

Parish data reviewed at event

More than 100 clergy, religious and laity attend Diocesan Study Week.

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FaithLife

POPE QUOTE

INSPIRING WORDS FROM POPE FRANCIS:

"Care for the poor is an essential element of our Christian life and witness."

www.ErieRCD.org

BI-WEEKLY NEWSPAPER OF THE DIOCESE OF ERIE

February 1, 2015

Vatican astronomer coming to Erie



CNS photo

Jesuit Brother Guy Consolmagno, the official astronomer with the Vatican Observatory, is pictured with the observatory's meteorite collection.

A starry night is planned at Gannon University in Erie Feb. 4.

Brother Guy Consolmagno, SJ, the official astronomer and planetary scientist with the Vatican Observatory in Rome, will deliver the inaugural Bishop Donald Trautman Lecture in Catholic Theology.

Titled "God, Astronomy and the Search for Elegance," the lecture will begin at 7 p.m. at Gannon's Yehi Alumni Room, which is accessible through the Waldron Campus Center, W. 6th or 7th Street entrances.

The Vatican Observatory is the official astronomical research institute of the Catholic Church. Brother Consolmagno also serves as curator of the observatory's meteorite collection.

Last year, Brother Consolmagno was awarded the Carl Sagan Medal for outstanding communication by an active planetary scientist to the general public by the American Astronomical Society. He also co-authored the book *Would You Baptize an Extraterrestrial?* (2014, Doubleday Religious Publishing Group) with Jesuit Father Paul Mueller.

The volume explores a variety of questions at the crossroads of faith and reason: How do you reconcile the the Big Bang theory with Genesis? Was the Star of Bethlehem a pious religious story or an actual description of astronomical events? What really happened between Galileo and the Catholic Church? Will the universe come to an end?

Holding a doctorate from the University of Arizona's Lunar and Planetary Laboratory, he did post-doctoral research and teaching at Harvard College Observatory and MIT, and served in the U.S. Peace Corps in Kenya for two years, teaching astronomy and physics.

In 1989, he entered the Society of Jesus, and took vows as a brother in 1991. His research is centered on the connections between meteorites and asteroids, and the origin and evolution of small bodies in the solar system. During 1996, he took part in the Antarctic Search for Meteorites, ANSMET, where he discovered a number of meteorites on the ice fields of Antarctica. An asteroid was named in his honor by the International Astronomical Union in 2000: 4597 Consolmagno, also known as "Little Guy."

Brother Consolmagno believes in the need for science and religion to work alongside one another rather than as competing ideologies.

Reservations for the lecture are encouraged by emailing grande001@gannon.edu or calling 814-871-7334.

People helping people

Catholic Services Appeal kicks off 2015 campaign

BY MARY SOLBERG | FAITHLIFE

In the past year, 75-year-old Ted Bleech of Warren has been hospitalized for triple bypass surgery and for cancer. He has seen first-hand the power of giving and receiving.

"In our neighborhood, people took care of our yard and all the shoveling this year because I haven't been able to do it," Bleech says. "People need to help people."

The care that he and his wife, Arminta, have received makes this year's Catholic Services Appeal, go to

www.ErieRCD.org/csaa



To watch a video about the Catholic Services Appeal, go to www.ErieRCD.org/csaa

of Erie that much more meaningful. For many years they have contributed to the annual campaign, knowing their donation would support education and service programs and all of the ministries that care for the neediest in the 13 counties of the diocese.

They know what it's like to give, but now they understand, more than ever, what a blessing it is to receive.

"People helping people is what it's all about. There are always people struggling with something. It's necessary to take care of your neighbor," Bleech says.

As president of the Holy Redeemer Parish Council, he is one of the callers who remind parishioners to make a pledge to the annual appeal. It's a system that has worked well for the Warren parish, which typically surpasses its goal every year by more than 300 percent.

"Ted and his wife are faithful people. Ted tries to fill his days with good things and the church is first on his list," says Father Jim Gutting, pastor.

Like all parishes that exceed their Catholic Services Appeal goal, Holy Redeemer gets to keep the extra funds that are raised. In 2014, the parish was able to

pair sidewalks in front of the church and install new heating units and replace doors.

"We have a very faithful group of callers who are devoted to the Catholic Services Appeal," Father Gutting adds.

In Erie, John Blakeslee, president of Arthur F. Schultz Company, is also committed to the campaign.

Longtime parishioners of St. Jude Parish, Erie, he and his wife, Janet, understand that giving to the Catholic Services Appeal ensures the future of so many ministries of the diocese, especially education. John graduated from Erie Catholic schools and the couple's children all attended Catholic schools through college. Janet is a kindergarten teacher at Our Lady's Christian School.



Photo by Mary Solberg

Bill Grant, director of Stewardship and Annual Giving for the diocese, displays this year's Catholic Services Appeal poster.

"It's important that we do as much as we can to keep Catholic education affordable or it will disappear. We don't want that," Blakeslee says.

As moderator of St. Jude's finance council, Blakeslee is happy to see that individual parishes benefit along with the wider needs of the Catholic Church.

"It's the best of both worlds," Blakeslee says.

On Feb. 15, Commitment Sunday, the Diocese of Erie will kick off the Catholic Services Appeal in parishes. The goal this year is to raise \$4.1 million.

Bill Grant, director of Stewardship and Annual Giving for the diocese, and his assistant, Amanda Phanco, have been preparing for the 2015 appeal by meeting with clergy and parish staff. It's a significant un-

dertaking for parishes that must meet their diocesan assessment and, hopefully, raise additional money.

In 2014, the diocese raised nearly \$6 million, with about \$2 million remaining in parishes. The theme of this year's appeal is, "Be a Reflection of Christ's Love."

"One of the highest compliments someone can pay you is that your life is a reflection of Christ's love," Grant says. "By giving, people are doing just that."

To make a pledge to the 2015 Catholic Services Appeal, parishioners are asked to use pledge envelopes available at all Masses in every church and mission of the diocese the weekend of Feb. 14-15.

Donors have the entire year to fulfill their pledge. Options include a 10-month installment plan or payment in full.

What is the 'seal of confession?'

BY MARY SOLBERG | FAITHLIFE

Editor's Note: The U.S. Supreme Court last month declined to hear an appeal of a Louisiana ruling that would force a Catholic priest to disclose what he heard in a sacramental confession, or face imprisonment. By declining to hear the appeal, the Supreme Court allowed the Louisiana decision to stand.

The Diocese of Baton Rouge has stated that violation of the confessional seal "cuts to the core of the Catholic faith."

Father Christopher Singer has heard plenty of confessions in his 11 years as a priest of the Diocese of Erie. As an intermediary between God and man, he tries to abide by one piece of sage advice that he received as a seminarian at the North American College in Rome: "Pray for the gift of forgetting."

According to Book IV of the Code of Canon Law (983, 984), a Catholic priest is bound by what is commonly known as the "seal of confession." A priest is obliged to not reveal—under any circumstances—the content of a sacramental confession. That means he cannot reveal to anyone who the penitent was, what he or she said, what penance may have been given, or even if that person came for forgiveness.

Additionally, the priest cannot take any action based upon what he heard in a sacramental confession.

"This is understood as part of the sacramental ministry of the priest and most civil courts—by and large—respect this seal," Father Singer says.

Having earned a degree in canon law and as chancellor of the diocese, Father Singer is well-versed on the

Ways that sins are forgiven:

- ✦ Baptism forgives all sin, original and actual.
- ✦ Catholics are encouraged to take all sins to the sacrament of penance, but they must take mortal (or serious) sins to the sacrament.
- ✦ During the penitential act at Mass, a person publicly admits to venial sins that might be an obstacle to receiving the sacraments. The priest offers a prayer of absolution.
- ✦ Going to God in personal prayer, asking for forgiveness.

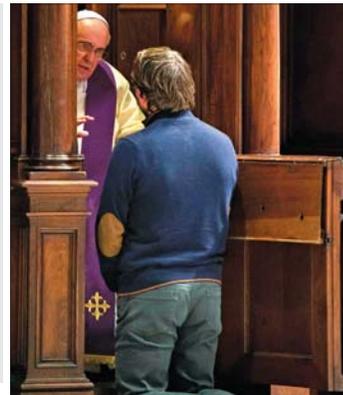
A precept of the church

(Canon Law 989): Catholics are obligated to confess serious sins at least once a year.

particulars of church doctrine. He clarifies an important distinction between sacramental confession and a casual conversation in which someone might mention sins to a priest.

A sacramental confession requires ritual prayer and an acknowledgement by both the priest and the penitent that the confession is a personal, grace-filled encounter. It is not to be confused with a casual conversation with a priest, in which someone may admit sins or ask for spiritual guidance.

"A priest has to be sensitive to the fact that some people may not know what a formal confession is," Father Singer says. "If someone simply speaks to a priest, this is not a sacramental confession."



CNS photo

Pope Francis hears a confession at St. Peter's Basilica in 2014.

According to canon law, the seal of confession also binds to confidentiality anyone who serves as an interpreter for a penitent or even someone who inadvertently overhears a confession.

If someone is waiting in line to enter a confessional and can hear a penitent speaking loudly or clearly, they should move from the area, Father Singer advises.

"A sacramental confession," Father Singer says, "is a very personal encounter with God and the mystical body of Christ."

Often times, sins admitted in confession are common to all of humankind, but sometimes they're mortally serious. Like a doctor who has done countless physicals, a priest doesn't make value judgments about an individual as much as he listens to what the person is saying, thus assisting in reconciliation with God.

"To hear a confession is a joyful burden," Father Singer says. "In many ways, it's the highest honor to be a channel of forgiveness between God and his people."

Pope Francis meets press

ABOARD THE PAPAL FLIGHT FROM MANILA, Philippines (CNS)—Pope Francis has announced that his trip to the United States in September will take him to



CNS photo

Pope Francis talks to reporters.

Philadelphia, New York and Washington, D.C.—where he intends to canonize Blessed Junipero Serra. In remarks during an hour-long news conference Jan. 19 en route to Rome after his weeklong trip to Asia, the pontiff said he wished he could canonize Blessed Junipero in California, the 18th-century Franciscan's mission field. Instead, the pope said he planned to perform the canonization ceremony at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, saying Washington would be a fitting location because a statue of Blessed Junipero stands in the U.S. Capitol.

The pope also confirmed he would visit the United Nations in New York. He had already announced his participation in the late-September World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia.

Also during the mid-air news conference, Pope Francis discussed what he called "responsible parenthood."

He reaffirmed his rejection of population-control programs as an example of ideological colonization and his praise of Blessed Paul VI for defending Catholic teaching against contraception.

But "this does not mean a Christian must make children one after another," the pope said, citing the case of a woman who became pregnant an eighth time after giving birth to seven children via cesarean section.

"Does she want to leave seven orphans?" he said. "This is tempting God," adding that church teaching provides for "many licit ways" to limit reproduction.



■ Oprah Winfrey to air interview with Erie's Sister Joan Chittister, OSB



Contributed photo

Sister Joan Chittister, OSB, talks with Oprah Winfrey for "Super Soul Sunday" on OWN.

LOS ANGELES—Erie Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister will appear on "Super Soul Sunday" with Oprah Winfrey March 1 on the Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN) from 11 a.m. to noon. The interview will be simulcast on Oprah.com, Facebook.com/supersoulsunday, and on Facebook.com/OWNTV.

"Super Soul Sunday" is a daytime series featuring Winfrey's interviews with top thinkers and spiritual leaders.

The author of more than 50 books, Sister Joan will talk with Winfrey about ways of looking at God, the role of women in the church and in society, and the di-

vinity of merging spirituality and science.

Sister Joan is recognized as an outspoken advocate of justice, peace and equality. In February, her new book, *Between the Dark and the Daylight*, will be published by Random House.

A founding member of The Global Peace Initiative of Women, a partner organization of the United Nations, Sister Joan works to develop a worldwide network of women peace-builders. As its co-chair, she has facilitated gatherings of spiritual leaders throughout the Middle East, in Asia, Africa, the Far East and Europe.

■ Leaders urge peace between Israel, Palestine

WASHINGTON (USCCB)—Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders of 25 national religious organizations recently wrote to President Obama urging "a renewed, determined" effort to work with Israel and the Palestinian Authority to achieve a negotiated two-state peace agreement.

The religious leaders warned that the Gaza war "demonstrated once again that there is no military solution to the conflict."

The signers of the letter represent the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East. Representing U.S. bishops are Bishop Oscar Cantú of Las Cruces, N.M., and Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick, retired archbishop of Washington.

■ New cardinals asked to celebrate modestly

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Writing to the 20 new cardinals he will create in February, Pope Francis said they should graciously accept that their friends, family and faithful will want to celebrate, but they also should ensure that the celebrations are not exaggerated.

"Accept it with humility. Only do so in a way that in these celebrations there does not creep in a spirit of worldliness that intoxicates more than grapples on an empty stomach, disorienting and separating one from the cross of Christ," Pope Francis said.

The letter was published Jan. 23 in *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican newspaper. Pope Francis also told the 20 cardinals he will create Feb. 14 that their new role in the church is a call to greater service.

Vatican's child-sized mummy pronounced a fake



CNS photo

VATICAN CITY—By using imaging technology and other state-of-the-art lab tests, Vatican experts discovered that a child-sized mummy in its museum collection is a "pseudo-mummy" made up of a few human bones from the Middle Ages. The mummy is wrapped in ancient bandages, but is considered a fake. Such fakes were passed off to unsuspecting European collectors during the so-called "mummy-mania" of the 19th century.

More than 500 attend pro-life breakfast Speaker examines 'culture of death'

Paul Kengor has six biological children, one adopted child and one foster child. But as a *New York Times* best-selling author whose specialty is faith and politics, he lives the pro-life ideals and preaches them, too.

Kengor was the keynote speaker on Jan. 17 at the 37th annual Pro-Life Breakfast, sponsored by People for Life, Erie. More than 500 people attended, along with Bishop Lawrence Persico and Bishop Emeritus Donald Trautman, as well as several public officials.

A professor of political science and the executive director of the Center for Vision & Values at Grove City College in Mercer County, Kengor has written such books as the series *God and Ronald Reagan*, *God and George W. Bush* and *God and Hillary Clinton* (ReganBooks, HarperCollins). Each of the volumes covers the abortion issue, something that Kengor has frequently discussed in his public speeches and as a regular contributor on the radio and television circuit.

"I've always been pro-life, even in college when I was not religious," says Kengor, who holds a

"How did we get to this point?"
— Paul Kengor



Paul Kengor, Ph.D.

doctorate from the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs.

Kengor's address, titled "Death's Progress," was a play on the book title, *Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan. His talk reflected on what St. John Paul II called the "culture of death" in our society.

"I want to explain how and why this is happening," Kengor says.

When Planned Parenthood was first founded nearly 100 years

ago, its founder, Margaret Sanger, said she wanted birth control but not abortion. Now, he says, Planned Parenthood is the largest abortion provider in the country.

When Kengor was in college some 25 years ago, pro-choice friends would say they want to see abortion safe, legal and rare, and that they would never ask the public to pay for abortions.

"Now here we are in 2015 and if I object to using taxpayer money to pay for abortions, I'm called names. How did we get to this point?" Kengor asked.

Kengor is happy with recent data that shows a decrease in the number of abortions in the United States, but he is still concerned that half the country still believes that it should be legal.

"If the country starts subsidizing it through government health care, then I'm afraid we may see more of it," Kengor says.



Editor's Notes

Mary SOLBERG

As a Roman Catholic married to a Lutheran, I took great comfort in the words of Pope Francis last month during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

In remarks to a Finnish ecumenical delegation visiting the Vatican, Pope Francis encouraged continued progress in theological dialogue between the Lutheran and Catholic churches. A Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, signed 15 years ago between the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, can "produce further fruits of reconciliation and cooperation," the pope said.

"We are reminded that the source of all grace is the Lord himself, and that his gifts transform those who receive them, making them witnesses to the true life that is in him alone," Pope Francis said.

Without a doubt, God has been the "source of all grace" in my 21-year marriage to a Norwegian Lutheran. Roger is not permitted to receive Communion in the Catholic Church, but has faithfully attended Mass with our three sons and me all these years. On a daily basis, he lives the true Christian ideals of forgiveness, kindness, patience, and love of God and others.

We have a common faith, but two religious traditions, something that Pope Francis calls "a shared Christian witness very much needed in the face of mistrust, insecurity, persecution, pain and suffering experienced so widely in today's world."

In such a world, Christian unity is not only a nice thought, it's essential.

This month marks the 10th anniversary of the murder of Sister Dorothy Mae Stang, a 73-year-old nun of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur who fought for the

preservation of the Amazon Rainforest in the Brazilian state of Pará.

The documentary *They Killed Sister Dorothy* was directed by Daniel Junge and narrated by Martin Sheen. It's said to be a powerful film that traces the reasons for the nun's death and the subsequent trial of those convicted of her murder.

Because this is Academy Award season, I plan to watch the documentary, which in 2009 made the short list of nominations for Best Documentary Feature.

There were a number of actions taken by legislators and the U.S. Supreme Court in January. These will be of significant interest to the Catholic Church in the coming months.

■ The U.S. House of Representatives passed the "No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion and Abortion Insurance Full Disclosure Act of 2015. Having bipartisan support, the pro-life bill passed the House by a vote of 242-179. It asks for a permanent, government-wide policy against taxpayer subsidies for abortion and abortion coverage. It also requires health plans offered under the Affordable Care Act to disclose the extent of coverage for abortion and the amount of any surcharge for that coverage to consumers.

■ The U.S. Supreme Court granted a request to review the November 2014 decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit upholding the constitutionality of same-sex marriage laws in Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee. Archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone of San Francisco, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage, said the high court's decision to examine the state laws "may be the most significant court decision" since 1973's *Roe v. Wade* that legalized abortion.

Mary Solberg is the editor of *FaithLife*.
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Twitter: @ERIECRDSolberg

Marching for life in D.C.



Contributed photos

Students and chaperones from St. George School in Erie enjoyed a brisk walk during the Jan. 22 March for Life rally in Washington, D.C. Their red hats were donated by members of the Knights of Columbus.



Many parishioners of Catholic churches in the Meadville area traveled by bus to Washington, D.C., for the March for Life rally last month.

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Seeking SOCIAL MEDIA DEVELOPER

The Diocese of Erie is hiring a full-time social media developer to work with the Office of Communications and the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry. The social media developer will work in concert with both offices and help the Diocese of Erie shape its online presence in an attractive, contemporary way, grounded in the overall mission of the diocese.

Successful candidate criteria

- Create and develop marketing material, includes copy and graphics
- Help with branding and promotion in both print and social media
- Be familiar with the basics of creating apps and be able to offer administrative support as needed
- Oversee Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Vine and other social media for the diocese
- Strong writing skills; work in short-form video production

Qualifications College degree in communications or related field and a heart for ministry. This is an entry-level position.

Full description and application form
<http://www.ErieRCD.org/employment.asp>

Applications are being accepted until February 15, 2015.
Please send a letter of application and resume to:
Anne-Marie Welsh, Director of Communications
St. Mark Catholic Center, P.O. Box 10397, Erie, Pa 16514-0397.

POSITION OPENING
Family Life Director

The Diocese of Erie has an opening for a full-time Family Life Director. Under the umbrella of Catholic Charities, the Family Life Director is a minister of the Diocese of Erie who is responsible for imparting the teachings of the Catholic Church regarding marriage and family life.

Qualifications

- Master's degree in family studies, pastoral ministry, social work or related field. Candidates with an undergraduate degree who are currently pursuing advanced credentials may be considered.
- Three years of professional experience.
- An active, practicing Catholic in good standing.
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills.
- Knowledge of the psycho-social and spiritual aspects of marriage and family life.

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See the full position profile and details for applying at www.ErieRCD.org/employment.asp
Applications will be accepted until Friday, Feb. 13, 2015.

News Briefs

National Catholic Sisters Week requests stories of sisters who made a difference

ERIE—The second annual National Catholic Sisters Week, in conjunction with National Women's History Month, will take place March 8-14. National Catholic Sisters Week was created to honor and to focus on the lives of religious women who have been on the forefront of education, healthcare, social justice, women's rights, homelessness and countless other ministries.

In anticipation of this year's event, organizers are gathering comments and stories about the impact of Catholic sisters. The reflections may be used in various publications and/or electronic media by the congregations and/or the Diocese of Erie. The public is invited to be part of the celebration by sharing a positive story or experience about a sister or sisters who made a difference in their lives. Thoughts also can be shared on the impact of Catholic sisters in our diocese, the community and the world. Email comments/stories to prdr@sserie.org or mail them to:

Stephanie Hall
Director of Communications and Public Relations
Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania
5031 West Ridge Road
Erie, PA 16506-1249

Mercyhurst show on display through March

ERIE—The ninth edition of the Friends of Mercyhurst University Art Show will remain on display throughout the first floor of Old Main on the Erie campus until the end of March.

Each year, Mary Gamble, wife of university President Tom Gamble, organizes an eclectic exhibit of works by artists with connections to Mercyhurst, including faculty, students, alumni and longtime supporters. Visitors are welcome to view the show daily between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. The show is free. For more information, visit www.mercyhurst.edu/events.

Sharon parish plans a Bible study

SHARON—St. Stanislaus Kostka-Holy Trinity Church, Sharon, will host "A Biblical Walk through the Mass," a Bible study beginning Feb. 24 from 6:30 to 8 p.m. and continuing every Tuesday through March 24. For information or to register, call Nancy Radachy at 724-347-7526, or email saintstans@roadrunner.com by Feb. 13. A \$20 registration fee includes a work study set.

Prince of Peace bowl-a-thon to strike out poverty in the Shenango Valley

SHARON—The Prince of Peace Center in Farrell is holding a bowl-a-thon March 8 at Thornton Hall Bowling Lanes in Sharon. Proceeds will benefit the center's emergency services program and family supportive services.

Registration begins at noon; bowling begins at 12:30 p.m. The deadline to register is Feb. 23.

Go to www.princeofpeacecenter.org/events/2015-bowlathon/ to print and send in the form to register as a bowler.

There is a minimum of \$30 per person, which includes three games, a t-shirt, shoe rental and lunch. Bowlers may solicit the \$30 or contribute it themselves. All are welcome to solicit personal sponsorships above the \$30 minimum.

Sign up before Feb. 23 to be guaranteed a free t-shirt. To register by phone, call Erica at Prince of Peace Center at 724-346-5777.

Scholarship created for Villa Maria grads

ST. BONAVENTURE, N.Y.—An Erie couple with allegiances to both St. Bonaventure University and Erie's Villa Maria Academy has created an endowment to provide a significant scholarship for a Villa graduate who attends the New York university.

The unidentified couple recently advised Villa's principal, Sister Mary Drexler, SSJ, that the endowment will provide—in perpetuity—a \$5,000 scholarship. The scholarship will be in addition to what the selected students would earn naturally through the university's regular scholarship programs.

"We are thrilled by this opportunity to build even stronger relationships with the Villa Maria Academy family, as we share an important mission to provide access to high quality Catholic education at the high school and post-secondary levels," said Sister Margaret Carney, OSF, president of St. Bonaventure.

Sister Mary Drexler said the opportunity provides a pathway to continue Catholic education.

"These students will emerge as the Catholic leaders of tomorrow," Sister Mary said.

The scholarship will be awarded to a senior from Villa who enrolls as a freshman at St. Bonaventure starting September 2015. All Villa Maria Academy seniors who applied to St. Bonaventure University by Jan. 31, 2015, will be considered for the inaugural award. The recipient will be identified in early March.

Data of parish life reviewed at Study Week

BY MARY SOLBERG | FAITHLIFE

"When leaders in various fields ask me for advice, my response is always the same: dialogue, dialogue, dialogue."

—Pope Francis to leaders in Brazil, July 27, 2013

Nearly 120 leaders of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Erie took the advice of Pope Francis and gathered for much discussion at the annual Diocesan Study Week Jan. 12-15.

Titled "Emerging Models of Ministry in Today's Church," the event attracted clergy, religious and lay leaders of parishes throughout the diocese—including Bishop Lawrence Persico and Bishop Emeritus Donald Trautman.

The week of study and discussion came at a particularly important time in the history of the diocese. A two-year pastoral planning process has been underway since last fall, with parishes, schools and ministries collecting data and determining the best ways to advance the Catholic faith in the sprawling 13-county diocese.

"The information offered here was good and I think the feedback we gave one another was important as we begin this process of planning," said Msgr. Richard Siefert, pastor of St. Catherine of Siena Parish, DuBois, and chair of the Parish Listening Task Force of the strategic planning effort.

Diocesan Study Week featured seven sessions, most of them led by Mark Mogilka, the director of the Department of Stewardship and Pastoral Services for the Diocese of Green Bay, Wisc. His research on the emerging shape of parishes across the United States complements current planning efforts in the Diocese of Erie.

Mogilka discussed many aspects of church life in the U.S., citing that one-third of all Catholics in America today are Latinos, with more than half of Hispanic Catholics identifying themselves as charismatics.

Alan Meitler, whose consulting firm is collaborating with the diocese in its planning process, spent one day presenting preliminary data that has been collected so far from parishes and schools. It was the first time that many diocesan leaders were able to see what the data may mean for their ministries and for the people they serve.



Photo by Mary Solberg

The Meitler planning firm's Alan Meitler, center, talks to Deacon Richard Schwem, left, and Mercy Sister Tina Geiger and Benedictine Sister Marian Wehler during a break at the Diocesan Study Week.

According to Meitler, there are 16 percent fewer registered parish households in the diocese today than 10 years ago. And average Mass attendance declined 26 percent from 2006 to 2014.

National and diocesan trends, Meitler said, show a decline in infant baptisms and marriages.

"We had many meetings and then took the leap and sold everything and built new. There's a lot we learned about growth and letting go," Kreidler said.

While the number of permanent deacons has increased significantly. Today, there is one priest for every 1,388 Catholics in the diocese.

"We have to get prepared for some of the impact," Meitler said.

He then asked his audience how such changes could affect their ministries over the next five years.

Mary Lou Kreidler, a member of All Saints Parish in Waterford, talked about the long process of consolidating the former St. Cyprian and St. Matthew-in-the-Woods parishes.

Clergy Continuing Education and the Department of Religious Education co-sponsored the Diocesan Study Week.

Christ the King Chapel undergoes restoration

Donations fund \$400,000 project

BY FAITHLIFE STAFF

Christ the King Chapel on the campus of Mercyhurst University in Erie is undergoing a \$400,000 renovation this winter, thanks to donations from alumni and friends.

According to Msgr. David Rubino, vice president for external affairs, the entire project is being funded by grants and gifts from donors, including a 50th anniversary gift from the Class of 1964.

"We're really grateful for that," Msgr. Rubino said. "I think the chapel holds a special place in the hearts of most people who have graduated from Mercyhurst."

Christ the King Chapel has been at the center of the spiritual life of the E. 38th Street campus since it was built in 1933. It has served as the site of innumerable alumni weddings and other events over the past 80 years.

Restoration work does not include any major changes to the Gothic architecture or overall look of the landmark. Instead, renovations include a fresh coat of paint, a new finish for the wooden pews, and a new lighting system that brightens the interior and shows off the iconic mural that surrounds the sanctuary.

"We have a beautiful chapel here, and it's very important to our mission and to who we are," said Tom Gamble, president.

Renovations began in early January, forcing the chapel to close through the winter. It is expected



Mercyhurst University photo

Christ the King Chapel is expected to re-open in March after a \$400,000 renovation.

to re-open at the end of March. Meanwhile, all Sunday Masses are being celebrated in the nearby Taylor Little Theatre, with daily Masses at the Prince of Peace Chapel in the student union.

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Seminarians meet with Serra Club



ERIE—The Serra Club of Erie hosted a dinner Jan. 14 for 11 seminarians at St. Mark Seminary, Erie. Guests included Father Michael Kesicki, Father Nicholas Rouch, Sister Mary Andrew Himes, RSM, and Joan Fye of the Diocese of Erie. Thirty-eight Serrans and their spouses or guests attended the event at the Erie Maennerchor Club.

Seminarians described the lay person in their lives who had the biggest impact on their decision to consider the priesthood. The Serra Club is an organization of men and women committed to fostering vocations to the priesthood and religious life through prayer and other activities.

Pictured, left to right, are: Gretchen Lorei, seminarian Benjamin Knopf, and Serra Club president, Dennis Deiner. Knopf is from the Diocese of Buffalo and is in his senior year at Gannon University.

Maternity Closet in Smethport benefits from baby shower



SMETHPORT—St. Eulalia's Maternity Closet in Smethport received more than \$1,100 in cash donations and an additional two truckloads of new baby items contributed at a baby shower hosted by Dr. Terry Foust, Amy Foust, and their daughter, Sophia. Many area businesses donated baskets that were raffled off at the shower. St. Eulalia's Maternity Closet is open the first Saturday of every month, providing diapers, wipes, clothes and equipment to families in need.

Pictured, left to right, are: Nikki Caramia, Marie DeRenzis, Patti Tingley, Connie Weitzel, Elizabeth Bucheit, Nancy Chitester, Karen Robbins, Melanie Hensel, Mary Keen, Kay Lee, Mary Larsen, Amy Foust, Linda Gagat and Father James Campbell. Missing from photo are Debbie Cochran, Marlene Fantasky, Patti Giannetti, Gert Hall, Julie Handwerdger, Karen Larsen and Pat Turton.

And the Golden Apple Award goes to...



ERIE—Vickie Bayle, a fourth-grade teacher at St. Luke School, Erie, has won the WJET-24/Edinboro University Golden Apple Award. She was nominated by one of her students from last year, Izzy Markley. Pictured are: Karen Beer, principal; Vickie Bayle and Izzy Markley; and Dr. Mary Jo Melvin, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania.

VFW Post #813 selects essay winners



DuBOIS—Sixteen students at DuBois Central Catholic Middle and High School were recognized by VFW Post #813 as winners in the recent Voice of Democracy and Patriot Pen Essay Contests. Pictured in the front, left to right, are: Alexandra Ochs, Nick Graeca, Alex Jenkins and Rachel Aravich. In the middle, left to right, are: Zach George, Courtney DeHaven, Zach Vandervort, Leyton Mangiantini, Carley Semancik and Gabriella Delzangle. In the back row, left to right, are: Don Aravich, junior vice president of Post #813; essay chairman Jessica Tomasko; Trisha Gupta, Abbie Zeltner, AJ Zelenky and Tessa Savers; and Francis Romeo, district chaplain. Missing from this photo is Madison Nasuti.

Lego my robot!



ERIE—The Lego Robotics Team from St. James School, Erie, captured two of the four trophies awarded at a regional competition at Penn State Behrend in December. St. James placed second out of 39 teams competing with robotic missions. They also won second place in the Grand Champion Award for overall points. St. James designed and built Lego models that traced how people in Erie get their water. Pictured in the front row, left to right, are: Eric Duma, Cayden Lombard and Ryan Dalton. In the back row, left to right, are: Van Phan, Nicholas Thompson, Mitchell Razanauskas, Garrett Glowacki and Arthur Thompson. Coaches are Allen Madura, Greg Helminski and Dennis Cooper.

Knights Council in North East receives Star Council Award



NORTH EAST—Knights of Columbus District Deputy William Aulenbacher Sr. presented the Star Council Award recently to the Alphonus Ligouri Council #4262 at a ceremony at St. Gregory Thaumaturgus Church, North East. Pictured in the front row, left to right, are: Jay Fritzsche, Mike Wheeler, Neil Ferringer, Andy Bennardo Jr., Nick Geraci and Joe Lawrence. In the back row, left to right, are: William Aulenbacher, Dave Spacht, Tom Hess, Mark Blackburn, K of C insurance representative Mark Masolotte, James Bahm, Father Thomas Brooks (pastor), George Beckes (past state warden), Mark Urban, Wayne Cawley and Charles Moore.

Children in St. Marys give baby gifts



ST. MARYS—The children of Sacred Heart Parish, St. Marys, observed the birth of Christ in a special way at a Christmas Mass. Father Eric Vogt, OSB, pastor, read *The Donkey's Dream* by Barbara Helen Berger. At the offertory, the children carried wrapped baby gifts for the Christ Child. Many other parishioners joined this "procession of gifts" with their young children. The procession included these children as angels: Maria Radkowski, Sophia Radkowski, Aiden Radkowski, Kaiden Bayer, Cecelia Dornish, Alicia Ginther, Gianna Bille, Sophia Bille, Ava Villella and Carly Antonelli. Mary and Joseph were portrayed by Hope Farley and Rudy Bish. Shepherds were Dean Rakieski and Lauren Rakieski, and the wisemen were Audrey Dornish, Tiffani Total and Sean Radkowski. All gifts will be distributed through the Maternity Closet, a local pro-life effort.

Cousins share love of serving at altar



ERIE—It's all in the family for these altar servers. Allison Onslow and Ryan Hewitt are cousins who volunteer as altar servers at Sacred Heart Church in Erie. A senior at Villa Maria Academy, Allison has been teaching Ryan the ropes in his first year at the altar. Ryan is a fifth-grader at Tracy Elementary. This is Allison's last year of being an altar server.

Wreaths Across America honors vets



ERIE—The Knights of Columbus of St. Boniface Parish, Erie, honored veterans in December with a Wreaths Across America ceremony that remembered, in particular, the 93,000 military men and women who were never found or returned. The Seneca High School Junior ROTC and school color guard, representatives of the Disabled American Veterans, parishioners of St. Boniface and the Knights of Columbus participated in the event. Seven wreaths commemorate the six branches of the U.S. military and prisoners of war.

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