence of Christ are important to us and to the Church.

Flesh and Blood Relationships

We often think of spiritual as invisible. But who wants an invisible relationship with a loved one?

Consider this example. A father leaves work early on a weekday, drives five hours to another city to be present at his son’s college basketball game, and then drives home the same night. The father arrives home about 3 a.m., catches an hour of sleep, and then goes to work.

He does this often. Perhaps it would be enough to tell his son over the phone that he is thinking about him and his son’s college basketball game, and then drives home.

So we say "blood," we probably think of something terrible, of violence or loss of life. When we hear about body and blood as sacrifice, as in the sacrifice of the Mass, we think someone or something has been killed. But in the ancient Hebrew mentality, if an animal was sacrificed to God, the people did not think the animal was killed to appease an angry God. Instead, they thought of blood as the presence of life. Sacrifice was not so much giving up their best lamb or the first and best part of their crop. Sacrifice meant communion of life.

This brings to mind the wonderful image of an infant in the mother’s womb. The infant is being nourished through the umbilical cord by the body and blood of the mother. The baby is receiving life! The mother’s body is making all kinds of changes and sacrifices for the infant in her womb, and the mother is very conscious of the communion she has with her infant. The bond between mother and baby is truly a body-and-blood relationship.

The bond between our loving parent, and us is just as strong and concrete. God wants a body-and-blood relationship with us, and this concrete relationship is made possible in Christ. God so loved the world that he sent his only Son. Christ’s sacrifice in becoming one like us in the Incarnation and in his passion on the Cross establishes a communion of life, a real presence in which we are assured that God desires us as much as we desire him.

The bread and wine are not simply like the body and blood of Christ they are the body-and-blood presence of Christ. This is because our relationship is that concrete, that real, that wonderful. Jesus is God revealing God’s self to us. Neither God nor we want an invisible relationship — we want the real thing!

We can increase our understanding of God’s presence during the Eucharistic prayer and Communion by thinking about being in the womb of God where we are fed concretely through the umbilical cord of the Holy Spirit. Demonstrating the importance of this sacrament, a Catholic visionary once said, “If I had a choice between a vision and the Eucharist, I would choose the Eucharist.”

Truly the Eucharist is a real, interpersonal encounter between God and the worshipping community precisely because Christ is body-and-blood present. Our human experiences of love and relationships tell us that any lover seeks concrete union with the beloved.

The love expressed in the Eucharist is as old as Christmas. It is like the love between a mother and her infant in the womb. It is the love of God as Christ for his people not yet fully born into the reign of God — the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.” (John 6:51-56)

The Different Modes of Christ’s Presence

In order that they should achieve a deeper understanding of the mystery of the Eucharist, the faithful should be instructed in the principal ways in which the Lord is present to his Church in liturgical celebration.

He is always present in a body of the faithfully gathered in his name (see Matt 18:20). He is present, too, in his Word, for it is he who speaks when the Scriptures are read at Church.

In the sacrifice of the Eucharist he is present both in the person of the minister, “the same now offering through the ministry of the priest who formerly offered himself on the cross,” and above all under the species of the Eucharist. For in this sacrament Christ is present in a unique way whole and entire, and God and man, substantially and permanently. The Sacred Congregation of Rites, instruction on the Worship of Eucharistic Ministry states that this presence of Christ under the species “is called ‘real’ not in an exclusive sense, as if the other kinds of presence were not real, but par excellence.” (Sacred Congregation of Rites, instruction on the Worship of Eucharistic Ministry no.9)

The Body of Christ

There is no doubt that a body-and-blood relationship exists between a mother and her child. But they don’t think of each other as body and blood. They think about the human relationship between them, whether or not it is a mutually loving relationship. It’s the same way in the Eucharistic celebration. We have a body-and-blood relationship with God in Christ. In this encounter, we no longer get stuck on the elements of bread and wine. Body and Blood. This is because we experience persons instead of things, relationships instead of magic. Real reverence has to be for the person of Christ and for all persons for whom he died — the two are inseparable. That is why people are called the body of Christ. We cannot have reverence for the Body and Blood of Christ — the person of Christ — if we knock down those for whom he died out of love. For this reason, people are the body of Christ. Scripture always says it so well. “Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.” (Matt 25:45) "If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ but hates his brother, he is a liar.” (1 John 4:20) In speaking of the condemnation of the unjust steward, Matthew’s Gospel says, “So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart.” (Matt 18:35)

It is simple: we must have reverence for one another. We cannot help but want a community of compassion, mercy, peace and justice. We recognize that we all come form the same womb of God, the love of God poured out into our hearts through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit signed and sealed in the bond of a blood relationship we have in Christ.

Father Jeffrey VonLehmen is pastor at St. Patrick Parish, Taylor Mill.
The Eucharist prefigured in the Old Testament

In the Beginning... The Eucharist prefigured in the Old Testament

Dr. Alma Burnette

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth. — Genesis 1:1

In the center of this verse, in Hebrew, is an untranslatable word, which is two Hebrew letters—the “aleph” and the “tau”—the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet. In Greek the letters are the Alpha and the Omega. It serves the grammatical purpose of being the direct object pointer. These two let-
ters form a concept rather than an actual word. They represent all the words of God by which all things were spoken into existence, including the Eucharist. These two letters appear peppered throughout the Old Testament, ses-
sioning its meaning. The rabbis teach:

When the Messiah comes he will explain the meaning of this aleph and the tau. And he did so in Revelation: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev 22:13). The same concept is in John 1:1.

When God made man, he made him out of the earth's pre-created dust and breathed life into the lifeless form, bringing man into being by his previously spoken words, “Let us make man in our image.”

In Genesis 2 God causes a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and from his side comes forth Eve. Adam explains, “This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” God allowed Christ to die, a deep sleep for his body and his side, too, was opened (parceled) for the Church to come forth. St. Paul writes, “Because out of one man's flesh came the body of sin; and out of one man's spirit, the spirit of life: for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”

In Genesis 3 we are told that in the sweat of one's face shall the earth bring forth bread; and our bread is the familiar name for a large white loaf. The manna is related to the “unleavened bread” (Exodus 12:3). Unleavened bread was eaten at Passover, the yearly commemoration of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. Unleavened manna and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil together foreshadow the Eucharist. It was a rabbi who once explained it to me. The Levitical men, while serving as priests, though non-priests are permitted to share in its sacrificial meal. The Todah offering was listed in the passage about the Seventy days the priests were consecrated. It was a small lamb with the blood of the sacrifice. Todah would cease. They were correct! Today, at the end of the year, after the official Passover, we do not offer the Todah. We do, however, offer the Mass. In the eucharistic prayer we ask the Lord to do this work in us so that we might become the bread of life. This prayer is the climax of the Mass.

The word “fruit” means more than apples, oranges or bananas. The word “product” of “fruit of the womb” means that which is “produced” by the law. It is the same as the Old Testament word “product” of “fruit of the womb.” Adam and Eve never prepared food before disobeying God. Evidence of this is found in Genesis 3:19: “In the sweat of one's face shall the earth bring forth bread; and our bread is the familiar name for a large white loaf. The manna is related to the “unleavened bread” (Exodus 12:3). Unleavened manna and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil together foreshadow the Eucharist. It was a rabbi who once explained it to me. When the Messiah comes he will explain the meaning of this aleph and the tau. And he did so in Revelation: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev 22:13). The same concept is in John 1:1.

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The Truth is ‘Out There’

Deacon Timothy Britt

There is a show on TV called “The X Files.” It’s about two F.B.I. agents who investigate strange and unexplained events, like ghosts and UFO’s. The show’s tagline is “the truth is out there.” I always thought of that tagline as saying that there was a rational explanation for all the mysteries that the agents were investigating. The answers the agents were searching for, basically the truth, would eventually be found because it was “out there” — somewhere.

Of course, there is another way of looking at that expression “out there.” It’s something that people say sometimes, when they’re talking about something or someone who is unconventional, unorthodox or eccentric. It’s what people mean when they say that the truth is stranger than fiction or when they ask, “is this guy for real?”

As Catholics we cannot deny that the truth that we present to the world is “out there.” Jesus himself did not deny it, or at least he expected that some people would find the truth itself stands before us.

“Of course, there is another way of looking at that expression “out there.” It’s something that people say sometimes, when they’re talking about something or someone who is unconventional, unorthodox or eccentric. It’s what people mean when they say that the truth is stranger than fiction or when they ask, “is this guy for real?”

As Catholics we cannot deny that the truth that we present to the world is “out there.” Jesus himself did not deny it, or at least he expected that some people would find the truth too hard to accept. Following what we call “the bread of life discourse” in John’s Gospel, many of his disciples said, “This saying is hard;” (aka, This teaching is out there”). Who can accept it?” and many of them returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.

Even today, many find our teaching on the Eucharist too out there. It is a stumbling block too confusing to get around or over. Two people can look at the same thing and see two entirely different things. Like an optical illusion, some of us might squint and strain and still not see what is said to be right before our eyes. The plate of what used to be bread and the cup of what used to be wine for some continue to appear to be nothing more than bread and wine. Like Puntius Pilate, we ask, “What is truth?” while truth himself stands before us.

Following Jesus’ introduction of himself as bread for the life of the world, he walked so many followers walk away. Jesus asked the Twelve, “Do you want to leave too?” To which Simon Peter replied, “Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the holy one of God.” It wasn’t that what he was telling them was any easier.

In the Beginning

(Continued from page 9)

First, let’s consider the two great harvests of Israel — the spring harvest of grain and the fall harvest of mostly grapes and olives — bread, wine and oil. In Leviticus 23:11-13 God unites bread and wine, priests who anoint with oil, grapes and olives — bread, wine and oil. In Leviticus 23:12-13 God unites bread and wine, priests who anoint with oil, grapes and olives.

Next, David is a type of Jesus starting with his birth in Bethlehem (House of Bread), and his being chosen by God for the dual role of king and priest — a priestly-king in the House of Bread, and his being chosen by God for the dual role of king and priest — a priestly-king in the House of Bread, and his being chosen by God for the dual role of king and priest. As Moses and David are a type or foreshadowing of the Eucharist in the Old Testament, we can see that Jesus himself was present — body, blood, soul and divinity — in the Blessed Sacrament. A hymn that I remember from my youth encourages us to “Look beyond the bread you eat; see your Savior and your Lord. Look beyond the cup you drink; see his love poured out as blood.”

The truth is out there, but Jesus is close enough to touch. Moreover, in the Blessed Sacrament we actually become a part of him. And so it happens that the truth that is somewhere out there is actually very close by. It has been placed on our hearts and written on our minds.

Deacon Timothy Britt is assigned to St. Mary Parish, Alexandria, Ky.

What does the Eucharist mean to you?

What people are saying around the Diocese.

Janet Schmidt, 2nd grade teacher at St. Joseph School, Crescent Springs.

“I enjoy watching the children’s faces light up when we discuss the sacraments. They know deep in their hearts that this is a special time in their lives. When we discuss the parts of the Mass and especially the Consecration, they are listening like little sponges because they know it is an honor and privilege to receive Holy Communion. The children have a deep, inner yearning to learn more about the Eucharist. When COVID-19 forced us to go to remote learning, we did not know when we would be able to celebrate First Holy Communion. One student who is dedicated to her faith said, ‘The Holy Eucharist is worth waiting for. It will be great when we get to receive our First Communicants.’ On the day of First Holy Communion, it was obvious that the Holy Spirit was at work!” The First Communicants walked into church with a deep sense of maturity and confidence. This was their day and although it was a different kind of First Communion Day — they had true joy and excitement behind their masks and a deep love for our Lord. It touched my heart more than any other First Communion Day in my teaching career.

I attend Mass whenever I can. It is my life-line. It is my connection to my God and my Catholic Faith. When my parish celebrated our first “in-person” Mass since COVID-19, I made sure I got to church early so that I would have a seat for Mass. I was yearning to receive Holy Communion. I masked up and social distanced, and was so excited to be at Mass. When I received Holy Communion, I cried — I literally cried out of pure joy! Finally, I was reunited with my dear friend and savior Jesus. After Mass, I just sat there and cried and thanked God that we were able to have Mass again — and receive Holy Communion. COVID-19 made me realize, more than ever, that I truly love receiving Holy Communion and attending Mass. I will never take that for granted again.”

Study Questions

How is Jesus present in the Eucharist and why is this so important?

What are some prefigurations of the Eucharist in the Old Testament?

What does it mean to say that Moses and David are a “type” of Christ?
Presidential debates and feast days

The 2020 presidential and vice-presidential debates are quickly approaching, when Republican nominee President Donald Trump will face off against Democratic nominee former Vice President Joe Biden. The vice-presidential debate will feature Vice President Mike Pence and Democratic nominee Kamala Harris.

Catholics have a duty to society to participate in the public square through political engagement and civil dialogue. The debates are scheduled, interestingly enough, on the feast days of several major saints in the Catholic Church. On their feast days, Catholics are given an opportunity to pray for their intercession and the success of the debates, that the candidates may engage in respectful and honest discussion. That way, Catholics can understand debates, that the candidates may engage in respectful and honest discussion. This way, Catholics can understand where the candidates stand on the issues which will determine their vote.

Here is the schedule:

**Sept. 29** - Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, 9-10:30 p.m. EST

*Patron:* Archangels Michael, Gabriel, Raphael

**Oct. 7** - The University of Utah in Salt Lake City, 9-10:30 p.m. EST (vice presidential)

*Patron:* Our Lady of the Rosary

**Oct. 15** - Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts in Miami, 9-10:30 p.m. EST

*Patron:* St. Teresa of Avila

**Oct. 22** - Belmont University in Nashville, 9-10:30 p.m. EST

*Patron:* Pope St. John Paul II

**Sept. 29** marks the feast of the archangels who are named and venerated in the Church — Michael, who fought against Satan and the evil angels at the fall; Gabriel, who announced to Zachariah the birth of John the Baptist and to Mary the birth of Jesus Christ in the book of Luke; and Raphael, who accompanied Tobias on his journey in the book of Tobit.

Did you know?

Archangels Michael, Gabriel, Raphael

**Newsworthy**


Youth Rosary Day, Oct. 10, 11 a.m., Our Lady’s Farm, Falmouth. Rosary at 11 a.m., Mass follows. All college-aged students in school or the work force are invited to join The Catholic Newman Center at Northern Kentucky University for virtual Bible Study. Tuesdays, at 7 p.m. Book Study at 8 p.m. and in-person Mass, Thursdays, at 7 p.m. at St. Joseph Church, Cold Spring. Email Donna Helm, campus minister, at helmjd@nkusu.edu to receive weekly information.

**People and Events**

Four students from the Diocese of Covington were named semifinalists in the 66th annual National Merit Scholarship Program, out of approximately 16,000 semifinalists:

Villa Madonna Academy: Jackson Bond and Emily Richardson; Covington Catholic High School: Pete Williams; Bishop Brossart High School: Trey Spoonamore

These students will continue in the competition for one of the 7,600 National Merit Scholarships worth more than $30 million that will be offered next spring.

**Congrats**

Pete Williams
Bishop Brossart High School

Jackson Bond
Covington Catholic High School

Emily Richardson
Villa Madonna Academy

Trey Spoonamore
Bishop Brossart High School
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<td>Daniel and Brooke Morrel</td>
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**St. Thomas Parish, Parishes (Continued)**

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<td>Garret and Amy Parker</td>
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<td>Christine and Jo Hodges Jones</td>
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<td>Andrew and Angie Kremer</td>
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<td>Ronald and Allison Martini</td>
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<td>William and Kayin Tanks</td>
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<td>Barton and Elizabeth Wilson</td>
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*Note: The table continues with similar entries for other parishes.*

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“Indeed, as Pope John Paul II never tired of reminding us, the future of humanity depends on marriage and the family.”

VATICAN CITY — The common good — and not political or economic gain — should be at the heart of the race to find a vaccine for COVID-19, Pope Francis said.

During his weekly general audience Sept. 9, the pope said that “we see partisan interests emerging” in the search for a vaccine, and some people “are taking advantage of the situation to instigate divisions: by seeking economic or political advantages, generating or exacerbating conflicts.”

Others simply are not interested themselves in the suffering of others, they pass by and go their own way. They are devotees of Pontius Pilate: they wash their hands,” he said.

The general audience was in the San Damaso courtyard of the Apostolic Palace, a small space with seats for about 500 people. While attendees were required to wear masks, they bunched up at the railings to try to get closer to Pope Francis, prompting him to urge them to return to their seats and stay a safe distance from one another.

“Please move back so that you aren’t crowded here. Each one (return) to your seats so we can avoid infections,” he said at the start of the audience.

After the audience, the pope put on a mask before getting in his car to leave the courtyard.

Continuing his series of talks on “healing the world,” highlighting Catholic social teaching, the pope reflected on the importance of love and the common good, especially in a time of crisis.

The Christian response to the pandemic, he said, is based on love, which is difficult, especially when it means “loving the enemy,” which is “the highest summit of holiness.”

“Many times, a caress does more good than so many arguments — a caress of forgiveness and not many arguments to defend ourselves. It is inclusive love that heals,” the pope said, departing from his prepared remarks.

Love, he continued, not only makes families and friendships flourish, but also “social, cultural, economic and political relationships,” thus allowing for the growth of a “civilization of love.”

“Without this inspiration, an egotistical, indifferent, throwaway culture (that) casts out those who we don’t love, prevails,” he said.

Pope Francis said the coronavirus pandemic highlights how “each person’s true good is a common good” and that “a virus that does not recognize barriers, borders or cultural or political distinctions must be faced with a love without barriers, borders or distinction.”

“If the solutions for the pandemic bear the imprint of selfishness, whether it be by people, businesses or nations, we may perhaps emerge from the coronavirus crisis, but certainly not from the human and social crisis that the virus has brought to light and accentuated,” the pope said.

“Therefore, we must be careful not to build on sand! To build a healthy, inclusive, just and peaceful society we must do so on the rock of the common good,” he said.

“Common good is a rock.”

Common good, not greed, must motivate search for vaccine, pope says
Oregon’s fire: Most churches safe, for now, offering shelter

PORTLAND, Ore. — While the foothills of Oregon’s Cascade Mountains have been ablaze, creating apocalyptic skies and leaving few small towns in ashes, most of the churches in the Archdiocese of Portland have not burned and many have offered shelter to thousands of evacuees. On Sept. 8, two deaths in Marion County and one in Jackson County were reported, but Oregon Gov. Kate Brown said she feared that many more lives were lost. Archbishop Pastoral Area of Phoenix lost her mobile home to flames not long after gathering up photographs of her husband, who died two years ago. Brophy said she expects that many more parishes will report being suddenly homeless.

Vatican: Educational alliance needed to confront pandemic challenges

VATICAN CITY — The Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education called for an alliance between Catholic and non-Catholic educational institutions in order to confront the challenges stemming from or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In a letter published Sept. 9 in the Vatican newspaper L’Osservatore Romano, the congregation said the pandemic has emphasized “the need for an increasingly communal and shared educational pact that — drawing strength from the Gospel and the teachings of the church — will contribute a generous and open synergy to spread an authentic culture of encounter.” The letter was signed by Cardinal Giuseppe Versaldi, prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, and Archbishop Angelo Zani, the congregation’s secretary. As many schools and universities begin a new academic year, many continue to rely on remote learning to prevent the spread of the coronavirus among faculty and students. In its letter, the congregation said that although digital platforms have allowed for educational opportunities, many continue to rely on remote learning to prevent the spread of the coronavirus among faculty and students. In its letter, the congregation said that although digital platforms have allowed for educational opportunities, they have now.

British bishops note ‘tragic loss of life’ as abortions increase

MANCHESTER, England. — Catholic bishops said they were disappointed by figures showing abortions in England and Wales were at their highest recorded level. The statistics released Sept. 10 by the Department of Health revealed that 200,699 abortions were performed in the first six months of 2020. The figures represent an increase of nearly 4,300 over the same period of 2019, a year that saw 196,369 abortions, the highest number recorded in England and Wales. In a Sept. 11 statement, the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales said, “We mark the tragic loss of the lives of so many unborn babies with deep sadness and regret. It is hugely disappointing that so many mothers felt that they could not continue with their pregnancies, and we look forward to a time when women are given the genuine support they need to have children no matter what their circumstances,” the statement added.

Catholic bishops of California launch yearlong anti-racism initiative

LOS ANGELES. — The Catholic bishops of California have announced a yearlong initiative to address personal and systematic racism, both in the church and wider society. Following a Sept. 1 letter from a group of African American Catholic leaders from their state, the California bishops released a statement pledging to “begin a journey aimed at exposing our hearts to more fully understand the extent and nature of the sin of racism in ourselves, our church and our nation. This journey is intended to offer tangible change.” The meeting and announcement occurred on the feast of St. Peter Claver, whose many challenges — including all in California — observed in the past, and, over some years, eliminating the racism that exists in our nation, our church, and our society so we can address it and eliminate it whatever we can,” the bishops wrote.

Federal bill hopes to decrease veterans’ suicide rate

WASHINGTON — Legislation in Congress intends to direct more money to local initiatives to stop the high rate of veteran suicides. The House Veterans Affairs Committee, Improvement Act of 2020 is meant to blunt what first-term U.S. Rep. Michael Waltz, a former Green Beret, said is a “staggering” suicide rate that results in 20 to 22 veterans on average committing suicide each day. “We’ve moved as a country from a mandatory service to all-volunteer service,” said Waltz, who fought in Afghanistan after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the U.S. and retired at the rank of lieutenant colonel. “Everybody who signs up knows that they’re heading into harm’s way and doing it voluntarily.” But veteran suicide rates haven’t ended. “We can’t sustain that,” he said, as he co-sponsored the House version of the bill based on his own military experiences. “To struggle with my own issues with TBI (traumatic brain injury), with survivor’s guilt with the Green Berets that I lost,” he told Catholic News Service in a Sept. 9 phone interview. “As leaders, we need to begin talking about it.”

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VATICAN CITY—When he addressed the United Nations via video message, the U.N. General Assembly Sept. 21, Pope Francis is thinking when the founder of Italy's Slow Food movement presents a book based on three long conversations he has had with the pope about the meaning of “integral ecology.”

Adam Cadenza, a United Food Bank volunteer, takes emergency food bags and places them in boxes at the United Food Bank warehouse in Mesa, Arizona, in this April 16, 2020, file photo. In an interview, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, said putting a priority on the human person is needed for economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

Pope Francis that ‘everything is connected.’”

The cardinal said acceptance of the idea that the economy is not everything is the only explanation for why so many national and local governments ordered lockdowns to prevent the spread of the coronavirus: “It shows that the priority isn’t the economy but the person.”

However, he said, for the Catholic Church, it is not enough to be concerned about a person’s physical health. “The integrity of the human person must be cared for,” which means caring for the person’s spiritual, political and economic health as well, he said.

Especially since St. John XXIII’s teaching about peace-making in the face of the nuclear arms race, Cardinal Parolin said, Catholic social teaching has emphasized the interdependence of nations.

The pandemic revealed “our common weakness, our shared fragility,” he said. “However, instead of fostering cooperation for the universal common good, we see more and more walls rising around us, exalting borders as a guarantee of security and practicing systematic violations of the law, maintaining a situation of permanent global conflict.

“As Pope Francis recalled in Nagasaki (in November), arms trimming reached its peak in 2019, and now there is a serious risk that, after a period of decline, including due to pandemic-related restrictions, it will continue to increase,” he said.

But, he said, the pandemic demonstrates that what is needed is “friendship and benevolence rather than hatred and fear.”

Cardinal Parolin said, Catholic social teaching, the cardinal said, has firm biblical, theological and anthropological foundations and can be “continually updated” to respond to new needs and situations.

When speaking about the economy, he said, the two most recent papal social encyclicals are key: Pope Benedict XVI’s 2009 “Caritas in Veritate” (“Charity in Truth”) and Pope Francis’ 2015 “ Laudato Si’, On Care for Our Common Home.”

“Benedict spoke of an economy in which room must be made for the logic of gift, the principle of gratuitousness, which expresses not only solidarity, but even more deeply human fraternity,” Cardinal Parolin said. “Francis relaunched the theme of integral human development in the context of an ‘integral ecology’ one that is environmental, economic, social, cultural, spiritual.”

“Today the pandemic is giv- ing a tremendous shock to the entire economic and social system and its supposed certain- ties at all levels. The problems of unemployment are and will be dramatic; the problems of poverty are and will be amplified; the ex- tension of entire health and educa- tion funding; the shrinkage of national welfare and social safety nets; the global financial and governance systems; and the role of states and relations between nations are changing,” Cardinal Parolin said.

“Pope Francis that ‘everything is connected.’”

The priority is not the economy as such, but the human person,” he responded to Carlo di Cicco, former vice president of an economic and social think tank.

Romano.

He said, “It shows that the priority isn’t the economy but the person.”

In a long interview published Aug. 27, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, was asked what principles of Catholic social teaching could help the global econ- omy recover from the pandemic and move forward in a way that is better for human beings and for the environment.

He spoke about transforming “the roots of our physical, spiritual and social infirmities and the destructive practices that separate us from each other, threatening the human family and our planet.”

During a news conference Aug. 26 in Rome, Italy, to launch a celebration marking events in the life of St. Francis Assisi, Bishop Domenico Pompili replied to a comment about interreligious dialogue by saying that Pope Francis was preparing a new encyclical on “human fraternity,” a phrase used for a document on interreligious dialogue and cooperation signed in 2019 by Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb, grand imam of Al-Azhar.

The Vatican confirmed Sept. 5 that the pope was writ- ing the encyclical and said he would sign it Oct. 3 in Assisi.

The interview was posted on RiparteL’Italia, the online magazine of an economic and social think tank.

“COVID—19 not only provoked a health crisis but impacted multiple aspects of human life: the family, poli- tics, labor, businesses, commerce, tourism, etc,” Cardinal Parolin said. “The broad and interconnected character of the pandemic constantly reminds us of the observation of

He added, “We cannot simply stand by while our people are treated with this lack of compassion for their needs, and this lack of respect for their rights,” Archbihop Cordileone wrote in the memo.

He has formed “a strategy committee consisting of both chan- cellory staff and others, both clergy and lay, to advise me on how we can best make our voice heard in a peaceful but force- ful way.”

“In my memo, he noted that San Francisco Mayor London Breed announced that, effective Sept. 14, she would possibly ease some restrictions on attendance for indoor religious services in her city. ‘This is welcome news if more distant future possibly make other adjustments.’

The city has been allowing just 12 people to gather for an outdoor Mass, and in some churches where a Mass was being livestreamed, 12 people could be there. In both settings, partici- pants of course must be masked and socially distant.

Archbishop Cordileone took issue with several points of Breed’s announcement. ‘First, the mayor announced that “houses of worship will be able to allow” 50 people at religious services outdoors start- ing Sept. 14. However, the civil government has no right to dic- tate to the Church whether or not it may “allow worship,” the archbishop said.

“Civil government has the authority to issue regulations to protect the public good that apply to everyone equally, including the Church. We do not dispute that,” he continued, and the state has the authority to issue a building code for church construction, for example, but it has “no authority” to tell the Church how to arrange its liturgical space.

“Similarly, the civil government can issue regulations to protect public health that apply to everyone, the worshipping community included, but those regulations have to be reason- able and consistent,” Archbishop Cordileone said.

“They cannot be so restrictive as to effectively ban public worship. San Francisco is the most restrictive county in the entire country when it comes to public worship, but the state of California is not much better, with open spaces for the human and ecological conversion that humanity needs.”

Italian readers may get more hints about what Pope Francis is thinking when the founder of Italy’s Slow Food movement presents a book based on three long conversations he has had with the pope about the meaning of “inte- gral ecology.”

The book, “PerraFutura” (“FutureEarth”), is sched- uled for an early September release and will recount the dialogues Carlo Petrini, a self-described agnostic, had with Pope Francis about caring for the Earth and for all the peo- ple who live on it, promoting justice for individuals and the preservation of nature.