Proud to be Black and Catholic

November is Black Catholic History Month
OVERCOMING RACIAL DIVIDE
Catholics urged to stand against racism.

PROUD TO BE BLACK AND CATHOLIC
Black Catholic History Month celebrates the contributions of black Catholics to the Roman Catholic faith.

SAIDING ‘YES’ WHEN JESUS CALLS
Read the stories of seven people who responded to God’s call for their vocation.

KEEPING PRESCHOOLERS ACTIVE
Early Childhood School readies children for kindergarten.

A SAINT IN THE FAMILY
Deacon counts St. Agostina as cousin and intercessor.

‘PARISH PRIEST FOR A MODERN WORLD’
Author tells the story how 19th-century priest Father McGivney was ahead of his time.

CONNECTION WITH FATHER
Priests celebrate the renowned parish priest and the priesthood through book club Zoom meetings.

PLUS: Archbishop’s Annual Appeal Names Essay Contest Winners

ARCHBISHOP’S DESK
6 We Cannot Live Without the Mass
“I breathe, and I want the Mass. It is my hope and prayer as your archbishop that we will take to heart these beautiful affirmations of our Catholic faith and make them our own”!

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DEPARTMENTS
4 EDITOR’S DESK
12 BIBLE GUIDANCE
14 VOCATIONS OFFICE
24 SAINTS CORNER
33 OBITUARY
33-34 AROUND THE ARCHDIOCESE
34 APPOINTMENTS
35 MARK YOUR CALENDAR
He loved the sport of baseball in his adult life. He loved a good laugh as much as anyone else. He believed in the strength of a family and, as a result, founded the Knights of Columbus, the largest Catholic men’s fraternal organization in the world. But his personal legacy will always lay in the lives he affected as a parish priest and his unshakable faith in God.

Father Michael J. McGivney (1852-1890) and how he met the criteria for canonization.

Two authors, Douglas Brinkley and Julie M. Fenster, wanted to learn more about this obscure priest who they heard about through an article in The New York Times. The piece, titled “Was There a Saint Born in Watertown?”, detailed the life of Connecticut’s own Father Michael J. McGivney (1852-1890) and how he met the criteria for canonization. This pivotal article piqued the curiosity of Brinkley and Fenster, who began researching the short life of this “parish priest.” As a result, they decided to write a McGivney biography. And the name of their biography, published in 2006, is appropriately named Parish Priest.

“By writing about Father McGivney, we’re embracing that very obscurity and so honoring all parish priests — or, more than that, seeking to understand their calling just a little bit more clearly. … We hope an account of McGivney’s life will help to instigate fresh thinking among all parish priests,” the authors said in the book’s preface.

Father Michael J. McGivney was an American parish priest from Connecticut, a people’s priest, who is on his way to sainthood 130 years after his death.

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WE CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT THE MASS

WHEN NEW YORK’S CARDINAL DOLAN WAS PRESIDENT OF THE U.S. BISHOPS’ CONFERENCE, IN ONE OF HIS ANNUAL ADDRESSES TO THE BISHOPS, HE SAID THAT MANY PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH TODAY THINK OF THEMSELVES AS CHRIST’S SHEEP, BUT IN A FLOCK OF JUST ONE — NAMELY, THEMSELVES.

IN “I DID IT MY WAY” WORLDS IN WHICH THE MAKERGOD IS INDIVIDUALIZED AND REAL, AND PEOPLE CLAIM THE AUTHORITY TO DEFINE THemselves, IT’S NO WONDER THAT AN INCREASING NUMBER OF CATHOLICS IDENTIFY THEMSELVES AS BEING CATHOLIC BUT WITHOUT ATTENDING SUNDAY MASS. WITHOUT REALIZING IT, THEY ARE A FLOCK OF ONE, AS IF THAT WERE POSSIBLE, DISCONNECTED FROM THE REST OF THE BODY OF CHRIST IN WORSHIP — AND OFTEN IN BELIEFS AND MORAL TEACHING TOO.

NOW THAT WE ARE EXPERIENCING A PANDEMIC, THERE ARE FEARS THAT THE “FLOCK OF ONE” PHENOMENON WILL GET WORSE, THAT EVEN MORE PEOPLE WILL NOT RETURN TO CHURCH WHEN IT’S OVER, BUT WILL THINK THAT WATCHING A LIVESTREAMED OR TELEVISIONED MASS BY THEMSELVES IN THE COMFORT OF THEIR OWN SUFFICES, WITHOUT ENCOUNTERING OTHER PEOPLE “LIVE” AND EVEN WITHOUT ENCOUNTERING JESUS “LIVE” IN THE RECEIPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION.

I, ON THE OTHER HAND, WOULD LIKE TO THINK, AND I HOPE AND PRAY, THAT BEING DEPRIVED OF THE ATTENDANCE AND THE SACRAMENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC WILL ACTUALLY MAKE PEOPLE RE-APPRECIATE WHAT THEY ARE MISSING.

“ABSENCE MAKES THE HEART GROW FONDER,” IS THE RESULT I’M HOPING FOR.

IN A LETTER PUBLISHED IN AUGUST, THE VATICAN ISSUED A THOUGHTFUL REFLECTION THAT CALLS THE ATTENTION OF Bishops, ORDERED AS CONDITIONS PERMIT, TO “RETURN TO THE EUCHARIST WITH A PURIFIED HEART, WITH A RENEWED AFFECTION THAT CALLS US, AS SOON AS CIRCUMSTANCES PERMIT, TO REFLECT IN A MORE DEEP AND RENEWED WAY THAT CALLS US, AS SOON AS CIRCUMSTANCES PERMIT, TO REFLECT IN A MORE DEEP AND RENEWED WAY THAT WE CHOOSE TO BE THE FLOCK OF CHRIST, AS CHRIST CHOOSE TO BE THE FLOCK OF HIS FATHER.”

“WE CANNOT BE WITHOUT THE HOUSE OF THE LORD, WHICH IS OUR HOME, WITHOUT THE HOLY PLACES WHERE WE WERE BORN TO FAITH, WITHOUT THE SACRAMENTS WHERE ONE DISCOVERS THE PROVIDENT PRESENCE OF THE LORD, WITHOUT THE Eucharist, WHERE WE DISCOVERED OUR Vocation TO MARRIAGE OR RELIGIOUS LIFE, WHERE WE PRAYED AND GAVE THANKS, REJOICED AND WENT, WHERE WE ENTRUSTED TO THE FATHER OUR LOVED ONES WHO HAD COMPLETED THEIR EPIPHANY; AND WE CANNOT BE WITHOUT THE LORD’S DAY, WITHOUT SUNDAY WHICH GIVES LIGHT AND MEANING TO THE SEQUENCE OF DAYS OF WORK AND TO FAMILY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES.”

It is my hope and prayer, as your archbishop, that we will take to heart these beautiful affirmations of our Catholic faith and make them our own! And that we will remember what our Lord said to the apostles when people walked away because he wept, where we entrusted to the Father our loved ones who had completed their earthly pilgrimage; and “We cannot be without the house of the Lord, which is our home, without the holy places where we were born to faith, without the sacraments where one discovers the provident presence of the Lord and discovered the merciful embrace that lifts up those who have fallen, where we consecrated our vocation to marriage or religious life, where we prayed and gave thanks, rejoiced and wept, where we entrusted to the Father our loved ones who had completed their earthly pilgrimage; and “We cannot be without the Lord’s Day, without Sunday which gives light and meaning to the succession of days of work and to family and social responsibilities.”

As the Archdiocese of Hartford, our primary task is to bring the word of God to the people of this Archdiocese and the Diocese of Bridgeport. 

As we gather here today, I reflect on those who have been with us these past few years, including our brother Cardinal Dolan, who served for nine years as our principal shepherd. As he prepared to step down, he summed up his tenure at the Archdiocese of Hartford this way:

“The biggest thrill of my life as archbishop is to see people come into the church for the first time or return to the Eucharist with a purified heart, with a renewed affection that calls us, as soon as circumstances permit, to reflect in a more deep and renewed way that calls us, as soon as circumstances permit, to reflect in a more deep and renewed way that we choose to be the flock of Christ, as Christ chooses to be the flock of his Father.”

“I hope and pray, as your archbishop, that we will reflect in a more deep and renewed way that calls us, as soon as circumstances permit, to reflect in a more deep and renewed way that we choose to be the flock of Christ, as Christ chooses to be the flock of his Father.”

En un mundo de “lo hice a mi manera”, en el que se idealiza al que es individualista, inconformista, y donde la gente reclama autonomía para definirse ellos mismos, no es de extrañar que un número cada vez mayor de católicos se identifique como católicos, pero no asistan a la Misa Dominical. Sin darse cuenta, son un rebaño de uno, como si eso fuera posible, desconectados del resto del cuerpo de Cristo en el culto y, a menudo, también en las creencias y la enseñanza moral.

Ahora que estamos atravesando una pandemia, existe el temor de que el fenómeno del “rebaño de uno solo” empeore, incluso que cuando se termine, más personas no regresen a la Iglesia, pensando que basta ver la misa transmitida o televisada en la comodidad de sus hogares, sin encontrarse con otras personas “en vivo” en la celebración de la liturgia con la Eucaristía, la mesa del Señor, a Jesús “en vivo” en la recepción de la Sagrada Comunión.

Por otro lado, me gusta pensar, y yo espero y rezar, que la privación de la asistencia a la iglesia y a la recepción de los sacramentos durante la pandemia haga que la gente vuelva a apreciar lo que se está perdiendo. “La ausencia hace crecer el cariño”, es el dicho que estoy experimentando en estos meses.

En una carta publicada este agosto, el Vaticano emitió una reflexión que nos llama, tan pronto como las circunstancias lo permitan, a “volver a la Eucaristía con el corazón purificado, con un renovado asombro, con un mayor deseo de encontrarnos con el Señor, de estar con él, para recibirlo y llevarlo a nuestros hermanos y hermanas con el testimonio de una vida llena de fe, amor y esperanza.”

La carta continúa diciendo: “No podemos vivir, ser cristianos, realizar plenamente nuestra humanidad y los deseos de bien y felicidad que moran en nuestro corazón sin la Palabra del Señor, que en la celebración de la liturgia toma forma y se convierte en palabra viva, hablada por Dios para los que hoy abren su corazón para escuchar;

“No podemos vivir como cristianos sin participar del Sacrificio de la Cruz en el que el Señor Jesús se entrega sin recibirlo en la comunión; sin tomarlo en la sagrada comunion de los fieles, que en la Eucaristía, la mesa del Señor, la misa de los Dores, se identifica como católico, pero no se puede ya ver en la Eucaristía las ayudas de la justicia, ni los consejos de la Iglesia con la que somos invitados como hijos e hijas, hermanos y hermanas, para recibir al mismo Cristo Resucitado, presente en cuerpo, sangre, alma y divinidad en ese Pan del Cielo que nos sostiene en las alegrias y las labores de esta peregrinación terrena;

“No podemos estar sin el banquete de la Eucaristía, la mesa del Señor, el Pan de la vida eterna” (Juan 6:67-69).

“No podemos estar sin la comunidad cristiana, la familia del Señor: necesitamos encontrar a nuestros hermanos y hermanas que comparten la filiación de Dios, la fraternidad de Cristo, la vocación y la búsqueda de la santidad y la salvación de sus almas en la vida; nuestros proyectos, carismas y vocaciones; “No podemos estar sin la casa del Señor en que no nos quedamos las mismas personas que nos apoderan de un casco de vivir como cristianos sin participar del Sacrificio de la Cruz en el que el Señor Jesús se entrega sin recibirlo en la comunión; sin tomarlo en la sagrada comunion de los fieles, que en la Eucaristía, la mesa del Señor, la misa de los Dores, se identifica como católico, pero no se puede ya ver en la Eucaristía las ayudas de la justicia, ni los consejos de la Iglesia con la que somos invitados como hijos e hijas, hermanos y hermanas, para recibir al mismo Cristo Resucitado, presente en cuerpo, sangre, alma y divinidad en ese Pan del Cielo que nos sostiene en las alegrias y las labores de esta peregrinación terrena;

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At the opening Mass of the 13th Convention of the Knights of Columbus, held at St. Mary’s Church in New Haven. Archbishop Blair is pictured here officially announcing the date of Father Michael J. McGivney’s beatification, scheduled for Oct. 31, 2020.

Archbishop Leonard P. Blair was the principal celebrant at the opening Mass of the 1316th Supreme Convention of the Knights of Columbus, held at St. Mary’s Church in New Haven. Archbishop Blair is pictured here officially announcing the date of Father Michael J. McGivney’s beatification, scheduled for Oct. 31, 2020.
OVERCOMING RACIAL DIVIDE
Catholics urged to stand against racism.

**EDITOR’S NOTE:** Recent nationwide events have unleashed a flood of demonstrations calling to improve the status of African Americans in society. Where does the Church stand? Archbishop Leonard P. Blair and the U.S. Bishops have issued statements in response to the death of George Floyd.

In his statement on racism, Archbishop Leonard P. Blair said, “The tragic killing of George Floyd has inflicted yet another deep wound not only on his family and local community but on our entire nation. ... What happened was senseless and brutal and only underscores once again the crying need for racial justice, equality and the acceptance of every person as possessing equal rights and dignity under God and under the law.”

Let’s embrace the remarks below related to bridging the racial divide in America and ensure equal rights for all. In their pastoral letter, “Open Wide Our Hearts, the Enduring Call to Love,” the U.S. Bishops urge us to accept our moral obligation to stand against racism.

“If we say we believe in God, that we love God, then we need to obey God by loving our neighbor, whatever his or her race, ethnicity or religion. And we cannot be silent or inactive when the dignity and rights of others are threatened,” they said.

Pope Francis, in a message against racism delivered during a general audience, directly referred to George Floyd. He denounced the “sin of racism” and expressed concerns about violence during the protests. “We cannot close our eyes to any form of racism or exclusion, while pretending to defend the sacredness of life,” he said.

In addition, seven chairmen of committees in the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a response to the death of Floyd, and said, “This is the latest wake-up call that needs to be answered by each of us in a spirit of determined conversion. Racism is not a thing of the past or simply a throwaway political issue to be bandied about when convenient. It is a real and present danger that must be met head on. As members of the Church, we must stand for the more difficult right and just actions instead of easy wrongs of indifference. We cannot turn a blind eye to these atrocities and yet still try to profess to respect every human life. We serve a God of love, mercy and justice."

The bishops were unequivocal in stating that “indifference is not an option.”

In response, the Office for Catholic Social Justice Ministry for the Archdiocese of Hartford has scheduled a series of webinars based upon the U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral Letter against Racism. The next webinar, “The Influence of Racism in our Health Care System,” will be held on Dec. 9, 7 p.m. Visit catholicsocialjustice.org for more information.

**Proud to be Black and Catholic**

Black Catholic History Month celebrates the contributions of black Catholics to the Roman Catholic faith.

**EDITOR’S NOTE:** There are millions of black Catholics in the United States whose devotion to Christ may have been tempered by challenges. What follows are the accounts of three black Catholics from the Archdiocese of Hartford who have pioneered the faith. The Church has designated November as Black Catholic History Month, to celebrate the long history and proud heritage of black Catholics while remembering their struggles of discrimination.

Deacon Art Miller, a cradle Catholic whose grandparents moved from Baton Rouge, La., to Chicago, grew up in a segregated society during the 1950s. He was friends with Emmett Till, the 14-year-old who was brutally murdered in Mississippi after being accused of whistling at a white woman.

Deacon Miller remembers leaving Mass in the Chatham neighborhood of Chicago after the white pastor said he did not want black people coming to his church.
RACISM IS “HUMAN HATRED THAT IS THE RESULT OF WHAT HAPPENES WHEN ONE GROUP SEeks POWER BY DEHUMANIZATION.”
— Deacon Art Miller

“What I encountered has actually driven me to where I am now. I have been blessed to go to Catholic schools all my life and been blessed with religious teachers who encouraged us to think.”

Townsend believes the country is in a period of awakening. “We talk about social justice, but it requires us to take a stand on something,” she says, adding, “I belong to a faith I believe to be true.”

Townsend, who earned degrees from the University of Connecticut and the University of St. Joseph, is the chief nursing officer at St. Mary’s Hospital/Trinity Health of New England in Waterbury, and serves as an active leader of St. Justin-St. Michael Parish. During her 35 years of nursing, she also served as an officer in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps.

She is active in evangelization, catechesis and community service at St. Justin-St. Michael Parish and will be a speaker in December on health, equity and disparity in the black and brown community.

“People tend to say, ‘What about the racism in the Catholic Church?’ They’re not welcoming to black and brown people. But that’s not true,” Townsend says. “I’m telling you, that’s not true. … We are able to practice our faith in St. Justin-St. Michael with our culture.”

MY GRANDSON WANTS TO BE A CATHOLIC PRIEST

When Marcus Butler was a senior in Ansonia High School, he decided to join the Catholic Church. Butler’s father was Baptist and his mother was Catholic.

“At the time, I just wanted to know God a little bit better,” he recalls. “I didn’t really know much about who God was and I was seeking him.”

He began attending St. Joseph Church in Ansonia, at the pastor, Father Mitchell Wanat, guided him in the faith and eventually baptized him and gave him Holy Communion.

“At the time I had never met a black Catholic,” he recalls. “I never met an African-American priest or deacon. The only place I saw them was on the Internet and EWTN.”

“What I experienced was not a list of my limitations. I was challenged to be a better me. … I didn’t feel entirely comfortable in predominantly white churches.”

“I felt people were looking at me and asking themselves, ‘Does he belong here? Is he lost? Is he visiting?'” Butler says. Father Sullivan helped him build relationships, and he began to serve at daily Mass and study the black Catholic heritage.

On February 15, 2019, Father Jeffrey Gubbiotti, the current pastor of Assumption, let Butler organize an event about African-American culture. Butler says the turnout from the church disappointed him, but his family and friends from the Baptist church came, along with the mayor of Ansonia and Father Reggie Norman, a convert to Catholicism and pastor of Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Wilton.

Butler’s discernment of the religious life has led him to Mexico and Los Angeles, where he visited the Missionaries of Charity Fathers and Brothers and witnessed firsthand their work with the poor, the homeless and the infirm.

“When I went to Los Angeles and saw the tents lined up on the streets, I knew this is what I was called to do. I want to serve the poor and devote my life to them,” he says. “During my last days there, I felt an African-American veteran under a bridge, and he said, ‘You know what, kid? Your smile really helped me a lot.’ That touched me, and I knew this was my destiny.”

Butler’s devotion to St. Francis of Assisi has recently inspired him to explore the Capuchin Friars.
A Change of Heart is Needed for True Equality

O ur call as Christians demands forming our consciences to receive and embrace God’s salvific truth and bring the Gospel of Christ to all we contact in our daily lives. Throughout this year, the response of many of our brothers and sisters to racial injustice has bluntly brought forth the awareness that we have not done nearly enough to alleviate the reality of inequality in our world. Moreover, the different approaches to this problem have exacerbated times of divisions and hatred.

Somehow, influenced by the world’s sway, we have forgotten that we all share a common origin, equally made in the image of God. “Since something of the glory of God shines on the face of every person,” the dignity of every person before God is the basis of the dignity of man before other men.” (Gaudium et spem 29) Moreover, this truth is the essential basis of the fundamental equality and fellowship among all people, regardless of their nation, race, sex, origin, culture or class. The Incarnation of the Son of God proves the equality of all people concerning the dignity of the person: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3:28; cf. Rom 10:12; 1 Cor 12:13) (Cf. 11:1)

Prejudice, fear of the other, resentment, sense of superiority, extreme nationalist ideologies, among different selfish attitudes, give growth to all forms of injustice, aggravating the reality of inequality in our society. (Cf. Jn 21:1-9) As the U.S. Bishops have affirmed many times, this outlook has no place in the Christian heart. Even though many significant instances of developing a fairer and just social order have taken place in the last few decades, they have proven not enough. The attack against human dignity, primarily through racism and discrimination, has made inequality a most painful societal wound that still overwhelms justice.

A change of heart, an attitude of Christian conversion (cf. Mt 4:17), embracing God’s mandate to love one another (Jn 13:34) is the call to make our own, as the means to act effectively in moving towards a society that strives for genuine equality. (Cf. Mt 5:38) However, before achieving that goal, each of us must first recognize how far we have strayed from Christ’s love and his example. (Cf. Jn 15:12-17)

As Pope St. Paul VI taught: “Together with equality in recognition of the dignity of each person and of every person there must also be an awareness that it is only possible to safeguard and promote human dignity only if this is done as a community, by the whole of humanity.” (Cf. Populorum Progressio, 43-46) Only through the mutual action of individuals and peoples sincerely concerned for the good of all men and women can a genuine universal brotherhood be attained; otherwise, the persistence of conditions of serious disparity and inequality will make us all poorer. (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 141)

Se necesita un cambio de corazón para la verdadera igualdad

Nuestro llamado como cristianos exige formar nuestra conciencia para recibir y abrazar la verdad salvífica de Dios y llevar el evangelio de Cristo a todos con quien tenemos contacto en nuestra vida diaria. A lo largo de este año, la respuesta a la injusticia racial de muchos de nuestros hermanos y hermanas ha despertado la conciencia de que no hemos hecho lo suficiente para aliviar la realidad de la desigualdad en nuestro mundo. Además, los diferentes enfoques de este problema han exacerbado tiempos de división y enemistad.

Influenciados por el pensamiento del mundo, hemos olvidado que todos compartimos un origen común, igualmente formados a imagen de Dios. “Dado que algo de la gloria de Dios brilla en el rostro de cada persona, la dignidad de cada persona ante Dios es la base de la dignidad del hombre ante los demás hombres” (Gaudium et spem 29). Además, esta verdad es la base esencial de la igualdad fundamental y la amistad entre todas las personas, independientemente de su nación, raza, sexo, origen, cultura o clase.

La Encarnación del Hijo de Dios prueba la igualdad de todos en cuanto a la dignidad de la persona: “No hay judío ni griego, no hay esclavo ni libre, no hay hombre ni mujer; porque todos sois uno en Cristo Jesús” (Galatianas 3:28; cf. Romanos 10:12, 1 Corintios 12:13, Colosenses 3:11).

El prejuicio, el miedo al otro, el resentimiento, sentimientos de superioridad, ideologías nacionalistas extremistas, entre otras actitudes egocéntricas, hacen crecer todas las formas de injusticia, agravando la realidad de la desigualdad en nuestra sociedad. (Cf. Santiago 2,1-9). Como los obispos han afirmado muchas veces, esta perspectiva no tiene cabida en el corazón cristiano. A pesar de que en las últimas décadas se han producido muchos casos importantes de desarrollo de un orden social más justo y equitativo, éstos no han sido suficientes. El ataque contra la dignidad humana y principalmente a través del racismo y la discriminación ha hecho de la desigualdad una herida social más dolorosa que aún abruma a la justicia.
PRIESTS DON'T COME FROM SOMEWHERE ELSE

FATHER MICHAEL CASEY
is the director of vocations for the Archdiocese of Hartford.

A n exercise I sometimes go through with teenagers or young adults who feel called to marriage is to ask them to consider that their future spouse is most likely already alive. How would they want that person to act, to grow, to learn? How would they act knowing that the person with whom they may spend the rest of their life is possibly just over the next horizon?

People don’t come into existence on the day we meet them. Similarly, priests don’t come into existence on the day of their ordination. They are born, grow up, go to school and have a variety of life experiences. If children today would not be able to be ordained a priest until the year 2046, at the earliest. This means that the men who will shepherd the Church in the foreseeable future are already alive and growing. They don’t come from somewhere else or fall from a cloud; they are members of our own families and friend groups.

On a more short-term view, the Archdiocese of Hartford currently has 12 men in formation for the priesthood, which is the maximum number of new priests we can expect in our archdiocese in the next six to eight years. In that same amount of time, our number of currently serving priests will decrease from 135 to a maximum of 105. A total of 12 men would have to replace at least 30 priests.

Our future priests are already alive. They are our sons and brothers, our nephews or uncles. They are our friends and co-workers. The key is we have to stop expecting that someone else will solve the priest shortage in Connecticut. We each need to assume our responsibility for promoting vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life through prayer and education and to offer prayers for those who are considering one of these vocations. Here are stories of seven men and women who said “yes” to Jesus, which made all the difference.

So what do we do? The first step is to pray for the Lord to call more men to the priesthood from our own families, workplaces and friend groups. Tell our Lord our need; bring it to him and much more by visiting youtube.com/archdioceseofhartford.

MEET THE SEMINARIANS
Get to know the seminarians of the Archdiocese of Hartford who discuss their faith lives, what inspired them to answer God’s call, which saints they look to when in need and much more by visiting youtube.com/archdioceseofhartfordct.

Editor’s Note: Some left behind dream jobs to follow the call. Others ignored it for years until they could ignore it no longer. Some knew from childhood they were called. Others found out later in life. When Jesus calls men and women out of an ordinary life to an extraordinary life, wonderful things happen. National Vocation Awareness Week, celebrated Nov. 1 to 7, is dedicated to promote vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life through prayer and education and to offer prayers for those who are considering one of these vocations. Here are stories of seven men and women who said “yes” to Jesus, which made all the difference.

‘YOU’RE GOING TO BE A PRIEST’

When Joe Keough was dating a Georgetown law student, they went to dinner with her former Fordham professor, and the Jesuit turned to Keough with a startling prophecy: “You know, you’re going to be a priest. ... All her boyfriends become priests.”

It was an awkward moment and, as Father Keough, pastor of Divine Providence Parish in New Britain, recalls, “She was ready to kill him.”

The fourth of five children from Meriden, he graduated from Niagara University with a degree in transportation management and started working for a Wallingford trucking company. At college, a Vincentian asked him about the priesthood, but he dismissed the idea. The fervor of his childhood faith seemed to wane in his 20s. Then one day, he visited his father, Thomas, a patient at a Meriden hospital, who said, “Give me your rosary.” He didn’t have any. “You’re supposed to have your rosary with you all the time,” his father told him.

He went to the Maryheart Crusaders religious store to buy beads for his father and ended up staying for Mass and going to confession. He also started praying the rosary with his father and it became a daily practice.

He realized God was at work and he went to talk to the Fordham Jesuit about discerning a vocation and eventually started formation in the Archdiocese of Hartford.

“I had some good spiritual directors, and going into the fourth year of seminary, I finally decided this is what I wanted to do,” says Father Keough, who was ordained on May 4, 1999. “I don’t think I could have gone in right from college. I had to have those other experiences to be where I am today.”
“LIVING THE DREAM’

As a young woman, Robyn Lee was living the dream: good money, a car, a house, fine wine, summer trips to Europe. She was a journalist who worked at publications like National Catholic Register, Faith and Family Magazine and Catholic Digest. She was also managing editor at Catholic Match Institute, the online dating service.

“I did have it all, but there was something more,” she recalls. “There was a recognition of being called; the dream life wasn’t enough.” Today, Sister Mary Mercy Lee looks back and can see God was directing her to the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist. The sixth daughter in a family of seven children, she grew up in Cheshire and went to St. Bridget of Sweden Parish.

“Vocations are born in the home, and my parents, Maryalyce and Bob, provided a culture that was such a beautiful domestic church,” she says. “We went to Mass every Sunday. My mom could have a baby on Friday, and we were in church on Sunday.”

When her mother went to Eucharistic adoration at the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Waterbury, she would take the youngest four children with her.

After graduating from Christendom College, Lee began her career in journalism. She dated and considered marriage, but she often wondered, “What am I supposed to be doing with my life? I would like to be married and have a bunch of kids, but am I called to the married life?”

While taking courses at Holy Apostles Seminary, she met a Franciscan sister who invited her to services and to join a young professional group for women and men. She began to think more about the religious life but wasn’t sure.

While on retreat, she asked Sister Barbara Johnson, the vicar general, “How do you know?” She responded, “You can sit on the side of the pool and wonder if the water is cold or you can jump in.”

“Her story was important for my vocation because I wanted to know if it was God’s will for me to make final vows. I wanted to know that instantaneous connection until a few months afterward. I started going to daily Mass, and this exposed me to more prayer time and the Eucharist, which captivated me.”

She began volunteering at a food pantry at the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Hartford and learned she could use her gifts and talents in other ways. She also enrolled in the Archdiocese of Hartford Catholic Biblical School.

“At the time, I remember asking the Lord to help me deepen my faith,” she says. “And he did. Although she had been raised Catholic in St. Lucia in the Caribbean, Roache wanted to make her faith her own.

Her biblical studies were part of that rediscovery. Among her classmates were four postulants from the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

“I started going to daily Mass at St. Mary in New Haven and at St. Joseph, and I would alternate in the morning and sometimes in the afternon,” she recalls. “And I used to see these sisters at both churches, never realizing they were Apostles. I didn’t make the connection until a few months afterward and I thought, ‘Oh my goodness, I keep seeing these sisters everywhere.’ I started talking to other sisters in the congregation, and the more of them I met, the more I understood that God was calling me.”

She eventually did a live-in experience with the sisters to gain a greater understanding of their life and ministry, and in 2012 she entered the order.

Sister Clara Mahilia Roache, ASCJ, professed her final vows this past Aug. 1 at Mount Sacred Heart in Hamden.
**“I JUST KNEW WITH MY HEART, AND I PAY ATTENTION TO THE DESIRES OF MY HEART. IT WAS ALWAYS THERE. I WANTED TO BE ONE OF THEM.”**
— Pauline Semkow

**ONE SISTER’S INFLUENCE**

From the time she was in kindergarten, Pauline Semkow was familiar with the Religious Sisters of Mercy. She helped with the chores at St. John’s Convent at her parish in Cromwell and became friends with the sisters, especially Sister Mericia, who taught seventh grade.

“They were very homey, and as kids we had the run of the convent,” she recalls. “They were down-to-earth, loving women. You could knock on that door anytime, and they’d bring you into the dining room. Sometimes we would have Holy Hour in the chapel.”

Sister Pauline Semkow, RSM, says she had a vocation from a young age: “I just knew with my heart, and I pay attention to the desires of my heart. It was always there. I wanted to be one of them.”

“Sister Mericia would tell the class stories about Jesus and memorize us,” Sister Pauline says. “The love of Christ poured through her. She knew I was interested and helped form my vocation in grammar school.”

After graduating from St. Joseph Academy in West Hartford in 1957, she entered the novitiate in Madison. She made her final vows in 1963. For 24 years, she taught school and then did spiritual direction and retreat work for 14 years at Our Lady of Calvary Retreat Center and continues to do so from her home.

**“A LIFER”**

Father Tom Cieslikowski, administrator of St. Nicholas Parish in Seymour, describes himself as a “lifer.”

“I always wanted to be a priest,” he says. “Ever since a priest came into our class at Holy Trinity School in Erie, Pa., and asked how many boys were going to be priests and two of us raised our hands.”

The oldest of four children, he entered St. Mark’s Seminary in ninth grade with the encouragement of his parents, Tom and Alice, who raised their children to be devout Catholics.

“We never missed church on Sunday,” he recalls. “It was filled with my relatives. I would turn around and see all my cousins there.”

He went to St. Mary’s Seminary in Baltimore Md., but took time off to earn a degree in history from Penn State. He later entered Christ the King Seminary in Buffalo, N.Y., before coming to the Archdiocese of Hartford where he was ordained on July 2, 1988, and assigned to St. Thomas Church in Southington.

“I’ve always had a lot of energy and I love doing what I’m doing,” he says. One of his trademarks has been his children’s liturgy, where he uses a Teddy Bear to tell stories.

“I’ve never regretted becoming a priest,” Father Cieslikowski says. “I’m like a good bottle of wine. The archdiocese imported me, and I only get better with age.”

**THE HARTFORD BISHOPS’ FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES LATEST CATHOLIC EDUCATION GRANTS**

Thirty-two Catholic schools and parishes have been awarded 2020 Innovation Grants — made possible by The Hartford Bishops’ Foundation — to enhance their educational efforts with new, creative programming.

“We want to extend our gratitude to The Hartford Bishops’ Foundation for awarding us with an Innovation Grant. Particularly in these trying times of social distancing, it is even more important to have an online presence in which to reach and engage our members and wider community. We are excited to build a digital foundation from which we can grow greater opportunities of learning, outreach and faith sharing. Your grant will help us considerably in doing so.”

— Patricia O’Neil Tiezzi, principal, St. Rita School, Hamden

“It is a great honor to have been amongst one of the 10 teachers chosen to receive this [Light of Christ] award. The notice of this award was a welcoming surprise as well as an uplift in spirit. I am very grateful for the generosity of The Hartford Bishops’ Foundation. With Christ’s presence, I will continue to live up to this recognition.”

— Nicole Truhart, teacher, St. Rita School, Hamden

“We look forward to implementing the newest version of the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Kits to boost our Literacy Program that will assist in launching our program to its next level of success. We value this gift and will use it to enhance our students’ academic, social-emotional and spiritual needs.”

— Dorothy Burns, Kristan Galpauth and Michelle Geoffroy, teachers, St. Bridget School, Cheshire

Below are the latest testimonials from some of the Foundation’s grant recipients:

“Our school is honored that [HBF] has recognized our desire and commitment to bring a ‘new energy’ to St. Rita School through the expansion of our outside classroom. We remain ever grateful for your faith in us as we work to provide the very best Catholic education for our students. Know that your contribution is an investment in the future of our students, as well as in the future of our Church.”

— Patricia O’Neil Tiezzi, principal, St. Rita School, Hamden

“To LEARN MORE about The Hartford Bishops’ Foundation and the Forward with Faith Campaign, visit hartfordbishopsfoundation.org.

**ADVERTISEMENT**
Names Essay Contest Winners

Archbishop’s Annual Appeal

The Archbishop’s Annual Appeal has awarded tuition grants to three Catholic high school students for their winning essays on the spirit of giving. The grants will go toward paying a portion of their tuition for their senior year at a Catholic high school in the Archdiocese of Hartford.

Alexandra Goodin, now a senior at East Catholic High School in Manchester, won first place in the Archbishop’s Annual Appeal Tuition Grant Essay Contest for her essay “The Reciprocation of Giving.” A parishioner at SS. Isidore and Maria Parish in Glastonbury, she is surprised she won first place. “I just tried to speak my truth and I’m excited and honored that I did win,” she says.

The theme for her essay stemmed from her experience volunteering in Guatemala. “To me, it embodied stewardship so perfectly. Just the idea of giving a little bit to someone less fortunate than you,” Goodin says. “I thought it was going to be about giving of myself but I received so much in terms of patience and understanding, and a new perspective on the world and the desire to help others. I thought it was really powerful. So I wanted to communicate that in my essay.”

ESSAY BY ALEXANDRA GOODIN, East Catholic High School, Manchester, and a member of SS. Isidore and Maria Parish, Glastonbury

First place

From its beginning, Catholicism has been based largely on giving to others. Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself to save us from our sins. He also gave us the opportunity to do for others a fraction of what He did and continues to do for us. The theme and inspiration for the 2020 Archbishop’s Annual Appeal is “Growing in Faith, Giving in Love.” Galatians 6:2 says, “Bear one another’s burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ.” As Catholics, if we want to grow closer to God, we can pray and study the Bible all we want, but we will never truly feel connected to God until we do what He does everyday: give selflessly. Therefore, it is important for me and all Catholics across the archdiocese to support the Appeal in order to advance Jesus’s work as well as our own faith.

As defined by Merriam-Webster, stewardship is “...the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care.” However, to me, stewardship has a slightly different meaning. In July of 2019, I went to Guatemala with an organization called Global Leadership Adventures to paint a school and teach English to children in an impoverished community. Many of these children lacked access to what we as Americans consider basic amenities, and yet they were still so happy and compassionate. I may have picked up a paint brush and shared a few English words, but what these children gave me was so much more valuable. During this incredible experience, I learned in my own personal definition of stewardship. For me, it is defined perfectly by Scripture, “Give and gifts will be given to you” (Luke 6:38), and by the 2020 theme for the Appeal: “Growing in Faith, Giving in Love.” My small act of stewardship to these Guatemalan children grew my faith in ways I could have never imagined. It made me discover my dream of becoming a child psychologist so that I can give in love to children who are struggling. Stewardship is not just about what you give, but also how you use what you receive in return.

Per the Archdiocese of Hartford’s website, the funds from the Appeal are given to many notable causes, including Catholic education grants, Catholic education and faith formation and Catholic charities and works of ministry. As someone who attends Catholic school, this appeal impacts me and my peers quite directly. I switched to a Catholic high school after nine years of public school, and it wasn’t until I got to my high school that I felt I could speak freely about my Catholic identity. Jesus once said, “… what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me” (Matthew 25:45). Therefore, it is vital to give in love so that we can grow in faith through the Archbishop’s Annual Appeal. Faithful acts of stewardship is a way of life that should be instituted by all, whether it be to commit time or a talent. At my confirmation this year, Bishop Rosazza took my hand and told me these words: “God Needs You.” Those words I will never forget. Without God’s love, I would not be the person I am today. I am dedicated to my faith and will live my life giving to those in need and spreading the word of the Lord, as I dedicate each summer volunteering as a camp counselor for St. Teresa’s Vocational Bible Camp. At this camp, we teach campers how to follow in God’s footsteps and teach values that will follow them through life. We also teach them about giving to those in need by collecting items for the poor (another reason why I titled this essay as I did). The impact of giving actually creates a fulfillment in one’s life. I see how proud my little campers are when they contribute their items each day. I believe they will aspire a lifelong commitment.
to giving, as I did.

Last year, the annual appeal helped over 200 local charities. This year is an especially difficult year for all. I love attending East Catholic High School, although realize how expensive it can be for my parents. My family, along with many others, are affected by the worldwide disaster of Covid-19. Unemployment and financial impacts have made our life drastically change. I will pray for the continued support of those that will be able to contribute to the annual appeal, as this year the archbishop’s work will be needed more than ever. We are all in desperate times, with financial hardship causing food and shelter issues, along with Covid-19 illness affecting many. Forward in faith, giving in love will continue to get us through these difficult times. God bless.

Third place

Luis Gonzalez, a senior at Sacred Heart High School in Waterbury, won third place for his essay, “The Importance of the Archbishop’s Appeal.” To come up with his theme, he studied the Archbishop’s Annual Appeal brochures and also researched the Appeal’s web page at archdioceseofhartford.org/appeal. Then, he says, “I took my ideals and the archbishop’s ideals and put them together.” Luis enjoys charitable works and projects, especially those he has done through the Boy Scouts of America. He will soon achieve the Scouts’ most prestigious honor. “This is going to be my last year,” he says. “I’m about to get my Eagle Scout rank, so I’m excited about that.” Keen to be spending his senior year at Sacred Heart High School, he says, “I like the values it teaches, the setup and the education.”

The Importance of the Archbishop’s Appeal

ESSAY BY LUIS GONZALEZ, Sacred Heart High School, Waterbury

Every year, Archbishop Blair promotes Catholicism through his appeal to encourage unity, charity, and youth involvement. These moral attributes also give Catholics the ability to improve the community around them and show how to exemplify stewardship. These concepts are not only impactful in helping the community, but they also show that through following God’s teachings and supporting others, individuals can fulfill the potential the archdiocese wants in everyone and what God sees in them.

One reason why the Annual Appeal is beneficial to my community and the archdiocese is because it gives guidelines on how to improve individually. However, to improve individually, people must help others around them. For example, Matthew 5:16 says, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” The archbishop wants us to understand that God rewards people for doing good deeds, whether through donations or other campaigns.

In this year, I try to help others through the Boy Scouts of America. The program offers many service projects for the sole purpose of helping the community, whether by cleaning parks, animal reservations or helping a local church. Another way I help others is through community service opportunities offered at my school. They have a wide variety of opportunities in which students can assist others, such as participating in school cleanups and local charity events. I like assisting other people because it brings me joy knowing that I made someone’s day better. If my community and the archdiocese continue to help others and resemble stewards, then it will only make us stronger spiritually.

Secondly, the archdiocese and my community benefit from the Annual Appeal due to its impact on others. If people work together towards a cause, it will only reap positive outcomes for others. For example, the St. Vincent DePaul Society is an organization that gives food, shelter, and other necessities so that people are less fortunate can enjoy the qualities of life. The society’s charitable acts and efforts to teach the Gospel can make a person’s somber day turn into an enjoyable one. An example of how my deeds brought a positive impact was when I participated in a service project for the Bent of the River Audubon Center during a scouting weekend. What I did was build birdhouses around the sanctuary for birds to reside, making their lives easier. If my community and the archdiocese apply these examples and seek change, the Catholic faith and civil life will take a positive direction.

In conclusion, the Annual Appeal plays a major role in the archdiocese and my community. It shows the Catholic applications of stewardship and how people’s contributions can affect others in a positive way. Furthermore, it shows the importance of unity and faith when helping others get on a path with God. By listening to the appeal, not only will my community and other Catholics understand their moral duties, it will also help individuals understand what it means to be a Christian.

J

essica Jimenez, a single mom from Manchester, turned to Catholic Charities in 2019 to enroll her 4-year-old daughter, Jade, in its Early Childhood School Readiness program.

“It benefits me because she’s learning while I’m working. I’m a single mom and I work full time, so the service they’re providing is very helpful,” Jimenez adds.

Melissa Valdes of Hartford agrees. Her 3-year-old daughter is in the program and loves learning new words every day. “I have a peace of mind that when I’m working I know my children are safe, my children are learning, my children are being fed,” she says. “My son, now in fourth grade, went through the program seven years ago. It’s close to home. It’s right in the community, so that’s a big plus.”

Part of the mission of Catholic Charities is “to meet the unique needs of each community, striving to reflect God’s love and reach those most in need,” says Jennifer Caraballo, senior director. “It’s helping our neighbor, making sure that we take care of each other, especially during this time of [pandemic],” she adds.

The goal of the full-day, full-year program offered by Catholic Charities is to prepare children ages 3 to 5 to enter kindergarten ready to learn and succeed. It is available in four cities, with three locations each in Hartford and New Haven, and one location each in Waterbury and Meriden.

In normal, non-pandemic times, Caraballo says the parents come in, they drop the kids off, the kids spend a day doing different activities and it’s like a regular school day.

“We do time for everything,” she says. “We do story time, we do gross motor, we do reading, we do language play, we do a lot of different things. We provide meals. They take a nap.”

Other services include family literacy, well-child screenings, developmental assessments, family counseling and parent support services. As in the related Infant & Toddler Care program, the whole family is involved, not just the child, Caraballo adds.

Both programs are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, which enforces rigorous national standards in education, health and safety.

In spring 2020, the pandemic curtailed some services. “Everybody’s working remotely,” Caraballo says. “The teachers go about once a week to the centers to make packets for families and do different activities for the children, and they mail it with a little note to the parents.”

Caraballo herself worked at and was a beneficiary of a similar program years ago. “I was actually in a center where my son was in a 1-year-old classroom and I was teaching the 4-year-olds,” she says. “But I was able to be with him all day, take my breaks, go see him, and I ended up loving it and I never went back. I stayed with early childhood since then.”

TO LEARN MORE about Catholic Charities, call 1.888.405.1183 or visit ccaoh.org.
Saint Leads Souls to God Through Contemplative Prayer

FEAST DAY: NOV. 8

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity Parish Promotes Prayer

Story by SHELLEY WOLF | Photos by AARON JOSEPH

“In the middle of our day to day, and now especially during the pandemic, it may be an opportunity to focus on the writings of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity to gain a deeper connection to God through contemplative prayer,” says Father Michael Santiago, of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity to gain a deeper connection to God through contemplative prayer. Two weeks after her 21st birthday, she read "I find him everywhere while doing the was as well as while praying." Inspired by the lives and writings of St. Paul and St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Elizabeth prayed and wrote passionately during her five short years at Carmel. Her letters on the Trinity, as well as her poems and prayers, fill three volumes. Succumbing to Addison's disease in 1906, Elizabeth proclaimed, "I am going to light, to love, to life!" as her final prayer. She was canonized on Oct. 16, 2016, by Pope Francis.

A Saint in the Family

Deacon counts St. Agostina as cousin and intercessor.

Story by SHELLEY WOLF | Photos by AARON JOSEPH

"I pray to her every single day," Scrivani says of St. Agostina Pietrantoni, whose feast day is Nov. 13. "I have my list of all stars that I ask for help, and St. Agostina is right up there in good company with St. Teresa of Avila and St. Thérèse the Little Flower. I just ask for her intercession in my life in whatever way I might need it." Deacon Scrivani, the Archdiocese of Hartford's executive director of Pastoral Services, also serves as a deacon at St. Elizabeth of the Trinity Parish in North Haven. He says he is a "first cousin twice removed," Deacon Scrivani explains. "It's a direct line of my own grandmother, Maria Pietrantoni, according to our family history, was St. Agostina's cousin and intercessor. She was a Sister of Charity, and worked as a nurse in a hospital children's ward and later a tuberculosis ward, where she was martyred in service to her faith.

The deacon says it is a "humbling" experience to have a saint in the family. "Extremely humbling," he stresses, "especially given the fact that she was a martyr. Those who gave their lives in service to others and to Christ, are in my opinion, the greatest of saints. To see if they could provide her with more information. "The mother superior sent her whatever they had, but there wasn't much in English," Deacon Scrivani says. "It was mostly in Italian.

Some years later, before his older cousin, Paula, died in 2013, she handed off that collection of materials to Deacon Scrivani. He now possesses what he says is a first-class relic of the saint from when she was beatified in St. Peter's Basilica on Nov. 12, 1972. The relic itself is a tiny bone fragment, contained in a three-fourths-inch glass and mounted in an A-frame stand along with a medallion of the saint's image.
Deacon Scrivani recently had a Latin document that accompanied the relic translated into English by a local priest. “It has the official stamp from the postulator for beatification,” he says. The Latin documents also spell the saint’s name as “Augustina,” he notes, rather than the more common Italian spelling “Agostina.”

The English translation authenticates the relic, reading “we give as a gift a sacred particle from the bone of Blessed Augustina Pietrantoni, virgin, extracted from an authentic place, to which we reverently deposited in a reliquary with red silk cords connected inside and impressing our seal upon it. Given in Rome, the 12th day of November 1972. (Given) Freely Everywhere, P. Theodorus Amalloa, OSST (Order of the Most Holy Trinity) Postulator.”

MIRACLES APPROVED

Through a newspaper article he received from his cousin Paula Alexay, Deacon Scrivani learned about the two miracles that were approved by the Vatican, supporting the Italian sister and nurse in her cause for sainthood.

The first, in 1932, involved Caterina Monzeglio, a 4-year-old who received an eye injury from a red-hot iron when playing near a fireplace. Her parents prayed to Sister Agostina for aid and, according to the article, the next morning a doctor “was unable to find the slightest trace of injury.”

The second miracle occurred in 1960 when a young boy, named Vittorio Berti, tried to jump onto a tractor and fell under its wheels. He sustained abdominal injuries and doctors could not operate due to his weak condition. His family and a sister nurse also prayed to Sister Agostina, and shortly after midnight, the child revived and again, according to the newspaper account, “the doctors found no sign of injury they had reported the night before.”

ONGOING INSPIRATION

In August of this year, hoping to gain a deeper understanding of the saint, Deacon Scrivani wrote to St. Agostina’s order in Rome himself. A sister there mailed him some books and materials, written in multiple languages, along with photos. He’s hoping to have some of the materials translated to learn more.

Today, Deacon Scrivani appreciates that he has a saint in the family. “I am grateful that God has made me aware of the life of my saintly cousin,” he says. “I hope I can follow her example by being willing to give as much of myself as I can to others, ultimately for Christ.”

NURSE TO THE POOR, VIRGIN MARTYR

St. Agostina Pietrantoni was one of three saints canonized by Pope St. John Paul II on April 18, 1999. During his homily, the now sainted pope reflected on the life of St. Agostina: “The Gospel ideal of the love of neighbor, especially towards the lowly, the sick and the abandoned, also led Agostina Livia Pietrantoni to the peak of holiness,” he said. “Formed in the school of St. Joan Antida Thouret, Sister Agostina realized that the love of Jesus calls for generous service to one’s brothers and sisters, for it is in their faces, especially those of the neediest, that the face of Christ shines.”

St. Agostina was born as Olivia Pietrantoni on March 27, 1864, in the village of Pozzaglio Sabina, 30 miles northeast of Rome. There, she grew up in a farming family, spending her youth working in the fields and tending farm animals. To help support her family, she also picked olives and transported sand and stones for road construction.

Though young men expressed interest in marrying her, Olivia Pietrantoni chose to become a nun instead. Assigned to the Hospital of Santo Spirito (Holy Spirit Hospital) in Rome, she tended the sick and suffering. During that time, however, the hospital was hostile to religion and she was forbidden to speak of God but found ways to live out the Gospel. She worked in the children’s ward and later in the grim tuberculosis ward, where she caught the disease herself and was healed. She also showed dedication to the most difficult patients, including Joseph Romanelli, who was at times hostile and violent.

In the hospital, she championed all of her patients to Mary in prayer, and prayed for the conversion of the unfaithful patients. Romanelli was eventually expelled for harassing the women in the laundry and took his frustration out on Sister Agostina. He followed through on his previous threatening notes to her and stabbed her on Nov. 13, 1894. She died invoking the Virgin Mary and forgiving her killer.

She was eventually accepted by the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Jeanne-Antide Thouret and, at age 22, arrived in Rome in March 1886 to become a “servant of the poor” in the tradition of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Jeanne-Antide. Renamed Sister Agostina, she had a premonition that she must become the first saint by this name.

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“I AM GRATEFUL THAT GOD HAS MADE ME AWARE OF THE LIFE OF MY SAINTLY COUSIN. I HOPE I CAN FOLLOW HER EXAMPLE BY BEING WILLING TO GIVE AS MUCH OF MYSELF AS I CAN TO OTHERS, ULTIMATELY FOR CHRIST.”

— Deacon Ernest Scrivani
‘A PARISH PRIEST FOR A MODERN WORLD’

Author tells the story how 19th-century priest Father McGivney was ahead of his time.

Story by KAREN A. AVITABLE

EDITOR’S NOTE: In September, Julie M. Fenster, one of the authors of Parish Priest who lives outside of Syracuse, N.Y., visited the Pastoral Center in Bloomfield to discuss her book and the life of Father Michael J. McGivney, who is on his way to sainthood. The book, she says, is intended to honor all parish priests or, more than that, seeks to understand their calling just a little bit more clearly.

In 1998, authors Julie M. Fenster and Douglas Brinkley were conducting research on a book for American Heritage when they noticed an article in The New York Times about a priest from Connecticut.

The piece, “Was There a Saint Born in Waterbury?,” highlighted the life of Father Michael J. McGivney (1852-1890) and acknowledged that he met the criteria for canonization, citing characteristics of his life that made him stand out during an era of anti-Catholicism.

“Father McGivney was ahead of his time and concerned about social issues. His incorporation of the laity was visionary,” the Rev. Gabriel B. O’Donnell, then-postulator of Father McGivney’s cause, was quoted in the Times article. “In the late 19th century, there was a lot of anti-Catholicism following the immigration wave.”

The article went on to explain how Father McGivney’s compassion for widows and orphans was the basis for his founding of the Knights of Columbus in addition to keeping men from joining secret organizations. After reading the Times article, Fenster says she was inspired to learn more about Father McGivney, concluding that he was pivotal to American history and Catholicism, and matches up to the likes of Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. She and Brinkley began conducting research for their book in 2005 and, a year later, published Parish Priest.

“We didn’t write this for Catholics but for the general American reader,” Fenster says. “We wanted Father McGivney to be part of American history.”

Fenster’s research took her to different places around Connecticut, to be able to walk in the footsteps of Father McGivney. She visited the towns and churches that meant so much to him, including the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Waterbury, where Father McGivney made his sacraments.

“It was easy to understand why he made the decision to become a priest at age 12, she says, adding she could feel the spirit of the church. “I felt like I understood why as a child he made a decision that lasted his whole life.”

She also read numerous newspaper articles about Father McGivney on microfilm. Additional research was done using files, clippings and booklets that were kept over the years by the Knights of Columbus. Because many of the Father McGivney letters were thrown out, Fenster says she was unable to gain his vision through an abundance of published writings, which instead “forced me to look at what he actually did.”

Parish Priest spent seven weeks on The New York Times bestseller list and received publicity on national television programming. Fenster says she was sure the book would be of interest to parish priests in America but was overwhelmed when she was invited to speak to 500 young priests attending the Pontifical North American College in Rome. “This was full circle to me to look out at an audience of bright, committed people,” she says. “They inspired me more than anything.”

Although Father McGivney founded the Knights of Columbus in 1882 in the basement of New Haven’s St. Mary’s Church, Fenster says he knew the organization would outlive him; so he put his ego aside to let it be run by others. “His leadership style was to launch the ship, not command it,” she says. “He really, really believed in the people around him and he loved seeing them thrive.”

Father McGivney was pivotal in breaking down barriers that existed at the turn of the century during a time when the priesthood, Fenster says, was rather “cloistered.” He did this by showing support and interest in others which involved directing a play in downtown New Haven because a parishioner was involved in it. He also organized baseball games for young people.

“He was very modern and loved life,” Fenster adds.

"THE DAY IS NOT FAR OFF WHEN BOOKS OF GENERAL AMERICAN HISTORY WILL CARRY HIS NAME IN THE INDEX, WITH SPACE DEVOTED TO HIS INFLUENCE OVER THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN VALUES AND CHARACTER. A BIOGRAPHY OF THIS CONNECTICUT MAN, THIS PARISH PRIEST, HAS BEEN LONG OVERDUE."

— Julie M. Fenster and Douglas Brinkley, from the introduction of their book, Parish Priest
ALWAYS A PARISH PRIEST

Although Fenster says Father McGivney could be persnickety, prickly and stubborn at times regarding maintaining the order of the Church, she also characterizes him as charismatic. “He was then and is now one charismatic figure for Connecticut and the rest of us.”

When Father McGivney died at age 38, he was honored by families, parishioners and even non-Catholics near and far who came to his funeral. “He never forsook his role as a parish priest,” Fenster says. “Father McGivney was uncontroversially supportive, encouraging, a masterful priest who ministered to priests around the Archdiocese of Hartford. “He was in communion with the Lord.”

From reading the book, Father Sztuber says it was astonishing that Father McGivney’s greatest aspiration was to be a parish priest, and says it is not surprising that he is on his way to sainthood.

“Everything was spirit-driven,” says Father Schulze, pastor of St. Margaret Church in Terryville. “He was in communion with the Lord.”

He adds it was astonishing that Father McGivney, who experienced the

CONNECTING WITH FATHER MCGIVNEY

Priests celebrate the renowned parish priest and the priesthood through Zoom book club meetings.

Story by KAREN A. AVITABILE
Photos by AARON JOSEPH

EDITOR’S NOTE: Several priests and seminarians from the Archdiocese of Hartford took part in a book club that focused on Parish Priest, a book about Father Michael J. McGivney’s life and his ministry. Five of those priests share their thoughts about the book, Father McGivney and, in some cases, how their life as a priest is intertwined with his life.

“Always a parish priest,” says Father Lavorgna, pastor of Mary, Mother of the Church Parish in Waterbury, when speaking about Father Michael J. McGivney, who has moved one step closer to sainthood.

“It’s been a positive thing. It’s a time to be joyful and celebrate the priesthood,” says Father John L. Lavorgna, pastor of Mary, Mother of the Church Parish in Waterbury, when speaking about Father Michael J. McGivney, who has moved one step closer to sainthood.

The announcement in May that Pope Francis approved a decree recognizing a miracle attributed to Father McGivney’s intercession, which cleared the way for him to be declared “blessed,” has been uplifting to priests around the Archdiocese of Hartford.

“One of our own is being beatified,” Father Lavorgna says of Father McGivney (1852-1890), a Waterbury-born priest, who ministered in parishes located in New Haven, Thomaston and Terryville. “His full life and ministry was in the parish and among the people. I can relate to that, my brothers can relate to that in a special way.”

Over the years, Connecticut priests, including Father Lavorgna, have bonded with the priest they never knew and looked up to Father McGivney for inspiration on their personal journeys serving their own flocks. “He’s been a spiritual figure I could turn to for his strength,” he adds.

GATHERING ONLINE

Since August, a group of priests has been staying connected during a time of social distancing by gathering online through Zoom for book club meetings to discuss a biography about Father McGivney, called Parish Priest. (Read more about Parish Priest beginning on page 28.)

Published in 2006, the book traces the ministry of Father McGivney as a parish priest.

Book club involvement included priests, retired priests and seminarians to “honor Father McGivney and celebrate together this great moment of grace,” says Father Lavorgna, who formed the book club and served as its moderator. “Priests are happy to talk about the ministry and their experiences.”

While many priests received a copy of Parish Priest after it was first published, the Knights of Columbus Supreme Council recently sent a complimentary copy to archdiocesan priests, many of whom are members of the Knights of Columbus which was founded by Father McGivney.

Reading Parish Priest for the first time in August, Father Tomasz Sztuber, pastor of St. Stanislaus Church in Bristol, has walked in Father McGivney’s steps at Immaculate Conception Church in Terryville. Touching his journals left behind, he says, was “like touching the history of a famous priest.”

From reading the book, Father Sztuber says it was apparent how Father McGivney politely invited people to follow him. “He was a very humble and very open priest,” he says. “We need to become more humble.”

As a seminarian, Father Philip Schulze remembers doing a report on Parish Priest for one of his classes. He recalled then that Father McGivney’s greatest aspiration was to be a parish priest, and says it is not surprising that he is on his way to sainthood.

“Everything was spirit-driven,” says Father Schulze, pastor of St. Margaret Church in Madison. “He was in communion with the Lord.”

TO SEE A VIDEO: tracing the steps of Father McGivney’s life and parts of the interview with Parish Priest author Julie M. Fenster, visit youtube.com/archdioceseofhartfordct

Father McGivney was known for helping families during his priesthood. According to author Julie M. Fenster, Father McGivney was known for helping families during his priesthood. According to author Julie M. Fenster, Father McGivney was known for helping families during his priesthood. According to author Julie M. Fenster, Father McGivney was known for helping families during his priesthood. According to author Julie M. Fenster, Father McGivney was known for helping families during his priesthood.
devastating loss of his own father at a young age, did not think he did anything out of the ordinary to form the Knights of Columbus to help widows and children. "He saw what his mom, brothers and sisters went through," he says. "He sacrificed a lot."

The retired Father Stephen Krugel, formerly of Holy Rosary Parish in Ansonia, read Parish Priest in the past. "Father McGivney has been part of my spirituality," he says.

He speaks of the stamina the priest needed to travel between St. Thomas Church in Thomaston and Immaculate Conception in Terryville to serve the people.

"The energy he must have had to accomplish what he did in such a short time; Father Krugel says, "that was amazing."

CLOSE BOND
Father James Gregory echoes the amount of energy that is needed to meet the needs of two churches at one time. He is pastor of Prince of Peace Parish, which is made up of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and St. Teresa of Avila Church in Woodbury.

"In the chapter, it gave his Sunday schedule, how he went between the churches by horse-and-buggy. That's where I can relate to him the most," Father Gregory says.

Father McGivney also lived during a time when there was a shortage of priests, he points out. "The priest was struggling in that way then ... and we are moving in that direction again, Father Gregory says, referring to the current decline in the number of priests.

Over the years, Father Gregory developed a kinship with Father McGivney for three reasons. "First, and perhaps the most obvious, is I feel a kinship because we are both priests of the Archdiocese of Hartford. I feel a kinship in that I'm a Fourth Degree Knight and part of a legacy he has established ... and third that I graduated from his alma mater, St. Mary's Seminary, in Baltimore, Md." he adds.

One of the chapters in the book describes how Father McGivney spent many hours visiting an inmate scheduled to be executed. "It took a lot of time out of his schedule, and it takes away from your projects, yet he did it," Father Gregory says. "Things happen you have to devote your time to that you don't expect."

Obituary

Rev. John J. Keane, 83, died on Aug. 20, 2020, at his home in Enfield. He was born in Springfield, Mass., on Aug. 26, 1936, the son of the late Martin J. Keane Sr. and Mary Ellen (Devine) Keane. Father Keane was raised in Enfield, where he attended St. Joseph Elementary School, and later attended Cathedral High School in Springfield. He graduated from St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield, St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, Md., and The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Father Keane was ordained a priest at St. Joseph's Cathedral in Hartford by Archbishop Henry O'Brien on May 31, 1962. He served as an assistant at St. Pius X, Wallingford; Immaculate Conception, Hartford; Our Lady of Victory, West Haven; St. Joseph, New Haven, and St. Ann, Avon. He was appointed pastor of Sacred Heart Church, Waterbury, in 1981 and St. John the Baptist Church in New Haven in 1987, where he served until his retirement in 2011. During this pastorate, he also served as administrator of St. Ann Church in Hamden, from 2004 to 2011.
NEW FRANCISCAN FRIARS — Two men professed their solemn vows as friars during a recent Mass held at St. Patrick-St. Anthony Church in Hartford. The two friars, Brothers Angel Vazquez, OFM, and Jay Woods, OFM, made lifelong commitments to the Franciscan Friars and to living vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Vazquez, a native of Staten Island, N.Y., professed his first vows as a Franciscan in August 2016 in Burlington, Wis., where he had spent a year as part of the Franciscan Interprovincial Novitiate. Since then, he has been involved in studies and ministry work, living mainly in Chicago and western New York. In the summer, he participated in a four-week retreat at Mount Irenaeus Franciscan Mountain Retreat in western New York. He is now living at and serving as a resident minister at St. Bonaventure University, Allegany, N.Y.

Two years after joining the Franciscans’ training program, Brother Woods, a native of Peabody, Mass., professed his first vows as a Franciscan in 2015 in Burlington, Wis., where he had spent a year as part of the Franciscan Interprovincial Novitiate. Over the last four years, the friar has lived in Chicago, studying, serving as a chaplain to the incarcerated and participating in social justice advocacy. In June 2020, he completed a year-long internship at St. Patrick-St. Anthony Parish, serving in a variety of roles and ministries, including executing the broadcast of Masses, workshops and retreats, as well as working with The Open Hearth to establish a long-term transitional housing location called Catherine’s Place at St. Patrick-St. Anthony Parish. He is continuing to study theology at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

CONNECTICUT CATHOLIC MEN’S CONFERENCE — This year’s Connecticut Catholic Men’s Conference was held outside at the New Britain Bees Stadium. In commemoration of the 150th anniversary of St. Joseph being proclaimed the patron of the Universal Church by Pope Pius IX on Dec. 8, 1870, the year there was “St. Joseph: Our Patron,” Father Jeffrey Romans (pictured) was the principal celebrant of Holy Mass at the Mass dedicated to Father Michael J. McGivney, priest of the Archdiocese of Hartford and founder of the Knights of Columbus. Speakers included Walter Finneran for testimony on the Brian O’Connell Homeless Project in Waterbury; David Craig in adoration for vocations; Sister Veronica Mary Sullivan on the life of Father McGivney; and Aaron Joseph on “St. Joseph: Our Patron,” his lay apostolate founded to promote St. Joseph’s universal patronage.

APPOINTMENTS

The Most Reverend Leonard P. Blair, S.T.D., has made the following appointments:

- Rev. John P. Malnic, pastor of St. Gertrude Parish, Windsor, effective Sept. 1, 2020. This appointment is in addition to duties as pastor, St. Domen of Molokai Parish, Windsor, and episcopal vicar of the Northern Vicariate.
- Deacon Joseph L. MacNeill, to deacon of St. Catherine of Siena Parish, West Simsbury, effective Sept. 8, 2020, in addition to duties as prefect for the seminarians of the archdiocese.
- Rev. Joseph P. Crowley, from administrator to pastor, St. Maximilian Kolbe Parish, Thomaston, effective Sept. 1, 2020, for a term of six years.
- Rev. Anthony J. Smith, from temporary administrator to administrator, St. Mary Magdalen Parish, Oakville, effective Sept. 1, 2020, in addition to responsibilities as pastor, St. John the Evangelist Parish, Waterbury.

The following priests have been elected as members of the Presbyteral Council:

- REV. RYAN M. LERNER, CHANCELLOR, SEPT. 24, 2020

TWELVE DAYS OF HOLLY BERRY — The Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Hamden are taking their annual Holly Berry Festival virtual this year from Nov. 10 to 21. Enjoy the convenience of online shopping, basket raffles and three cash prizes. Don’t miss festival favorites like the Apostles’ famous pickled eggplant, homemade jellies, specialized handcrafted items made by the sisters and Christmas Tree Lane. Event proceeds benefit the care of the retired Apostles at Sacred Heart Manor. For more information about the Twelve Days of Holly Berry, visit assjus.org.

WJMJ SETS RADIO-THON IN NOVEMBER — WJMJ, Catholic Radio Where Faith Meets Life, is one of Connecticut’s most popular radio stations and is operated by the Archdiocese of Hartford Office of Radio and Television. WJMJ is a non-commercial radio station and is listener-supported by fundraising events twice a year, including biannual radio-thons. The fall radio-thon will run Nov. 19 to 23. To make a donation from the Hartford area, call 860.242.8800. From anywhere else, call toll-free at 1.877.342.9596. There is also a way to make donations online. Look for the “Please donate now” button on the ortv.org web page.

SPIRIT OF THE FRANCISCAN CHRISTMAS FAIR — The annual Franciscan Christmas Fair goes online this year for 30 days. The Spirit of the Franciscan Christmas Fair will be held Nov. 21 to Dec. 20. Because of the pandemic, the fair will be recreating the spirit of the living Crèche from past years. Fair items including Christmas trees, wreaths, centerpieces, pottery, handcrafted miniature reindeer, handmade candles, Holy Land items and more will be for sale. The basket raffle will also be available. Santa and Mrs. Claus will have a special North Pole online booth for children to tell Santa their wishes. The fair is a major fundraising event for the Catholic nonprofit services of the Franciscan Life Center and Franciscan Home Care and Hospice Care in Meriden. Visit flcenter.org or call 203.237.8084 for more information.

EDITORS’ NOTE: At press time, the events listed here were scheduled. For questions, call the phone numbers or check the websites provided for each event.

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We See 20/20 When Jesus Is Our Prescription
See a Video of the Parish Priest Author Discussing the Book

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“Does Our Daughter Really Need Tutoring For A ‘B’ In Math?”
Make This Vintage-style Clock
Meet the Seminarians