Ast Wednesday leaves defining mark on Catholics

WASHINGTON (CNS)—In more ways than one, Ash Wednesday—celebrated on March 1 this year—leaves a mark.

That’s because not only are Catholics marked with a sign of penitence with ashes on their foreheads, but the rich symbolism of the rite itself draws Catholics to churches in droves even though it is not a holy day of obligation and ashes do not have to be distributed during a Mass.

Almost half of adult Catholics, 45 percent, typically receive ashes—made from the burned and blessed palms of the previous year’s Palm Sunday—at Ash Wednesday services, according to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University.

Parish priests say they get more people at church that day than almost any other—excluding Christmas and Easter—and the congregations are usually much bigger than for Holy Thursday or Good Friday liturgies.

“Virtually every parish that I’ve worked with will have more people come to Ash Wednesday than almost any other celebration,” said Thomas Humphries, assistant professor of philosophy, theology and religion at St. Leo University in St. Leo, Fla.

“We talk about Christmas and Easter as certainly being the most sacred and most attended events during the year, but Ash Wednesday is not even a day of obligation. In terms of liturgical significance, it’s very minor, but people observe it as overwhelmingly important,” he said.

Humphries said part of the Ash Wednesday draw is the “genuine human recognition of the need to repent and the need to be reminded of our own mortality. Having someone put ashes on your head and remind you ‘we are dust and to dust we shall return’ is an act of humility.”

See ASH, page 16
**Catechism Corner**

What the catechism says about Lent

The season of Lent is mentioned in the Catechism of the Catholic Church in various sections. It is brought up in #540 in the section that explains Christ's public ministry.

In #1095, Lent is discussed in regards to the way in which the Church, especially in its liturgy, sees Christ prefigured in various ways in the Old Testament. Finally, in #1438, the penitential nature of Lent is discussed in the section on the sacrament of reconciliation.

#540: “Jesus’ temptation reveals the way in which the Son of God is made, contrary to the way Satan proposes to him and the way men wish to attribute to him (see Mt 16:21-23).

This is why Christ vanquished the Tempter for us: ‘For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sinning’ (Heb 4:15). By the solemn forty days of Lent, the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert. #1095…” The Church, especially during Advent and Lent and above all at the Easter Vigil, re-reads and re-lives the great events of salvation history in the “today” of her liturgy. But this also demands that catechesis help the faithful to open themselves to this spiritual understanding of the economy of salvation as the Church’s liturgy reveals it and enables us to live it.”

#1438: “The seasons and days of penance in the course of the liturgical year (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church’s penitential practice.”

(To read the Catechism of the Catholic Church online, log on to www.usccb.org/catechism.html)
By Natalie Hoefer

Next to the Planned Parenthood abortion facility in Bloomington is a small, quaint building with red brick and white trim. Monica Siefler and others who pray and offer sidewalk counseling in front of the abortion center “have eyed that building for a long time, and dreamt of it someday being a care center for pregnant women,” she says, noting that the closest pregnancy care center was a few miles away.

On Feb. 1, that dream came to fruition when Women’s Care Center opened for business in the building, providing free counseling, support and education to women facing unplanned pregnancies. Choosing to locate immediately next to a Planned Parenthood facility is an intentional strategy, says Jenny Hunsberger, vice president of Women’s Care Center, which is headquartered in South Bend, Ind.

“It’s really important to be visible and accessible to the women who need us the most,” she explains. “That’s why we’re there. We want to be as easy for them [to access] as we possibly can be.”

The “women who need [them] the most” are the women who are seeking services just feet away at the Planned Parenthood facility, where both chemical and medical abortions are performed. Not only does the Women’s Care Center offer free medical-grade pregnancy tests and ultrasounds, but also counseling and classes on the basics of caring for a baby, parenting, discipline, nutrition, budgeting, relationships, goal-setting and more—all for free.

Women who participate in a one-on-one parenting class earn coupons to “purchase” items for their babies—car seats, clothes, cribs, diapers and more. “[Our services are] comprehensive, skilled, empathetic and non-judgmental,” says Hunsberger. “We offer counseling and support so [the mother] has an individual pregnancy plan.”

She says the goal is for an expecting mother to feel “that barrier she’s facing, the challenges, are really met, that she is not alone, that she has someone who is both there to help and support her, and someone who is there to help her recognize her own value and dignity and goodness, and support her in making decisions about her pregnancy that are rooted in her own core belief in her goodness and value.”

Siefler, a member of St. John the Apostle Parish in Bloomington, attributes the presence of the newly opened Women’s Care Center to the “great many years of souls praying outside of the Bloomington Planned Parenthood facility [in inclement weather, begging our Lord to send us help].”

That help came recently when the building next to the abortion center went on the market.

“Last February, a very generous donor purchased the building for us,” says Hunsberger. “We started renovations in the spring. Now we’re open and seeing clients.”

Within the first hour of opening, she says, the center had two clients, and four by the end of the first day.

“We already have 12 babies expected to moms [who are clients] in Bloomington,” she says with enthusiasm. “That’s within just two weeks.”

According to the Indiana Induced Termination of Pregnancy Reports found on www.in.gov/isdh, the number of abortions in Monroe County, where Bloomington is located, dropped from 831 to 718 between 2012 and 2014, then spiked to 822 in 2015, the last year for which the report is available.

“What that means to us is that the number of women facing difficult pregnancies is high and increasing,” says Hunsberger. “We want to be there for them. We’re thinking that within three years we will start to see some incredible shifts in Bloomington.”

Based on statistics from Women’s Care Centers in communities similar to Bloomington, she says they expect to serve around 900-1,000 women a year.

“We’re going to see more and more women—significant, measurable numbers of women who feel for the first time they have the option to choose life,” she says.

Hunsberger says that the members of Women’s Care Center are “really grateful to the community and people of Bloomington, to the people who recognized the need and want a stronger presence of hope and care in Bloomington, who will be there to make this a local outreach.

“It’s lifesaving work.”

New Women’s Care Center offers women ‘option to choose life’

Special Olympics show world that ‘every person is a gift,’ pope says

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—The athletes of the Special Olympics witness to the world the beauty and value of every human life, and the joy that comes from reaching a goal with the encouragement and support of others, Pope Francis said.

“Together, athletes and helpers show us that there are no obstacles or barriers which cannot be overcome,” the pope told representatives of the Special Olympics World Winter Games, which will take place in Austria on March 14-25.

“ ‘It’s really important to be visible and accessible to the women who need us the most. That’s why we’re there. We want to be as easy for them to access as we possibly can be.’”

—Jenny Hunsberger, vice president of Women’s Care Center

“You are a sign of hope for all who commit themselves to a more inclusive society,” the pope told the group on Feb. 16. “Every life is precious, every person is a gift, and inclusion enriches every community and society. This is your message for the world, for a world without borders, which excludes no one.”

Pope Francis praised the passion and “true and well-deserved joy feels like!”

“The constant training, which also requires effort and sacrifice, helps you to grow in patience and perseverance, gives you strength and courage and lets you acquire and develop talents which would otherwise remain hidden,” the pope told the athletes.

“In a way,” he said, “at the heart of all sporting activity is joy: the joy of exercising, of being together, of being alive and rejoicing in the gifts the Creator gives us each day. Seeing the smile on your faces and the great happiness in your eyes when you have done well in an event—for the sweetest victory is when we surpass ourselves—we realize what true and well-deserved joy feels like!”

Watching the Special Olympics, he said, everyone should learn “to enjoy small and simple pleasures, and to enjoy them together.”

Sporting events, especially international events like the Special Olympics World Winter Games, help “spread a culture of encounter and solidarity,” the pope said, wishing the athletes “joyful days together and time with friends from around the world.”

Special Olympics World Winter Games will take place in Austria on March 14-25.
At the National Prayer Breakfast this month, President Donald J. Trump promised to “repeal and replace” the Johnson Amendment. He said the amendment “stands in the way of our friends in the tax code who represent the moral qualifications of candidates seeking office.”

The day before the National Prayer Breakfast, Sen. James Lankford and Rep. Jody Hice introduced a bill—the Federal Election Act—designed to kill the ban on endorsements, though not the one on contributions.

I’m sure this is a good idea, though my reasons are probably different from the ones the secular left will advance. The Commonwealth supported the Johnson Amendment. Separatists may say that giving churches a tax exemption and letting them participate in political campaigns is a forbidden mixture of church and state.

But repealing the Johnson Amendment would also free the Open Society Foundation to do the same thing. When the government is giving out subsidies, it should allow charitable groups to do the same way it treats other, secular, institutions.

I might even go further. I think the idea that the church only benefits when it imposes its will on churches when it declines to tax them (the “tax benefit” argument) rubs me the wrong way. It assumes that everything we have really belongs to the government and anything we’re allowed to keep is a matter of a benefactor’s grace. This kind of omnivorous statism is what got Trump elected.

But looking at the matter from the Church’s point of view, I think the government’s—I see a good deal of wisdom in the principle the Johnson Amendment enshrines.

The Catholic Church does not align very well with either Republicans or Democrats, as evidenced by the week before the National Prayer Breakfast reminded us. Vice President Mike Pence spoke at the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C., while President Trump issued an order banning travel from seven Muslim-majority countries.

Both the candidates really aren’t the mission of the Church—nor of our Church, anyway. When it comes to voting, better she reminded us at all times what the Gospel requires and leave it to us to figure out how to comply.

—John Garvey is President of The Catholic University of America in Washington. CatholicUniversityCA.edu is his website.

**Letter to the Editor**

**As Christians, we are called to be activists for the witness of truth**

In the Feb. 17 issue of *The Criterion*, Editor Emeritus John Fink in his editorial on page 4 aptly described how we Christians live in a post-Christian world. He encouraged Catholics and other Christians to “hang in there,” “don’t be arrogant” and “be charitable.”

This is good advice, but we need to be more proactive. It is our duty as Christians to be active witnesses for the truth and effect change where there is evil.

Society has become overwhelmingly secularized and more relativistic. People seem to think that there is no objective truth and that whatever someone feels is right is OK. Who am I to impose my beliefs on someone else?” is a common refrain whether this involves pornography, abortion, euthanasia, religious freedom or other crucial issues.

This moral relativism has caused Christians and our allies to lose ground and become more and more silent while secularism runs amok. We are afraid to speak up, in many cases, because of fear of being labeled intolerant, bigoted or backward. Our silence needs to end, and we need to step up and speak the truth or others will fill the void with falsehoods.

William Wilberforce was an abolitionist in the British Parliament who was the primary person responsible for ending the slave trade and slavery in Britain. He lived in a time when slavery was the norm, people were afraid to speak up if they were against it and those who did were marginalized. Meanwhile, the horror of slavery continued. Wilberforce stood up for what was right and persistently fought for over 20 years for the end of slavery.

We need more William Wilberforces to profess the truth today.

—Dr. Stephen O’Neil

**Indianapolis**

**Letters from readers are welcome and should be informed, relevant, well-expressed, courteous, tone-appropriate, courteous and respectful.**

Letters preserve the right to select and edit the letters based on space limitations, past editorial response and courtesy.

Letters should be typed, double-spaced, with salutations to the Editor. Readers with access to e-mail may send letters to criterion@archindy.org.
Payday lending expansion is defeated by Indiana Senate panel

The Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC) celebrated a legislative victory after a bill to expand payday lending practices in Indiana was defeated on Feb. 16 by a vote of 15-10. Members of the Senate Insurance and Financial Institutions Committee voted on the bill by a 5-4 vote.

Glenn Tebbe, executive director of the ICC, who serves as the public policy spokesperson for the bishops in Indiana, joined 18 other organizations to testify before the panel in opposition to the proposal. He called the defeat of the bill “a victory.”

“While there are better ways to help low-income persons cover needed expenses rather than expanding a payday loan product with a 216 percent annual percentage rate [APR],” Tebbe said.

The proposal, Senate Bill 245, authored by Sen. Travis Holdman, R-Martinsville, was amended in committee to make it more palatable, Holdman said, “if we don’t get the bill to a place we are all comfortable with, it won’t move past second reading.”

“We are not going to push this through the goal line until everyone is comfortable with the language,” he added. Some of the key changes of the amendment include: lowering the monthly interest rate from 20 percent to 18 percent; reducing the loan maximum amount from $2,500 to $1,750; removing late penalties; and reducing the payback time.

Tebbe told panel members during his testimony that even in its amended form, the Church remained concerned about the bill because it would encourage low-income persons to get trapped in debt and a process of recycling the loans.

“We see this as a moral issue because it takes advantage of the distress that these families are in,” said Tebbe. “The Catechism of the Catholic Church says the seventh commandment is violated when people do things such as taking or keeping the property of others. This also includes business fraud; paying unjust wages; or forcing up prices and taking advantage of ignorance or hardships of another.

“Taking advantage of someone and exploiting them is wrong,” continued Tebbe. “I know that is not your intent here, but in our view, it is realistically the effect.”

Kathy Williams, who represents the Indiana Community Action Coalition, said while the legislation would allow lenders to reduce the interest rate of payday loans, the interest rate would still be 18 percent per month and a 216 percent APR, a rate that is far too high for lower-income borrowers to shoulder. Williams said research on low-income borrowers by the Pew Research Center, a non-partisan think tank based in Washington, indicates loans should not exceed 5 percent of a person’s monthly income, but this proposal would translate to about 20 percent.

Marcie Luhigo, who represents The Creek Christian Church, a 4,000-member church on the southeast side of Indianapolis, told the panel, “Every year, our church gives $200,000 that I’m in charge of distributing to those in need, with the need. I can tell you that, in my five-year tenure, hundreds have come to us with payday loans that they are unable and incapable of repaying. We would oppose any expansion of payday lending.”

Jim Bauerle, a retired brigadier general, said one of the biggest problems in the military is financial hardship experienced by young soldiers and those returning from deployment. He said that many of those individuals experience unemployment and homelessness, and some get themselves into debt through these types of high interest loans.

Bauerle said his parish on the north side of Indianapolis takes in needy veterans and their families who contribute 10 percent of their weekly collections to help those needing financial assistance or to pay for household repairs.

Representatives of several other organizations testified in opposition to the bill, including the Indiana Institute of Working Families; United Methodist Church; Christian Legal Aid; the Society of St. Vincent de Paul; Indiana Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church of America; and several veterans groups.

Heather Willey, who represented payday loan providers, testified in support of the bill, saying the proposal has retained safety procedures which includes lending to the employed with bank-accounts. She added that loans may not exceed 20 percent of the borrower’s gross monthly income.

Lawmakers on the panel were not convinced the bill was prudent or needed. Two lawmakers who supported the bill did so to give the author of the legislation an opportunity to work on the bill, but they were not convinced of the bill’s merits. Five members who voted against the bill recognized the negative effects of these loans on families.

Sen. Eddie Melton, D-Merrillville, said he felt the industry needed “more transparency” and voted “no.” Sen. Roderick Bray, R-Martinsville, said while he appreciated the efforts to make a good product, he has not detected a “human cry” for this product. Sen. John Ruckelshaus, R-Indianapolis, also voted “no,” saying he was “not comfortable moving forward.”

Tebbe said even though this bill has been defeated, the topic could be resurrected and amended to another bill before the Indiana General Assembly

Cost: $200 (includes meals and housing) or $150 (without housing)

Register by March 2 at Events.SistersofProvidence.org or call 812-535-2952
March 1
Archbishop Edward T. O’Malley, Cathedral Center, 1400 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis. Solo Seniors, Catholic, educational, charitable and social singles, 50 and over, single, separated, widowed or never married. New members welcome: 6 p.m. Information: 317-243-0777.

March 1-April 9
Planned Parenthood Facility, 8390 Georgetown Road, Indianapolis. 40 Days for Life Prayer Vigil, 40 days of peaceful prayer and fasting. Planned Parenthood facility, 7 a.m.-7 p.m. Register for prayer time slot: 317-784-5454. Information: 317-407-6681 or sherif@spsglobal.com.

March 3
SS. Cyril and Methodius Catholic Church, 1347 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis. Lumen Dei Catholic Business Group, 6:30 a.m. Mass, 7:15-8:30 a.m. breakfast at Lincoln Square Panera, 920 W. Washington St. Parking is available around noon. Information: 317-435-3447 or lumen.dei@comcast.net.

March 3
St. Lawrence Church, 1218 E. Oak St., in Indianapolis. Ritter House, 1218 E. Oak St., in Indianapolis. The first opportunity is on March 14, when all are invited to join lunch with the sisters. Following both meals, guests can have lunch or supper with Sisters of Providence. The meals are free, but seating is limited. To register, log onto Providence Hall Dining Room.

March 4
Central Performing Arts Center, 1 Trojan Rd, St. Louis. Eucharistic Hospitality and Spiritual Formation Event. This event is sponsored by the St. Louis Archdiocese, the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, the Archdiocese of Chicago, the Archdiocese of Detroit, and the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. Information: 317-567-3280, mckayev@indy.com.

March 4
St. Mark the Evangelist Parish, 535 E. Edgewood Ave., Indianapolis. Lenten Fish Fry. Fish, fries, slaw and drink, 5-7:30 p.m., adults $8, seniors $5, children $4. Desserts available for $1. Information: 317-771-9099, a.coltman@sbcglobal.net.

March 5
St. Meinrad. The couple also has five grandchildren. They will celebrate with a Mass and a family dinner.

St. Mark the Evangelist Parish Disability Awareness Mass and Reception set for March 11

The Indiana Catholic Women’s Conference is set for March 25

The Indiana Catholic Women’s Conference will be March 25. The event is from 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m., with registration at 8 a.m. The conference will be at the Indianapolis Downtown Marriott, 305 W. Maryland St. Parking is available across the street in the Government Center Parking Garage, 401 W. Washington St.

The event features speakers Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Father James Blount, Father Ronan Murphy and Carrie Gress, with an adoration reflection by Father Michael Keucher, associate pastor of Our Lady of the Greenwood Parish in Greenwood.

St. Mark the Evangelist Parish’s annual Disabilities Awareness Mass will be celebrated March 11. The Mass will be celebrated at St. Mark the Evangelist Parish, 535 E. Edgewood Ave., in Indianapolis, at 5:30 p.m. on March 11. The purpose of this Mass is to raise awareness of the importance and value that individuals with disabilities bring to both St. Mark and to the community. Several of St. Mark’s special needs parishioners will participate in the Mass. There will also be a reception in the parish’s Schaefer Hall immediately following the Mass.

The reception is being organized by the St. Mark Inclusion Committee under the guidance of parishioner Deirdre Todd, a pastoral associate Deacon Tom Horn. All are invited to join in the Mass and reception to worship and to learn more about how St. Mark Parish encourages everyone, including parishioners with special needs, to take an active role in parish and community activities.


No parking: Pope Francis tells ‘lazy Christians’ to keep moving

La semana pasada escribí acerca de la admisión del papa Francisco a la Iglesia joven (citando las Sagradas Escrituras): “Vete de tu tierra, de tu patria y de la casa de tu padre y a la tierra que yo te mostraré” (Gn 12:1). Esta es una llamada a la emprendeduría de nuestro Sumo Pontífice. Estamos llamados a irnos, a abandonar la comodidad de nuestra vida actual y las comodidades de nuestras vidas para aventurarnos inclusivo en los mares de la sociedad humana.

En una homilía reciente, el papa Francisco profundizó todavía más en esta enseñanza al decir que los cristianos que avanzan con determinación en su fe en Dios tienen la fortaleza para soportar los momentos más oscuros de la vida. Pero el Santo padre también dice que quienes no logran avanzar o luchar por un cambio verdadero se quedan “estancados”.

Incluso un tímido “cristianos perezosos” y cristianos que son como el “aguatibia” en su fe, para describir palpables vivas las consecuencias de no abandonar nuestra comodidad y avanzar proclamando la alegria del Evangelio.

Según el papa Francisco, los cristianos perezosos “han encontrado en la Iglesia un buen estacionamiento para aparcarse.”

Comparó la situación de estos cristianos con la de “vivir en un refrigerador,” que mantiene las cosas tal como están. El papa comentó que esto le recuerda un viejo dicho de su tierra natal que dice que el agua escondida es la primera en pozo.

¿Por qué el papa Francisco está tan preocupado por los cristianos que están “estancados” y no participan de un progreso en el camino de peregrinación que es la vida cristiana? Porque ve en ello las oportunidades perdidas, tanto en la vida de los propios cristianos como en las obras de misericordia que no se llevan a cabo a causa de nuestro egoísmo.

Las Sagradas Escrituras condenan este tipo de conducta estancada: “Yo conocí tus obras, que eres frío ni caliente; ¡Dújales fuego frío o caliente!” (Rev 3:15–16). Así que si estás frío, te vomitaré de mi boca. Porque dicen: ‘Soy rico, me he enriquecido y de nada tengo necesidad;’ y no sabes que eres un miserable y digno de lástima, y pobre, ciego y desnudo, te aconsejo que des de mi compo oro refinado por fuego para que te hagas rico y vestires blancas para que te veas y no se manifieste la verguenz de tu desnudez, y colórico para ungi tu rostro que puedas ver’ (Rev 3:15–16).

Muy a menudo nos engañamos pensando que somos buenos cristianos que disfrutamos legitimamente de la seguridad de una vida decente. No nos tomamos cuenta de nuestra comodidad y nuestra indiferencia ante las necesidades de los demás nos han convertido en cristianos perezosos o tibios.

Jesús aborrece este tipo de indiferencia y deja muy en claro que sus discípulos no deben ser insípidos: “Vosotros sois la sal de la tierra; pero si la sal se ha vuelto insípida, ¿con qué se hará salada otra vez? Si para nada sirve, sino para ser echada fuera y pisoteada por los hombres. Vosotros sois la luz del mundo. Una ciudad situada sobre un monte no se puede ocultar: si se enciende una lámpara y se pone debajo de un almidón, sino sobre el candelero, y alumbrará a todos los que están en la casa. Así brillar vuestra luz delante de los hombres, para que vean vuestras buenas acciones y glorifiquen a vuestro Padre que está en los cielos” (Mt 5:14–18).

El papa Francisco nos recuerda que la verdadera vida cristiana es valiente, erigida sobre la esperanza; es un compromiso de avanzar con confianza, pese a las tormentas que encontraremos en el camino. La Iglesia no es un “buen estacionamiento.” Es el camino diseñado para que sigamos adelante, aunque a veces peligrosa, hacia nuestro hogar celestial. Como pueblo peregrino, estamos llamados a apoyarnos, alentarnos y ayudarnos mutuamente en este camino hacia el cielo.

Prohibido estacionarse. Debemos seguir avanzando con esperanza, tal como lo dice el papa, “luchando, soportando la tormenta y mirando hacia adelante al horizonte abierto.”

Cuando nos tropezamos y caemos, la constancia de Cristo nos levanta y nos sustenta en el camino. Cuando sintamos recelo o desaliento, los espíritus alegres de todos nuestros hermanos nos revivirán y nos ayudarán a seguir avanzando.

No somos cristianos perezosos. ¡Somos valientes y energéticos mientras seguimos a Cristo en el camino de la vida!

(Daniel Conway es integrante del comité editorial de The Criterion.)

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El rostro de la misericordia
Daniel Conway

The Criterion Friday, February 24, 2017

No last week, I wrote about Pope Francis’s admonition to the young Church (quoting sacred Scripture): “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (Gn 12:1). This is a frequent theme of this pope’s teaching. We are called to “go,” to abandon the comfort and security of our lives in order to “venture forth” even to the margins of human society.

In a recent homily, Pope Francis took this teaching a step further, saying that Christians who forge ahead with hope in God have the strength to endure life’s dark moments. But the Holy Father also said that those of us who fail to move forward, or to fight for real change, are “stagnant.” He even used the term “lazy Christians” and Christians who are “lukewarm” in their faith to describe in vivid terms the consequences of our failure to leave our comfort zones and “go forth” proclaiming the joy of the Gospel.

According to Pope Francis, lazy Christians “have found in the Church a nice parking lot” for themselves. He likened their situation to “living in a refrigerator” that keeps things just as they are. For a pope who recently held an old saying in his native land that warns that stagnant water is the first to go bad, his words on this topic are striking.

Why is Pope Francis so concerned about Christians who are “parked,” making no real progress in the pilgrim journey that is Christian life? Because he sees the opportunities that are lost—both in the lives of Christians themselves and in the works of mercy that are not carried out because of our self-centeredness. Sacred Scripture condemns behavior that is stagnant: “I know your works, you that are neither cold nor hot, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you, I say, are rich and affluent and have no need of anything, and yet do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I advise you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich, and white garments to put on so that your shameful nakedness may not be exposed, and buy cumin to smear on your eyes so that you may see” (Rv 3:15–18).

Too often, we fool ourselves thinking that we are good Christians who rightly enjoy the security of a decent life. We don’t realize that our comfort and our indifference to the needs of others have made us lazy or lukewarm in our Christian life. Jesus abhors this kind of indifference. He makes it very clear that his disciples are not to be insipid or tasteless: “You are the salt of the Earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden, nor can people light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lamp stand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father” (Mt 5:13–18).

Pope Francis reminds us that a true Christian life is courageous, built on hope. It is a commitment to move confidently forward in spite of the storms we may encounter along the way.

The Church is not “a nice parking lot.” It is a roadway designed to support us in the sometimes perilous journey to our heavenly home. As a pilgrim people, we are called to support, encourage and assist each other as we travel on the road to heaven.

No parking allowed. We must keep moving forward in hope, the pope says, “fighting, enduring the storm and looking ahead upon an open horizon.”

When we stumble and fall, the grace of Christ will lift us up and sustain us on our way. When we are weary or discouraged, we must take the joyful spirits of our sisters and brothers who will revitalize and help us to keep moving forward.

Let’s not be lazy Christians. Let’s be bold and energetic as we follow Jesus on the road to life!

(Daniel Conway is a member of The Criterion’s editorial committee.)

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VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Without commenting on the authenticity of alleged Marian apparitions in Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Pope Francis has appointed a Polish archbishop to study the pastoral needs of the townspeople and the thousands of pilgrims who flock to the town each year.

The pope chose Archbishop Henryk Hoser of Warsaw-Praga as his special envoy to Medjugorje, the Vatican announced on Feb. 11.

“The mission has the aim of acquiring a deeper knowledge of the pastoral situation there and, above all, of the needs of the faithful who go there in pilgrimage, and on the basis of this, to suggest possible pastoral initiatives for the future,” the Vatican announced.

Archbishop Hoser’s assignment has “an exclusively pastoral character,” the Vatican said, making it clear his task is “an exclusively pastoral character,” the Vatican said, making it clear his task is an “independent mission” to study the questions that arise from the alleged Martian apparitions.

Cardinal Ruini had given him the group’s approval last year now.

The Vatican’s February announcement said that Archishop Hoser “is expected to finish his mandate as special envoy by the middle of this year.

Thousands of pilgrims travel to the small town each month to meet the alleged seers and to pray. Because the apparitions have not been approved, the Vatican has said dioceses should not organize official pilgrimages to Medjugorje. However, it also has said Catholics are free to visit the town and pray there, and that the Diocese of Mostar-Duvno and the Franciscans who minister in the town should organize pastoral care for them.

The Vatican’s February announcement said that Archishop Hoser “is expected to finish his mandate as special envoy by the middle of this year.”
**Case-Back**
Valerie Kathleen Case and Joseph J. Back will be married on April 29 at St. Ambrose of Pekin Church in Morris. The bride is the daughter of Kevin and Frances Case. The groom is the son of Tony and Mary Back.

**Tobit Weekend**
Tobit Weekend retreats are scheduled at Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House in West Lafayette for the weekend of April 7-9, May 19-21, June 23-25, July 21-23, Sept. 15-17, and Oct. 6-8. For more information, contact the Catholic Center at 317-872-7651, or visit www.archindy.org/tobit.

**St. John’s**
The registration fee of $298 includes meals, snacks and overnight accommodations in separate rooms for the weekend. Registration is required. A $150 non-refundable deposit is required at the time of registration.

For more information about the program, contact Cheryl McSwain at 317-545-7861, or by email at cheryl.mcs@archindy.org to register, log on to www.archindy.org/stjohns.

**Tobin Weekend**
Tobin Weekend retreats are scheduled at Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House during 2017 on April 7-9, May 19-21, July 23-25, Sept. 15-17, and Oct. 20-22.

The numbers spoke volumes: 49 couples, 1,385 years of marriage, 124 children, 89 grandchildren and 47 great-grandchildren.

These were the figures of those who registered for the second annual archdiocesan Marriage Day Celebrations, a Mass and a weekend held for all married couples in the archdiocese at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis on Feb. 12.

“Popes often refer to marriage and family life as the salt and light of society,” says Scott Sobieski, archdiocesan coordinator of marriage and family life, a brunch of the archdiocesan Office of Life and Family Life that sponsored the event. “Marriage is what gives life freshness and flavor, and allows life to be more abundant.”

He notes that society tends to offer a negative narrative on marriage.

“This celebration shines a light on the beauty of marriage,” he says. “We’re able to see firsthand what we know to be true—that marriage offers a glimpse into the beauty of the love of God.”

**Pre Cana, Marriage Day**
**Second Sunday of February**

**Annual Marriage Day Celebration recognizes ‘goodness of God’s love and gift of marriage’**

By Natalie Hoefer

For six months of their courtship, Frank was in the Army, first for three months in California, then three more months in Hawaii.

“I really missed her,” he says. “All the other boys were going into town for a good time, but it wasn’t what I wanted.”

Joan visited him once on Easter weekend.

“Neither of us remembers an official proposal,” Frank recalls. “We just figured we’d get married.”

When Joan returned to St. Louis, she sat a wedding date, and Frank mailed her a ring.

“I got my ring from the mailman,” Joan says with a laugh.

The couple married when Joan was 18 and Frank was 17. Joan was still a few weeks from graduating from high school when they married.

“The Church saw us as two children, of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Faith played a role in their relationship right from the start, says Joan.

“We both believe that God brought us together and kept us together, and gave us this beautiful family,” she says.

Passing on the faith to one’s children is important, says Frank, noting that it’s “what you leave them with.”

“Joan’s advice to other couples is ‘It’s not always easy. You may have to give up a night out with your friends; … through sacrifice and perhaps most importantly through forgiveness, [which] calls us to not only put hurt aside but to forgive the other much [on] Monday through Friday, so church is the place we can be together.”

The couple is on their way, already expecting their first child.

The Gomezes received recognition and a papal blessing as the most recently married couple present.

“Marriage is not something we’re going to try to out live or for a year or two,” he says. “Think about this as something that is going to last until you die, the way God intended it.”

Perhaps that’s why Joan and Frank still sound like a young couple in love.

“It’s been a good 65 years,” says Frank. “I just wrote her a little note in a (clueless) devotional book we both read it. ‘You are my every day Valentine.’”

“We are just in love. We have been 63 going on 64 years. God has certainly blessed us.”

**Newlyweds Luis and Clare Gomez sound like a newlywed couple.**

The numbers spoke volumes: 49 couples, 1,385 years of marriage, 124 children, 89 grandchildren and 47 great-grandchildren.

These were the figures of those who registered for the second annual archdiocesan Marriage Day Celebrations, a Mass and a weekend held for all married couples in the archdiocese at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Indianapolis on Feb. 12.

The Gomezes received recognition and a papal blessing as the most recently married couple present.

“The ceremony shines a light on the beauty of marriage,” he says. “We’re able to see firsthand what we know to be true—that marriage offers a glimpse into the beauty of the love of God.”

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Pre Cana, Marriage Day, Tobit Weekend and One in Christ programs prepare engaged couples for marriage.
continued from page 1

Angela Dim, a Myanmar refugee of the Zomi Chin tribe and a member of St. Mark Parish, says she is “so excited” to have a priest from Myanmar. “We consider this our home country now, and it is so nice to have him,” she says. “He’s a very nice man. Most of us don’t speak English, so we really need him. We really thank God for bringing us a Burmese priest.”

So do her fellow parishioners, Mary Ellen and John Magee. Mary Ellen serves as a realtor for the Myanmar refugees of the parish. “They’re very dear to my heart. I love the diversity they bring—it warms my heart. I think it’s wonderful!” that they have a priest who speaks their language, she says.

John, an officer of the local Knights of Columbus Mtgr. Downey Council 3660, is excited about a new Burmese Knights council that is developing. “A lot of them wanted to join;” he says, “but because of the language barrier, ‘our district deputy decided it would be better for them to have their own council.” Father Bu Nyar will serve as chaplain of the new council.

Lauren Jones worships at St. Mark Church with her boyfriend Peter Kim, a member of the parish and a Myanmar refugee of the Zomi Chin tribe. “The Burmese” come to Mass faithfully, even when they don’t understand the language,” she observes. “I think it’s great for them to have someone to serve their community, go to their homes, talk to them and make them feel more a part of the community. Father Todd has been doing a great job, but he doesn’t speak Burmese. It will help new refugees have a faith figure to give them guidance.”

Kim notes that the refugees still learning English have come to Mass despite the language barrier “because of the Eucharist.” Now, he says, that barrier is gone. “We’ve been longing for this moment a long time,” he says. “We never thought we’d have a Burmese priest. Now that he’s here, we are so excited.”†

Both Burmese and English-speaking Catholics are grateful for Father Bu Nyar’s presence as well.

By Natalie Hoefer

Catholics are one, whether from Myanmar or America. Nevertheless, there are experiential impacts, cultural differences and myths about refugees that can lead to misunderstanding and division. Here are a few tips in understanding and interacting with refugees from Myanmar, as explained by natives Father David Bu Nyar and Rita Si Si Lwin, coordinator of the archdiocesan Burmese Catholic Community, and Heidi Smith, director of Indianapolis Catholic Charities’ Refugee and Immigrant Services (RIS):

• While civil war in Myanmar (formerly Burma, officially becoming Myanmar in 1989) has played out in stage since 1948, the current refugees from Myanmar started arriving in Indianapolis in the late 1990s as victims of forced relocation, or as refugees from the government and rebels opposing the government. “If the government came into a village, you [had] to do whatever they say,” says Lwin. “And when the rebellion came in, they say, ‘You are helping the Burmese government.’ That’s why they kill everyone.”

While circumstances are better now, Father Bu Nyar says, he admits previously “our political situation was very bad. There was always fighting, murder by the government and some of them, their villages were burned down and they had to flee.” According to an explanatory article on exodusfugee.org, “Most [refugees from Myanmar] have survived significant human rights violations such as persecution, war, hunger, genocide, forced relocation, rape and many other unspeakable experiences.”

The refugees fled to camps, mostly in Thailand, living there for more than a decade in many cases.

• Myanmar refugees, like refugees from many other nations, made their way to Indianapolis through RIS, which represents the archdiocese as a participant organization in a public-private partnership between the federal government and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and in Migration and Refugee Services.

• Contrary to what some believe, refugees from Myanmar who settle in Indianapolis are not given federal money for homes and cars, says Smith. “They receive very short-term financial aid that’s meant to cover rent and utilities,” she explains. “They’re very family-oriented and hardworking, so they’re able to save the money they earn very quickly. They start working in the first few months of when they arrive here.”

“As refugees, they don’t have much control over their lives, so the minute they can make a life of their own and be independent, they run for it. That’s why people see them buying homes and cars so quickly. It’s all with the money that they earned themselves.”

For more information on this and other myths about refugees in Indiana, log onto www.in.gov/isdh/24670.htm.

• Myanmar people associate more with their tribe than as “Burmese.” “At St. Pius [Parish in Indianapolis],” Lwin explains, “At St. Mark [the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis], it is mixed, but mostly Chin and Kachin.”

• Regardless of tribe, three particular Myanmar customs that show respect in their culture but can seem rude to Americans, says Lwin, are the crossing of arms over the chest, the averting of eyes and social reserve.

• “Eye contact is one of the big differences,” she says. “In Burma, eye contact is very rude. But here you have to, or people think you don’t pay attention or are not interested.”

• “Also, arms crossed [over the chest] is how we show respect. But in America if you do like that, they say that you’re not paying attention, or not interested.”

• “And no hugging—handshakes. We have a lot of issues in our parishes: The parishioners want to hug, and most of our people are shy and run away from that. We are not used to it. It’s not offensive to us, we are just shy.”

• While hugs are perhaps uncomfortable for those from Myanmar, asking one’s age is not.

“It is not a rude question in our culture,” says Lwin. “This is something we are told here—don’t ask age, don’t ask salary. But in Burma we are really proud to say, ‘Hey! I’m 25 already!’”

When we arrive here, we learn that this is not the culture here, this is very private. But we are very proud of our age!”†
Ancient symbols draw believers closer to Christ through Lent

By Paul Senz

Our society is not one that readily embraces the idea of sacrifice. There is little recognition of the profound benefits of self-denial and of giving completely of oneself to others—and to God.

All the more reason, then, for us as Catholics to actively live out the time of the penitential season of Lent. One way to prepare ourselves is to better understand the roots and symbolism of the season and the day that starts it all: Ash Wednesday.

The name of Lent comes from the Old English word for spring. In most other languages, the name of this season is derived from the Latin term “quadragesima,” or “40 days.”

The length of the season is one of its most symbolically important aspects, putting us in continuity with figures throughout salvation history who experienced penitential periods of 40 days. Biblically, the number 40 is associated with discipline, preparation and asceticism.

During the great flood, it rained for 40 days and 40 nights (Gen 7:12) and after 40 days had passed, Noah sent out a raven and later a dove to test the waters (Gen 8:6-7).

Moses was on the mountain with God for 40 days (Ex 24:18, Ex 34:28). Elijah traveled for 40 days before reaching the cave where he had a vision (1 Kgs 19:8). Ninethves was given 40 days to repent of its sins (Jon 3:4).

And most directly related to our liturgical celebration of Lent, Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness fasting and praying before beginning his public ministry (Mt 4:2).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church sums up the meaning of the season of Lent: “By the solemnity of Lent, 40 days, the Church unites herself each year to the ministry (Mt 4:2).”

The Catechism notes that “God, in the person of Christ, offers us a sacrifice of himself by undergoing the trial of 40 days in the desert” (#540). This union comes not simply from the length of the season; it is from the three pillars of Lent—praying, fasting and almsgiving—by which we live out the example set by Jesus and prepare ourselves to celebrate at Easter the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection.

Ash Wednesday is one day in particular in which we unite ourselves to the ascetic fasting of Jesus Christ. Appropriately, as it is the beginning of the season, Ash Wednesday is a sort of Lent-in-microcosm.

What significance do the ashes themselves hold? Why do we engage in this ritual each year in which ashes are placed on our foreheads in the shape of a cross? What does it have to do with Lent?

There are two primary symbols with which we often associate the ashes. First, in the Bible a mark on the forehead is something that signifies ownership. This tradition was retained in the early Church after the resurrection, as the early Christians would make the sign of the cross with their thumbs on their foreheads, indicating their complete gift of themselves to Jesus Christ.

Similarly the forehead is marked with the sign of the cross at baptism, in confirmation and at every Mass prior to the proclamation of the Gospel. Signing the forehead with ashes is one more reiteration of this ownership.

Second, and more widely recognized, ashes are biblically a sign of mourning and penance, as well as death. There are countless scriptural examples wherein people express their penitence and seek forgiveness by covering themselves in sackcloth and ashes. Eusebius of Caesarea (circa 260-339), in his Ecclesiastical History, tells of an apostate named Nalathai who came clothed in sackcloth and ashes to Pepe Zephyrinus seeking the pope’s forgiveness.

Ashes were also sprinkled on the forehead of people as they left confession to do public penance. This outward sign of an inward reality increased in prominence as time went on.

Reflect for a moment on one of the two options for words used by the minister when the ashes are administered: “Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

The first part recalls what God said to Adam when he and Eve were being expelled from the garden (Gn 3:19), and Abraham’s declaration: “I am only dust and ashes” (Gn 18:27). It is a profound reminder of the reality of death. This phrase is a strong reminder of our mortality, a reminder that the things of this world are fleeting, and that we are ultimately meant for the kingdom of God.

According to Father William Saunders, former professor at Notre Dame Graduate School of Christendom College in Alexandria, Va., this ritual is one that dates back at least to the eighth century, in the earliest extant editions of the Gregorian Sacramentary, a collection of prayers and other liturgical texts.

Lent is not merely a preparation for Easter. On Ash Wednesday, we sign ourselves as disciples of Jesus Christ, and we strive to live the following 40 days so that the world knows we are Christians.

(Paul Senz is a freelance writer living in Oregon with his family.) †

Scripture readings on Ash Wednesday a ‘rallying cry’ for complete conversion

By Father Herbert Weber

After more than four decades as a parish priest, I am still moved by the Scripture readings of Ash Wednesday. That is true even if there may seem to show a contrast of expectations.

For example, in the first reading from Joel, the prophet uses words like “Blow a trumpet . . . call an assembly” (Joel 2:15). At the same time, in the Gospel passage from St. Matthew that is proclaimed at the same Mass, we hear Jesus say, “When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you” (Mt 6:2).

Likewise, when it comes to fasting, Jesus calls people to “anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting” (Mt 6:17-18). At the same time, we place dark ashes on the foreheads of adults and children alike as a sign of their repentance.

Finally, people gather in great numbers to begin a holy 40-day season of prayer and renewal. Yet we are reminded that “when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret” (Mt 6).

Are we ignoring Jesus’ challenges to attend to the inner man of the soul without being shown? A closer look at both readings will ease some of the apparent conflict.

It is very tempting for me to spend the entire Ash Wednesday homily preaching on Matthew’s passage about almsgiving, prayer and fasting. After all, they summarize the traditional ways to seek a change of heart and a renewal of spirit through repentance.

These three Lenten observances are means to an end, not the end itself. That is why it is necessary to remember the prophet Joel’s message. He presents the “what” of the message; Matthew’s words are the “how.”

What Joel calls people to is a complete renewal of heart and spirit. His words are really a rallying cry. Thus the blowing of the trumpet is to awaken people to the need to universally and collectively change their lives.

Many people implicitly understand that Ash Wednesday is a rally of sorts. What will follow in the remainder of Lent is equally important, but people need to be given encouragement and motivation at the start.

This also explains why gathering as a group and not just praying alone is important. We gather with fellow sinners admitting our unholiness and looking to God’s mercy.

In recent years, I have begun washing off the ashes more recently, if not on Ash Wednesday shortly after each Mass. I do this in the spirit of Matthew’s Gospel reading. As I wash, I often pray that my heart will wear this sign of repentance for the next six weeks.

At the same time, I know that people need visible and exterior signs, so if the ashes are worn for that day alone, the symbol cannot, be seen, not unlike wearing a cross around one’s neck, as a sign of going beyond the immediate pleasures and gratification of this world.

Again this year we will rally for the beginning of Lent with the Scriptures reminding us of the call to true renewal.

(Father Herbert Weber is the founding pastor of St. John XXIII Parish in Perrysburg, Ohio.) †


Ashes are distributed at St. Helen Church in Grandla, Antz., in this 2016 file photo. On Ash Wednesday, we sign ourselves as disciples of Jesus Christ, and we strive to live the following 40 days so that the world knows we are Christians. (CNS photo/Bob Roller)
Faith and Family/Sean Gallagher

Learning about the plight of Christians in the Holy Land

(Second in a series)

Last week, I started to tell you about a trip I took back in 1982 when I led a group of 26 American Catholic journalists on a trip to Israel, Jordan and Egypt. Last week’s column was about our meetings in Jordan. From Jordan, we went to Israel. Our first meetings in Jerusalem were with Cynthia Dewes, a Presbyterian American who ran an orphanage in Jerusalem. Later, we met with Latin Rite Patriarch James Berrill. When we were introduced, both Archbishop Carew and Patriarch Berrill said, “I saw you on Jordanian television.” We wouldn’t run across each other again in the Jewish official, Amman and Jerusalem are only 46 miles apart, and it became obvious that both Jews and Arabs in Israel just didn’t talk to each other. All three prelates spoke about the real
eccumenism that exists in the Holy Land among the Christians. They agreed that the real task of the churches today—among Jews, as well as now—is to try to halt the exodus of Christians from the Holy Land. Young people are the natural people we’d like to go to where they can have a better life—in the United States, Canada, Australia or South America. On that day, our group met with Elias Freij, the Palestinian Christian mayor of Bethlehem at the time. Freij showed us on a map the Jewish settlement that was coming in the West Bank to build Jewish settlements. He said that he would be glad to have opened the church to the people who would then be given full citizenship, but Israel could not do that because the Arabs would then control the government.

He told us that Israel was not interested, in peace, only in the land. He said that Israel was a very powerful, and if the Palestinians wanted peace, “Why should I leave Bethlehem to go to Jordan? I was born here and my family has lived here for 50 years.”

While still in Bethlehem, we visited Bethlehem University, one of the results of Pope Paul VI’s visit in 1964. He asked the Christian Brothers to found a university to train Palestinians so they would not have to leave the Holy Land in the first place. They have a papal mandate for the years since then. I learned more about the university and have written about it.

From Bethlehem University, we went to Tantur. After Pope Paul VI’s visit to Jordan, he sent Father Theodore Hesburgh to establish an ecumenical center in the Holy Land. He did, and the University of Notre Dame continues to operate it. This is where I studied for three months in 1997 after my retirement as editor of The Criterion.

Next week: Meetings with Jewish officials. (John Fink’s recent series of columns on Church history is now available in book form from Amazon. It is titled How Could This Church Survive? A very acceptable time” and the “day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2).”

When later we want to bring those pieces back to God, we might have to spend time pondering our failures and the causes and implications of them.

Lent can be a time for good反射 on the past, so that, with a renewed faith in our whole heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning” (Jl 2:12).

As we wander on our own, pieces of our reality碎 are scattered about. When later we want to bring those pieces back to God, we might have to spend time pondering our failures and the causes and implications of them.

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The Sunday Readings
Sunday, February 26, 2017

• Isaiah 49:14-15
• 1 Corinthians 4:1-5
• Matthew 6:24-34

For its first reading for Mass this weekend, the Church presents a rather short selection from the final part of the Book of Isaiah.

By the time this passage was written, the Jews, long trapped in exile in Babylon, had returned home. The conquest of Babylonia by Persia, and the resulting ceding of the Babylonian empire, enabled them to go home.

It was a bittersweet return, however, for since few of the exiles, if any, were old enough to remember the homeland. Their parents and grandparents surely had told them about it. Everything was good, so they longed to leave Babylon and re-establish their pride in their own identity. In a way, they thought that they were going to the Promised Land.

Then the bubble burst when they arrived. The homeland was desolate. Life was miserable.

The prophets had to cope with the people’s great disappointment, bewilderment and anger with God. The following readings present God’s promise to protect and sustain the chosen people.

St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians is the source of the second reading. In the first century, Corinth was Sin City—Las Vegas and New York all rolled into one. Converts to Christianity lived in Corinth but, assuming from Paul’s second letter to them, they apparently were constantly lured away from the Gospel. There is evidence that pagans there, not Christians, were the ones to suffer.

The third reading, from St. Matthew’s Gospel, was part of that long discourse given by the Lord to his disciples about how God would succeed to eternal life. Paul had to fortify faith and resolve. Before any spiritual undertaking in Lent, we are foolish.†

Who is our master? If God is not our master, we are foolish.†

Lent can succeed, we must look at the criteria by which we judge ourselves. Lent is a liturgical opportunity for every believer to search his or her soul, to reform by rejecting sin, and finally to recommit to the Lord.

In three days, the Church will call us to observe Ash Wednesday and to begin Lent. This ancient season of penance and renewal so identified with the Catholic faith is a liturgical opportunity for every believer to search his or her soul, to reform by rejecting sin, and finally to recommit to the Lord.

Before any spiritual undertaking in Lent can succeed, we must look at the criteria by which we judge ourselves. Who is our master? If God is not our master, we are foolish.†

Relax, and don’t be so tough on yourself. Distractions during prayer are not necessarily sinful—even during prayers that are obligatory. They come to everyone—even to the saints, who have written often about this.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church recognizes the universality of the problem, calling distraction “the habitual difficulty in prayer” (#2729).

But if it exceeds the assigned amount, 50 percent of the excess is rebated to the parish from which I attended Mass elsewhere if they could credit the parish’s appeal donation to that other parish, knowing that it was struggling to make its quota.

I heartily endorse your idea and can speak from my own experience—

Q I have heard that it is sinful to let oneself be distracted in prayer. This makes sense to me as regards prayers that are obligatory: e.g., Sunday Mass, the Divine Office for priests and religious, or the penance assigned during confession.

But what if one is not required to say prayer in the morning, prior to the morning offering, for example, or weekday Mass?

Would it be better not to say those prayers at all, because then there would be no sin?

And at what point do distractions become sinful—when they are intentional of course, but what about a quick thought regarding something I must remember to do when I get home from church?

Also, when I have a weighty decision to make or a stressful situation on my hands, I like to pray the rosary because it seems to help me to think clearly and be calm. But should I not be using that time in the context of prayer to think things through?

Q I attend a very large Catholic parish that has some 4,000 families and 10,000 parishioners. Would it be appropriate for me as a donor to consider giving a contribution for our archbishop’s annual appeal to a nearby smaller parish that I sometimes visit?

Our own parish always exceeds its obligation comfortably, while I suspect that the smaller one is challenged to do so.

A Understandably, the Jews questioned their status as “chosen people” mean? It was a bittersweet return, however, so I shall not forsake.

in me.

to partake.

I always encouraged them to do exactly that. More than once, a person who was uneasy journeying to God, The Criterion, 1400 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, IN 46202-2367 or e-mail to criterion@archindy.org.

Please Hold My Hand
By Gayle Schrank

Help me Lord, to listen to You, and to carry out what You desire. Strengthen me, and open my heart.

Please Hold My Hand, so I shall not forsake.

Probable no time in history, anywhere, for anyone, utterly is without material concern. If it is not the task of making a living, or of maintaining a constant and fulfilling relationship, it is a question of health.

For Jews at the time of Jesus, things extraordinarily were bad. The temptation was to enter a “dog eat dog” world, just to survive. Hanging over everything was the Roman occupation of their homeland, which brought the empire’s hedonism, materialism and vice to the Jews. The temptation here was to join them if you could not beat them, and no one beat the Romans.

Understandably, the Jews questioned their traditional beliefs. Where was God, their protector, in all this? Whatever did their status as “chosen people” mean?

Jesus is frank in this reading. Not so much condemning the things of the world, certainly not necessities for life, Jesus instead reminds the audience that for genuine disciples only attention to God is to his will suffices.

God must be the only master. Jesus then reassures the disciples. Worry not about incidentals, but be concerned about what is truly important. Judge by God’s standards, not by the world’s.

Reflection
In three days, the Church will call us to observe Ash Wednesday and to begin Lent. This ancient season of penance and renewal so identified with the Catholic faith is a liturgical opportunity for every believer to search his or her soul, to reform by rejecting sin, and finally to recommit to the Lord.

In this will be new life, so on Easter, if they have taken advantage of Lent, Christians will experience for themselves a renewal of life.

A Q
My Journey to God
Please Hold My Hand
By Gayle Schrank

Help me Lord, to listen to You, and to carry out what You desire. Strengthen me, and open my heart.

Set my life, and soul, afire. Your words impart, so it dwells, I will drink, to partake.

I will drink, from This Love, so it dwells, in me. Please Hold My Hand, and I shall not forsake.

(Gayle Schrank is a member of St. Mary Parish in NaviStanton. This artwork, the sculpted hands of St. John Paul II, was on display in Philadelphia when the “Vatican Splendors” exhibit was open during the World Meeting of Families and the visit of Pope Francis in September 2015. (CNS photo/Nathan guest))

Question Corner/
Fr. Kenneth Doyle

All believers, even great saints, experience distraction in prayer

I Q

Editors may submit prose or poetry for faith column

The Criterion invites readers to submit original prose or poetry relating to faith or experiences of prayer for possible publication in the “My Journey to God” column.

Seasonal reflections also are appreciated. Please include name, address, parish and telephone number with submissions.

Send material for consideration to “My Journey to God,” The Criterion, 1400 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, IN 46202-2367 or e-mail to criterion@archindy.org.

Readers may submit prose or poetry for faith column
Rest in peace

Please submit in writing to our office by 10 a.m. Thursday before the week of publication; be sure to state date of death. Obituaries of archdiocesan priests serving our archdiocese are listed elsewhere in The Criterion. Order priests and religious sisters and brothers are included here, unless they are natives of the archdiocese or have other connections to it; there are separate obituaries on this page.


HALL, Robert, 65, Christ the King, Indianapolis, Feb. 10. Husband of Barb Hall. Father of Eowyn Hall. Grandfather of four.


Rest in peace

First Franciscan Sister Mary Catherine Eschenbach was a missionary, educator in Indiana

Franciscan Sister Mary Catherine Eschenbach was a missionary, educator in Indiana from 1941-47, when she was a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis in Oldenburg. She was 93.

The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on Feb. 15 at the Motherhouse Chapel in Oldenburg. Burial followed at the sisters’ cemetery.

Mary Catherine Eschenbach was born on Feb. 15, 1923, in Indianapolis where she grew up as a member of the former St. Simon Parish.

She entered the Sisters of St. Francis on Sept. 8, 1939, and professed final vows on Aug. 15, 1945.

During 77 years as a Sister of St. Francis, Sister Mary Catherine ministered as an educator for 40 years in Catholic schools in Indiana, Illinois, Missouri and Ohio. In the archdiocese, she served at St. Louis School in Batesville from 1961-68, St. Michael the Archangel School (now St. Michael-St. Gabriel Archangels School) in Indianapolis from 1968-81 and at her community’s motherhouse in Oldenburg from 1998-2017.

Sister Mary Catherine served from 1983-98 as a missionary to Papua New Guinea. While there, she helped a new native community of Franciscan women religious, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary, teach at a parish grade school and a teacher’s college, and ministered at two seminaries.

She is survived by two sisters, Leann Cox and Akaree Kriss, both of Indianapolis. Memorial gifts may be sent to the Sisters of St. Francis, P.O. Box 100, Oldenburg, IN 47036-0100.

Josephine Gottemoeller, mother of Father Mark Gottemoeller, died on Feb. 14

Josephine (Hansing) Gottemoeller, the mother of retired Father Mark Gottemoeller, died on Feb. 14. She was 90.

The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on Feb. 14 at St. Roch Church in Avon. Burial followed at Calvary Cemetery in Indianapolis.

Josephine Gottemoeller was born on July 9, 1926, in Indianapolis. She earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology and education at Maran University in Indianapolis, and a master’s degree in education at Butler University in Indianapolis.

She served as an elementary school teacher for 34 years in schools in Indianapolis, including at St. Jude School, St. Roch School and various Indianapolis Public Schools.

She was preceded in death by her husband Walter Gottemoeller, and her sister, Florence Gottemoeller, and is survived by her daughter Christine Dimman, her son Father Mark Gottemoeller, and three grandchildren.

Skiing priest

A priest wearing a cassock takes part in the annual Polish Priests and Clerics Alpine Skiing Championships for the Pope John Paul II Cup in Wista, Poland. St. John Paul was an avid skier and even hid the eventual slopes often occurring after his papacy.
Rallies held nationwide call on Congress to defund Planned Parenthood

CHICAGO (CNS)—The organizers of rallies held across the country on Feb. 11 to call for the federal defunding of Planned Parenthood said their message to Congress is to redirect taxpayer’s money to facilities that “do a better job meeting the real health needs of women and families without specializing in abortion.”

More than 15,000 people attended 229 rallies held in 45 states. Average attendance was around 75, but in some cities, crowds numbered as high as 600, according to a new release issued by the organization through Medicaid and public family planning services. Planned Parenthood performs 34 percent of U.S. abortions.

“This is a nationwide event, but at the same time, it is a local community concern,” Scheidler said in a statement. In rallying to tell “Congress to quit sending money to an organization that specializes in killing children,” participants also declared “that they do not want Planned Parenthood to continue operating in their neighborhoods.”

According to its 2014-15 annual report, Planned Parenthood receives $553.7 million annually in government health service grants and reimbursements, which is 43 percent of its overall revenue. Federal money is allocated to the organization through Medicaid and public family planning services. Planned Parenthood performs 34 percent of U.S. abortions.

“One single cent of American tax dollars should go to an organization that kills innocent human life,” said Monica Migliorini Miller, director of Citizens for a Pro-Life Society. During this year’s March for Life, held on Jan. 27, Vice President Mike Pence told the crowd that the Trump administration would work with Congress to stop taxpayer funding of abortion “and devote those resources to health care services for women across America.” On Jan. 24, the House passed the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act, making the 41-year-old Hyde Amendment permanent. The amendment, which has had to be approved each year as part of the budget for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, prohibits tax dollars from going for abortion except in cases of rape, incest or threat to the woman’s life. The Senate has yet to act on a companion bill, but President Donald Trump has said he will sign it into law when the measure reaches his desk.

On Jan. 23, Trump took executive action to reinstate what’s called the Mexico City Policy, which bans tax dollars from funding groups that promote or perform abortion in other countries.

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Novena
UNFILING NOVENA TO ST. JOSEPH
Glorious St. Joseph, foster father and protector of Jesus Christ. To you I raise my heart and my hands to implore your powerful intercession. Please obtain for me from the hand of Jesus the help and graces necessary for my spiritual and temporal welfare. I ask particularly for the grace of a happy death and the special favor I now implore (REQUEST). Oh gracious St. Joseph, through your merits you bear to Jesus Christ, and for the glory of His Name PLEASING ME, THROUGH MY PRAYERS AND OBEDIENTLY WITH MY PETITION.

PRAY FOR 9 DAYS AND PUBLISH. MAKE SURE YOU REALLY WANT WHAT YOU ASK BECAUSE IT HAS NEVER BEEN KNOWN TO FAIL.

Trust that your PRAYERS WILL BE ANSWERED.
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Announcement of Vacancy
Principal of
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Edwardsville, IL

Saint Boniface Catholic Grade School, located in Edwardsville, Illinois, is seeking applicants for the position of Principal. Interested religious or lay applicants should possess a Master’s Degree in Educational Administration, teaching experience and preferably administrative experience.

Candidates can find more information and application instructions by visiting www.st-boniface.com. The application deadline is March 15, 2017. The duties of this position begin July 1, 2017.

Full-Time Associate Coordinator of Youth Ministry Position Available
The Terre Haute Catholic Community is seeking a full-time Associate Coordinator of Youth Ministry to work collaboratively with the Coordinator of Youth Ministry to facilitate a Total Youth Ministry program in five city parishes of Terre Haute, Indiana for Grades 9-12. This includes, but is not limited to: religious education and Confirmation programs, retreats and prayer services, mission trips, service projects, leadership development of students and volunteers, and fundraising.

Applicants should be a practicing Catholic and possess a love for and knowledge of the Catholic faith, as well as a strong commitment to the faith development of young people. The applicant must have the ability to organize, collaborate with other ministerial leaders, work well with volunteers, exhibit good leadership skills, creativity and initiative. Professional work ethic and excellent communication skills, both written and verbal, are essential. Bachelor’s Degree and Youth Ministry programming experience preferred. Possession of a Youth Ministry Certificate or the willingness to obtain one is essential. Some overnight travel, frequent evening and weekend work is required.

Direct Inquiries by March 17, 2017 to:
Barbara Black
Youth Ministry Supervisor
2322 N 13 1/2 St., Terre Haute, IN 47804
812-466-1231 • barb@shj.org
Becht said the key to renewing the Church’s ministry to and with young adults is to go out to where they are—and to come to them. “Waiting for them to come where we are,” he said, “is not our idea is to go … to be with them in their world and ask what their needs are,” she said. “How do they meet their need for belonging? How do they meet their need to come together as a Christian community? If they’re not coming to church, how are they meeting that need?”

Saint Meinrad plans on working over the next five years with 12 to 15 parishes within a 250-300 mile-wide radius of the southern Indiana seminary.

Each parish participating in the program will assess itself in regard to young adults, and seek to learn about this population group that is already within it and those who live in its vicinity but are not connected to the parish.

The parish would then build up a core group of volunteer ministry leaders who would receive training from Saint Meinrad to effectively reach out to young adult Catholics in the broader community and help them build up their faith.

A key way that the Saint Meinrad program will promote this is through the encouragement of an intentional life of faith and prayer in the young adults’ life at home.

Becht says Saint Meinrad is well positioned to take this approach to young adult ministry because its monastic and seminary communities do this themselves every day on “the hill” on which they live in southern Indiana.

“It’s the rhythm that takes place every day on the hill—prayer, work, common meals,” she said. “The living out of the Christian life that takes place on the hill is a model for the rest of the Church.”

One way that Saint Meinrad will foster a life of prayer and rituals at home for young adults is through the development of a prayer book for them.

“We hope to use it as a resource book for young people in creating their Catholic Christian home,” Becht said. “We hope to help them consider how, when, and whom to invite into their domestic church as they discern their vocation. In turn, our domestic church supports the parish via interaction, connection, support and engagement.”

Father Denis said helping young adults build up faith rituals in their daily life can be a way to connect them to parishes.

“The parish is an essential place for the program to gain life,” he said. “And so our hope is that the domestic rituals being practiced through the program lead our participants to a more fruitful, deeper appreciation of the liturgical life of the parish.”

St. Bartholomew Parish in Columbus may be one of the faith communities that Saint Meinrad will work with through this program.

Father Andrew Syberg, St. Bartholomew’s associate pastor, said his parish has young adults among its members, but also acknowledges that the broader Columbus community has many Catholics in their 20s and 30s who are not practicing their faith.

“There are tons of young families, tons of kids here,” he said. “But then there is a lot of young adults who are single and still doing their discernment. We have to do something. I don’t want to lose these people.”

St. Bartholomew, Father Syberg said, offers young adult service opportunities, times of prayer and ecursional adoration, and the chance to help with its youth group.

“At this point, you’re throwing whatever you can out there and seeing what sticks to the wall,” he said.

Although it can be challenging to reach out to young adult Catholics in the broader community, Father Syberg said that they can play a vital role in the Church once they become engaged with their faith.

“When you can convince them and they get on board, there are few groups of people who will become more on fire for the faith than young adults will,” he said. “The idea is to reclaim that identity that, for a young adult, can very easily get lost in the discordant battling of the world.”

Becht said that a main purpose of Saint Meinrad’s program will be to help parishes regularly re-examine and adjust their outreach to young adults to make it more effective.

“They have to constantly have a finger on the pulse [of young adults], know what is happening in the young adult community, and respond to their needs,” she said. “It’s not about expecting people to come to the Church and do what the Church does. The Church needs to respond to the needs of the people.”

“Helping our young adults navigate this world through the lens of faith is becoming more important with each passing week,” Father Syberg said. “It’s a most worthy conversation to have.’”

(Grants communities interested in learning more about Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology’s program to help parishes reach out to young adult Catholics can contact Tammy Becht at 812-357-6349 or at tbecht@stmeinrad.edu. †)

The Criterion  Friday, February 24, 2017  Page 16

ASH continued from page 1

He also said the day—which is the start of Lent in the Latin Church—reminds people that they are not always “as we should be, and it is a chance to “stand together with people and be reminded of our frailty and brokenness of our longing to do better.”

“This practice is particularly attractive to us today because it is an embodied way to live out faith, to witness to Christian identity in the world,” said Timothy O’Malley, director of the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy at the University of Notre Dame, where he also is a professor of New Testament and early Christianity.

He said that the only way to explain why millions of people identify themselves “as mortal sinners for an entire day” is Jesus Father Bruce Mollor, the Edward A. Malloy professor of Catholic studies at Vanderbilt University Divinity School in Nashville, Tenn., thinks the appeal of Ash Wednesday is partly because participants receive a “marker of identity” as Catholics.

The day also has rich symbolism, he said, of both flawed humanity and mortality. He pointed out that even though a large percentage of Catholics do public penitence by being sprinkled with ashes. But later in the Middle Ages, the practice of penance and marking of ashes became something for the whole Church.

Ash Wednesday also is one of two days, along with Good Friday, that are obligatory days of fasting and abstinence for Catholic adults—meaning no eating meat and eating only one full meal and two smaller meals.

The other key aspect of the day is that it is the start of the 40 days of prayer, fasting and almsgiving of Lent.

“Ash Wednesday can be a little bit like New Year’s Day,” noted Father Mike Schmitz, chaplain for Newman Catholic Campus Ministries at the University of Minnesota Duluth. He said the day gives Catholics “a place to clearly begin something new that we know we need to do.”

Purdue University College of Pharmacy is seeking volunteers to participate in a study to determine if hormones called Progesterone and Testosterone can reduce the risk of a heart rhythm abnormality.

If you qualify for the study:
• You will complete 4 hour visits at the IU Health Indiana Clinical Research Center (ICRC) located on the IUPUI campus
• Prior to the 2nd, 3rd and 4th visit, you will take Progesterone, Testosterone or a Placebo for 7 days
• During the 2nd, 3rd and 4th visits, you will receive a medication called Corvert, have your blood taken and ECGs performed throughout the visit

$500 if you complete the study.