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BI-WEEKLY NEWSPAPER OF THE DIOCESE OF ERIE

November 8, 2015

TRANSFORMATION: Bishop unveils plan for schools

BY MARY SOLBERG | FAITHLIFE

Bishop Lawrence Persico calls the proposed top-to-bottom plan for Catholic schools in the Diocese of Erie both "bold" and "transformational."

Despite concerns raised by parents mostly in the greater Erie area, the bishop is confident that the preliminary recommendations are necessary and important to secure the future of Catholic education in the 13 counties of the diocese.

"We are at an important crossroads in the history of our diocese and I'm of the opinion that we must move forward boldly and without fear," the bishop wrote in a letter to pastors and parishioners after the preliminary plan was announced to the public Oct. 28.

Under the proposal, two grade schools in Erie would close and others would lose their sixth through eighth grades. Two middle schools would be established in the newly created Erie system, while several schools outside of Erie would form a consortium to



Photo by Mary Solberg

Bishop Lawrence Persico enjoys visiting a session of Catholic school educators and staff who gathered at St. Mark Catholic Center in Erie to discuss the proposed plan for schools in the Diocese of Erie.

enhance programs and planning. In a presentation to Catholic school principals and staff at St. Mark Catholic Center Oct. 27, the bishop asked for feedback and prayers. He also requested open minds. "We can be the agents of change or the victims of change," Bishop Persico told the edu-

cators. "This is our moment in the history of the Diocese of Erie. So let's take advantage of it and move forward." Like many bishops throughout the country, Bishop Persico—even in his brief tenure as leader of the Diocese of Erie—has

>>> See SCHOOLS, page 3

Preliminary Proposal

ERIE AREA CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Could possibly close:
■ St. Boniface
■ St. Peter Cathedral

Could possibly become pre-K through grade 5 only:

- Blessed Sacrament
- Our Lady's Christian
- St. George
- St. James
- St. Luke

Being considered as middle schools only:

- Our Lady of Peace
- Our Lady of Mount Carmel

Could possibly remain pre-K through grade 8:

- St. George, North East

Special considerations:

- The Diocese of Erie is in ongoing discussions with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania regarding how Villa Maria Elementary School might participate in future plans.
- Holy Family School could become a separate corporation and operate a K-5 format, serving as an inner-city ministry of the diocese.

Likely to remain unchanged:

- Erie Catholic Preparatory School (Cathedral Prep and Villa Maria Academy)
- Mercyhurst Preparatory

FEEDBACK?

Feedback on the proposed plan will be accepted through Dec. 1. Submission forms and the full plan can be found at: www.ErieRCD.org/planning.asp.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Bishop Lawrence Persico will approve a final plan in February 2016. Implementation could begin at the start of the 2018-19 school year, perhaps earlier.

WHAT'S THE PLAN?

See the proposed Erie plan at right. The preliminary plan for schools elsewhere can be viewed on PAGE 3.

WORLD NEWS

Bishops plead for climate change action

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—The presidents of the U.S. and Canadian bishops' conferences joined leaders of the regional bishops' conferences of Asia, Africa, Latin America, Oceania and Europe in signing an appeal for government leaders to reach a "fair, legally binding and truly transformational climate agreement" at a summit in Paris.

Indian Cardinal Oswald Gracias of Mumbai, president of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, signed the appeal Oct. 26 at the beginning of a joint news conference at the Vatican.

The appeal is addressed to negotiators preparing for the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Paris Nov. 30 to Dec. 11. The bishops called for "courageous and imaginative political leadership" and for legal frameworks that "clearly establish boundaries and ensure the protection of the ecosystem."

The bishops also asked governments to recognize the "ethical and moral dimensions of climate change," to recognize that the climate and the atmosphere are common goods belonging to all, to set a strong limit on global temperature increase and to promote new models of development and lifestyles that are "climate compatible."

The appeal calls for decisions that place people above profits, that involve the poor in decision-making, that protect people's access to water and to land, are particularly mindful of vulnerable communities and are specific in commitments to finance mitigation efforts.

Colombian Cardinal Ruben Salazar Gomez of Bogota, president of the Latin American bishops council, spoke of the Amazon basin and the key role it plays in the survival of South America and the world. The Latin American bishops, he said, want an end to pollution, to the destruction of the forests and the disappearance of biodiversity, but they also want justice for their people, the majority of whom do not benefit from the exploitation of resources taken from their countries.

The appeal said that most people recognize the planet as "a shared inheritance, who(s) fruits are meant to benefit everyone.

HOPE behind the RAZOR WIRE

Inmates find God in prisons of Erie Diocese

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MARY SOLBERG msolberg@ErieRCD.org

Not many people would find God in the prison cell where Theodore Sherlock was severely beaten.

He and his cellmate allegedly got into a violent fight one evening last month at the State Correctional Institution at Albion in Erie County.

Sherlock was rushed to the hospital with blunt force trauma to his head. Less than a week later, he died. Erie Bishop Lawrence Persico, in a pre-scheduled visit, walked into the prison only two days after the deadly altercation. He offered the sacraments, as well as a glimmer of hope and peace to the Catholic inmates gathered for Mass.

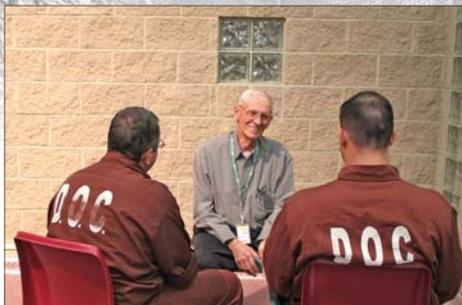
"In my homily, I told them no matter what you do, no matter where you are, Christ is with you...even in your cell," Bishop Persico says. Such is the church of God in America's prisons—where chaplains, volunteers and law enforcement officers walk a tightrope between violence and hope.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the 2012 homicide rate in state prisons stood at 7 per 100,000. That's not much worse than most American cities today. Still, prisons remain communities encumbered with a concentrated mix of anger, abuse, addiction and isolation.

Those who minister behind the razor wire and steel doors of prisons in the 13 counties of the Diocese of Erie say that God is the only permanent, authentic way out.



Graphic by Elizabeth Butterfield



Deacon Robert Hoover, Catholic chaplain at the State Correctional Institution-Houtzdale, Clearedfield County, shares a light moment with prisoners.

"Someone can find God in prison, but if they leave him at the gate when they're released, then more than likely they'll end up back here," says Deacon Ralph DeCecco, director of prison ministry in the diocese and facility chaplaincy program director at SCI-Albion.

Mark Zaleski says state troopers are investigating the Albion inmate death as a homicide. A Catholic and a 25-year police veteran, he believes nurturing people's faith may prevent crimes that put people in jail in the first place. "I think faith-based ministry in the prisons is a must and I wish every-

one from all religions would get involved with it," Sgt. Zaleski says. America's criminal justice system continues to examine and debate the effect spiritual programs have on recidivism, the rate by which someone returns to prison after being released. It's a revolving door that many volunteers and prison officials seek to close.

"Many of these individuals are broken and they have suffered some of the worst that life can dish out," says Joanne Torma, superintendent of SCI Cambridge Springs, a minimum security prison for women in Crawford County. "I believe that faith and community support of faith are essential in an inmate's transformation to the person she will become when she leaves here and tries to become

a productive member of society." The five state prisons and one federal institution in the diocese offer weekly Masses and numerous spiritual opportunities, including Bible study, faith formation, retreats, meditation exercises, and metanoias (Cursillos in the prison setting).

For Catholic inmates in state and federal facilities in northwestern Pennsylvania, these opportunities can be life-savers. There are only about 1,500 Catholics out of nearly 11,000 prisoners currently incarcerated in this region's state and federal systems.

Richard, a parole violator serving a seven-year sentence at the State Correctional Institution-Forest in Marienville, attends metanoias and a Monasteries of the Heart program led by Sister Marian Wehler, OSB, and Sister Tina Geiger, RSM. He regularly talks to Father Christopher Barnes, the Catholic chaplain, and interacts with other Catholic lay volunteers.

"I was a stranger to my faith, but coming back to the church here has allowed me to get more guidance in my everyday life," Richard says. "The biggest thing I'd want people to understand about prison is that it's not about just putting someone in jail to do their time. It's about a person learning about them-

>>> See PRISONS, page 4

■ Lego-loving priest combines building passion with ministry

MOSCOW, Pa. (CNS)—Bob Simon fell in love with two things at the age of 5: the Catholic Church and building with Legos.

Now, as a 51-year-old priest, Father Simon has discovered a way to merge both of these passions. The pastor of St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Moscow, Pa., finds that his Lego-building hobby not only provides him with a diversion from his ministry at a busy parish, but that it enriches his prayer life and offers him a tool for evangelization on a large scale.

Father Simon's 14-by-6-foot self-described "Lego Vatican" is a featured display at the Franklin Institute Science Museum in Philadelphia as part of its "Vatican Splendors" exhibit, which opened Sept. 19 in time for Pope Francis' visit to the city. The exhibit will close Feb. 15.



CNS photo

Father Bob Simon, pastor of St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Moscow, Pa., places a Lego piece on a model church he is building in a spare room in his rectory.

■ Pope requests aid to earthquake victims in Pakistan, Afghanistan

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—As the death toll from an earthquake in Pakistan and Afghanistan continues to rise, Pope Francis has called for prayers and concrete aid for survivors.

The magnitude-7.5 temblor Oct. 26 left at least 380 people dead and thousands of homes and buildings badly damaged.

"Let us pray for the dead and their relatives, for all those who are wounded and the homeless," Pope Francis said at the end of his general audience in St. Peter's Square Oct. 28.

He asked that God offer consolation and courage to those who were suffering and struggling. Further, he asked that "these brothers and sisters not be lacking our concrete solidarity."

■ Apostolic exhortation on family is expected soon

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, said an apostolic exhortation on the family following the recently concluded Synod of Bishops could be released soon.

"I imagine that it won't take long because usually these things should be done in a relatively short time, otherwise it loses its strength a bit, its impact," Cardinal Parolin told Vatican Radio Oct. 28. "I think if the pope decides to do it, he will do it relatively quickly."

The postsynodal apostolic exhortation follows a request made by the synod fathers in their final report.

■ Catholics deride 172-mile canal

MANAGUA, Nicaragua (CNS)—Catholic Church representatives in Nicaragua are concerned about the potential social and environmental impact of building a 172-mile-long canal through the country to link the Pacific and the Atlantic oceans.

"We have said that it's OK if the canal brings benefits to the people, but the government needs to act with transparency and clarity, because there is not enough information," Bishop Jorge Solorzano Perez of Granada told Catholic News Service.

The concession to build and operate the canal for 50 years, renewable for another 50, was awarded in June 2013 to a newly created Chinese-Nicaraguan consortium, HKND Group. Last December, the Nicaraguan government began paving a road for the project, which supporters argue will boost the economy and create 250,000 much-needed jobs for one of the poorest countries in the region.

The project, if finished, will connect the Pacific and Atlantic oceans across this Central American country of 6.1 million people. It will be about 570 yards wide and nearly 100 feet deep.



CNS photo

Fisherman Joseph Enoch Rodriguez sits on a log Sept. 9 in Boca de Brito, Nicaragua, a small community on the Pacific coast.



Editor's Notes

Mary SOLBERG

"Listen carefully: Any one of us is capable of doing what these men and women in prison have done. We all sin and make mistakes in life. They are not worse than you or me."
—Pope Francis

Wherever he travels, Pope Francis makes it a point to visit prisons. During his most recent visit to Philadelphia, the Holy Father met with inmates at the Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility.

"All of us are invited to encourage, help and enable your rehabilitation," he told 100 men who gathered to meet him and listen to his message of mercy.

I can't think of a better way for FaithLife to introduce the coming Holy Year of Mercy than with the prison ministry feature that begins on page 1.

In the past year, I visited three state prisons in our diocese and talked to several inmates who shared their stories of struggle and hope.

Also featured in the article are a few of the many clergy, sisters and lay volunteers who told me about the ups and downs of prison ministry.

Mercy Sister Tina Geiger, who meets with the inmates at the State Correctional Institution-Forest in Marienville, likes to say that "God is hidden in plain sight" in the prison environment.

Bishop Lawrence Persico announced last week the preliminary plan that is expected to bolster and enhance the Catholic schools in the Diocese of Erie.

Everyone is welcome to respond to those proposals until Dec. 1 by going to www.ErieRCD.org/planning.asp.

Many questions have been raised about the athletic changes that may result from the creation of five K-5 schools and two middle schools. Doug Chuzie, athletic director, is excited that the plan will only solidify Catholic school athletics.

"We believe there will actually be expanded athletic opportunities under the new model with our middle schools," Chuzie said.

Speaking of sports, several Catholic schools in the Diocese of Erie have reason to celebrate this fall.

The Mercyhurst Prep girls' tennis team won its fourth straight PIAA championship in Hershey. They joined the Kennedy Catholic boys' basketball team as the second District 10 athletic program to have earned PIAA championship trophies four consecutive years.

In Sharon, the Villa Maria Academy



Photo courtesy of Prep-Villa

The Villa Maria Academy varsity soccer team is pictured praying at the grotto located at the Prep and Villa Events Center in Erie.

cross country team captured the D-10 Class AA girls' crown, while Cathedral Prep's team was the district's large-school team champion.

The Villa Maria water polo and the Cathedral Prep water polo teams won their respective Western Conference championships, moving them on to the state tournament.

In addition, Villa won its second consecutive PIAA AA golf state championship.

Congratulations to all!

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Q&A with Carolyn Woo: Faith—Action—Results

Carolyn Woo, president and CEO of Catholic Relief Services, delivered the prestigious Thomas J. and Mary H. Loftus Lecture on Catholic Thought and Action Oct. 21 at Gannon University in Erie.

While CRS "encounters people in the deepest of suffering," Woo told her audience: "Good-heartedness is not enough. How do we use our talents in order to serve the best we can?"

The following is a question-and-answer session with Woo and FaithLife.

Q: How has the work of CRS changed since it was founded in 1943?

CW: Most of our work in 1943 was emergency relief. Today, we still are a very big emergency agency, but two-thirds of our work is about long-term development and transformation. Today, we are now in over 103 countries. Our work spans 11 or 12 sectors, including education, livelihood, teaching people how to start small enterprises, use of water for agriculture and hygiene, peace-



Photos by Mary Solberg

building, working with disabled children and health systems. We are going for holistic solutions. Integral human development is a Catholic concept that says a problem has root causes. So, hunger is not just a lack of food; it could be a lack of productivity. It could be a lack of land rights. It could be literacy issues or reflected in malnutrition.

Q: What makes CRS different from other organizations?

CW: I would say CRS follows

the Catholic principles that distinguish us. We have the strongest priority on the very poorest of people. We go for those who are truly at the margins.

Another thing is that Catholic social teaching calls for solidarity and subsidiarity. Subsidiarity calls for us to develop the capacity of

the people we serve. It is empowering the local people, our local communities and our local partners. We are not just giving things to people; we are actually changing their own capacity so that they can be more resilient, more prosperous, more independent.

Q: In spite of all the world's problems, how can the average person make a difference?

CW: There are four things you can do, but, overall, we must have a general spiritual orientation. God puts us on earth to be for each other. I think we are supposed to serve each other and we are served by others. The second thing is I don't think God gives us what we cannot handle, and third,

I don't think we have to do it all.

Mother Teresa had the right idea. She just served whoever she could reach and whoever was in need. She was not trying to solve poverty. She couldn't give them what she didn't have.

This is the mentality of people of faith. We have a part to do, but God has a part to do, too. CRS promotes four actions: prayer, learning (if we don't open our eyes, we can never open our hearts), and action and giving. We want to surrender what is our best.

Q: You often write about your own family. How have they

helped you in your position at CRS?

CW: My parents left everything behind in China, first during World War II and then during the Communist revolution.

I actually understand migrants and refugees. I can see them as people of hope and people of dreams, not just people of need. There is a whole work ethic of the immigrant family and there is strength of family and community. It just nurtures so much in terms of a sense of belonging and a sense of can-do, a sense that you're not in the world alone.

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St. Martin Center to benefit from coffee event

ERIE—The public is invited to a coffee sampling Nov. 15 from noon to 4 p.m. to benefit St. Martin Center, Erie. The Erie's Best Coffee event will be held at the Ambassador Center's garden atrium, 7794 Peach St., Erie. All proceeds will benefit St. Martin Center, 1701 Parade St., Erie.

The afternoon will include coffee and other beverages, pastries and chocolate. Celebrity judges will choose Erie's best coffee. Tickets cost \$10 per person; free to children 12 and under.

Tickets can be purchased at the door, at the St. Martin Center office, on Facebook or online at www.stmartincenter.org.



Information Night scheduled at DCC

DuBOIS—The secondary enrollment committee of DuBois Central Catholic will host the school's annual Information Night Nov. 15 beginning at 6 p.m. The open house is for students and their families interested in learning more about Central Catholic Middle School and Central Catholic High School, 200 Central Christian Road, DuBois. Activities are planned for parents and students, and applications for next school year will be accepted. Call 814-371-3060, ext. 606, for details.

Pancake breakfast remembers 'pancake chef'

ERIE—Mount Calvary Church will host a pancake breakfast in memory of Terry Skarupski, who was the church's "pancake chef" for a number of years.

The breakfast will be held in Feeny Hall at Mount Calvary Church, 2022 East Lake Road, Erie, on Nov. 15 from 9 to 11:30 a.m. Enjoy breakfast and a gift auction. For more information, call the parish office at 814-454-0061.

Religious education program to benefit from upcoming Christmas craft fair

ALBION—The St. Lawrence Parish Christmas craft fair will be held at the parish center in Albion Nov. 21 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. There will be crafters, a food concession and bake sale. Proceeds benefit the St. Lawrence Religious Education Program.

St. Peter Cathedral continues concert series

ERIE—The St. Peter Cathedral Concert Series continues Nov. 22 at 4 p.m. with Allan Stovenkay, organist and choir master emeritus of Trinity Memorial Episcopal Church, Warren. He held a faculty appointment and the post of college organist at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford for 25 years. He was harpsichord soloist with the Erie Chamber Orchestra and the Erie Renaissance Singers. The concert is free and open to the public.

Schools

Continued from page 1

been forced to close and consolidate schools in face of declining populations and fiscal concerns.

The new proposal calls for the possible closing of two long-time elementary schools and a restructuring of several others, but in the long view it may secure Catholic schools here for the future, the bishop said.

Currently, kindergarten through 12th grade enrollment in the diocese stands at 7,743. That's a decline, particularly in the primary grades, even from just six years ago. Research conducted by the diocese through its consultant, Meitler of Milwaukee, Wis., indicates that high school enrollment is stable in Erie and declining somewhat in high schools elsewhere in the diocese.

"There are no real population growth projections," said Father Nicholas Rouch, vicar for Education. "So the question is how

do we restructure the schools to be efficient and viable?"

Several educators, school staff, priests and religious who attended the schools summit at St. Mark expressed concerns about the plan's visibility and implementation.

Msgr. David Rubino of Mercyhurst University asked about tuition models and discounts to families. Kathy Griser, advancement director at Our Lady of Peace School, Erie, asked for clarification on how the proposed middle schools were selected.

Sister Kevin Berdis, principal at Holy Family School, expressed concerns about eliminating sixth through eighth grades at her inner-city school.

"Where they are right now is where they feel comfortable," Sister Kevin said. "It has to be done gradually. These students are different."

Rick Pendergast, a consultant with Meitler, told the gathering that the preliminary plan "is not the final plan."

"It is the best thinking right now," Pendergast said.



Photo by Mary Solberg

Holy Trinity principal, Sister Mary Kevin Berdis, OSF, right, and Mary Detwiler, principal at St. Leo School, Ridgway, discuss Catholic identity during the Catholic schools summit on Oct. 27.

Others, like Lisa Panighetti, principal at Our Lady of Mount Carmel School, said the plan could benefit students in the long run. Two years ago, Mount Carmel welcomed sixth-through eighth-graders from nearby St. Boniface School.

"Sometimes different things need to happen in order for great things to occur," Panighetti said. Stacey Pfarr, a parent of three children currently enrolled at Our Lady's Christian School, Erie, said she's excited for the new plan to be implemented. Her family, she said, is planning to be affiliated with Catholic schools "for the long haul."

"I think the plan is great, especially for the middle schools," Pfarr said. "I think parents, at least at Our Lady's Christian, understand it is needed."

Another area of great interest as a result of the plan is the effect it may have on athletics.

Doug Chuzie, director of athletics for the diocese, said that as the plan unfolds he and others "are going to do our best to recognize and honor many of our Parochial League traditions." Chuzie added, "We believe there will actually be expanded athletic opportunities under the new model with our middle schools."

PROPOSAL FOR SCHOOLS OUTSIDE ERIE

Consortium

Eleven Catholic schools in the diocese not already connected to a school system will form a consortium in order to improve academic quality and operational efficiency. Schools in the consortium will include:

- Immaculate Conception, Clarion (pre-K - 8)
- Seton Catholic, Meadville (pre-K - 8)
- St. Cosmas and Damian, Punsulawney (pre-K - 5)
- St. Bernard, Bradford, (K - 8)
- St. Francis, Clearfield (pre-K - 8)
- St. Gregory, North East (pre-K - 8)
- St. Joseph, Lucinda (pre-K - 6)
- St. Joseph, Warren (pre-K - 5)
- St. Michael, Greenville (pre-K - 8)

- St. Patrick, Franklin (pre-K - 8)
- St. Stephen, Oil City (pre-K - 8, but could become pre-K - 12 at Venango Catholic High School)

Special cases:

- St. Boniface in Kersey and St. Leo in Ridgway both would continue with pre-K - 5 models and become satellite campuses of Elk County Catholic School System.

3 current Catholic school systems will develop comprehensive strategic plans and/or update advancement plans:

- DuBois Area Catholic
- Elk County Catholic
- Kennedy Catholic Family of Schools



Photo by Mary Solberg

Our Lady of Peace Principal Mary Beth Ek, center, makes a point at St. Mark Catholic Center during discussions about the proposed school plan.

OBITUARIES

Father Jacques DePaul Daley, OSB

Benedictine monk was spiritual director

LATROBE—Father Jacques DePaul Daley, OSB, a monk of Saint Vincent Archabbey in Latrobe, died Oct. 25. Ordained in Greensburg 44 years ago, Father Daley gave retreats to religious communities and parishes throughout the United States. Also, he was a spiritual director to many seminarians, priests and religious throughout western Pennsylvania.

In the Diocese of Erie, he served as parochial vicar of Sacred Heart Church, St. Marys, from 1977-80.

Father Jacques was well known for his work with Mother Angelica of the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) from 1995 to 2006. He was a regular guest on Mother Angelica's EWTN, where he served as host and commentator for three mini-series. In his monastic community,

Father Jacques DePaul Daley, OSB, served in a number of assignments at Saint Vincent College and Saint Vincent Seminary. A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated Oct. 28 in the Archabbey Basilica, followed by the Rite of Committal at the Mary, Mother of Mercy Mausoleum Chapel at Saint Vincent Cemetery.

Memorials may be made to the Benedictine Health and Welfare Fund, Saint Vincent Archabbey, 300 Fraser Purchase Road, Latrobe, PA 15660.



Father Jacques DePaul Daley, OSB

Father Thomas S. Hoderny

Served as Maryknoll missionary, pastor in diocese

Father Thomas S. Hoderny, 69, died Oct. 20 at the Bishop Michael J. Murphy Residence for Retired Priests in Erie.

Father Hoderny was born June 3, 1946, in Cleveland, Ohio, the son of the late Chester and Julia Hoderny. In 1951, his family moved to Erie, where he attended Holy Rosary School. He continued his education at Maryknoll Junior Seminary in Clarks Summit, Pa., graduating in 1964. He then entered Maryknoll College Seminary, remaining there for two years before serving in the U.S. Air Force from 1967-71. He later earned his bachelor's degree in psychology at Pennsylvania State University.

Father Hoderny returned to the Maryknoll community in 1972

and to the major seminary in 1973. He traveled to missions in Korea in the mid-1970s, and was ordained to the priesthood on May 19, 1979. After his ordination, he earned a master of divinity degree in 1979, and a master's in pastoral counseling in 1980. He was assigned to South America in 1981, but had to return to the United States in 1983 due to illness.

At the end of 1984, Father Hoderny was incardinated into the Diocese of Erie. He served in a variety of capacities, including as parochial vicar at St. Andrew Parish, Erie; Immaculate Conception Parish, Clarion; and St. Catherine of Siena Parish, DuBois. He was parochial administrator of Our Lady Help of Christians Parish, Oil City, from 1987-89, and of St. Peter and Paul Parish, Hawk Run, and St. Peter and Paul Parish, Grasslitz, in 1994. He served as pastor of St. Mary Parish, Crown, and St. Ann Mission, Marienville, from 1994 to 2003, as well as of St. Michael the Archangel Parish, DuBois, from 2003-04, and St. Francis Xavier Parish, McKean, from 2004-07. He was senior associate at St. Catherine of Siena from 2011-12, and then began an

early retirement due to ill health. During his retirement, he was able to serve as chaplain to the Sisters of Mercy at their motherhouse in Erie.

Besides his parents, Father Hoderny was preceded in death by a sister, Angela Feeney. Survivors include his sisters, Kathleen Walker and Marilyn Amento; and many nieces and nephews.

Bishop Lawrence Persico was the main celebrant at a funeral Mass Oct. 24 at St. Francis Xavier Parish, McKean. Burial was at Calvary Cemetery.

Memorials may be made to the Bishop Michael J. Murphy Residence for Retired Priests, 400 East Gore Road, Erie, PA 16509; or to St. Francis Xavier Church, 8880 West Main St., McKean.



Father Thomas S. Hoderny

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Inmates find God in prisons of the diocese



Mercy Sister Tina Geiger, center, and Benedictine Sister Marian Wehler go over material with an inmate at the State Correctional Institution-Forest.

PRISONS, from page 1

selves and applying that knowledge rather than become a stigma and a drain on society." At SCI-Houtzdale in Clearfield County, Stephen is doing time for involuntary manslaughter. He credits Deacon Bob Hoover, 81, for inspiring him to consider becoming Catholic. He enjoys attending Catholic services and religious education classes. "I'm going to keep pursuing being a Catholic because of him," Stephen says. "If it wasn't for his teaching, his understanding, his compassion, I wouldn't even consider it." Upon hearing this compliment, Deacon Hoover winks, saying that humor also seems to go a long way in opening people to faith. "These guys have it too

serious all the time," he says. "If they're going to find God in their life, they're going to have to find a little levity, too." The picture isn't all that bright inside the penal institutions across America, considered by the International Centre for Prison Studies to have the largest incarceration rate in the world. Nationwide, the state and federal prison population stood at about 1.5 million as of December 2014. "We are in great need of more priests to come to the prisons and we're also in need of volunteers," Deacon DeCecco says. "It takes an open heart and an open mind to look at someone who comes in after committing a crime and know that the same

Jesus that's in them is also in you." Prison ministry isn't easy. Just ask Rod and Rita Hartle who volunteer at SCI-Forest; George and Marlene Beisler, who visit women inmates at the Crawford County Correctional Facility, Saegertown; and Kathleen Lipkovich, who this past spring sponsored four women receiving the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and first Communion at SCI-Cambridge Springs. "These men of fenced society

and they've got to make reparation for what they did, but we have to help them do their sentence with dignity," Rod Hartle says. The Beislers and four others from St. Anthony Parish, Cambridge Springs, visit inmates in nearby Saegertown two to three times per week. They pray the rosary, talk and offer Bible study classes. "One girl was strung out on drugs and in solitary. All she did was cry, so we're trying to give her enough to do to occupy her," George Beisler says. "You can really see God's hand in all of this."

After inmates are released from prison, there is still a place to go in the diocese: Maria House Project. Founded in Erie in 1971, it ministers to men with various backgrounds, including addictions, homelessness and incarceration. "Prison doesn't end when you walk back into the world. It stays with you for a while," says Joe Tarquinio, Maria House director. "We have to help these people adjust, otherwise they resort back to crime." Bishop Persico has offered Mass to the men at Maria House, and has made seven visits to the federal and state institutions in the diocese. Like Pope Francis, he believes God's mercy overcomes the walls of any prison. "I look at these prisoners as part of my flock," Bishop Persico explains. "It's just a different kind of church building."

State Correctional Institutions in the Diocese of Erie:

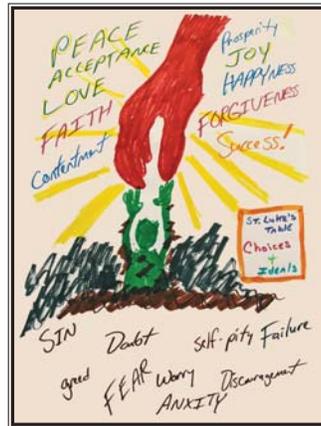
(Source: Prison Ministry of the Diocese of Erie, September 2015)

- **SCI-Albion (medium security, men)**
2,274 inmates; 328 Catholics
Catholic chaplains: Deacon Tom McArAw, Father Phil Oriole
- **SCI-Cambridge Springs (minimum security, women)**
1,081 inmates; 225 Catholics
Catholic chaplains: Father David Poulson, Deacon Tom McArAw
- **SCI-Forest, Marienville (close security, or maximum, men)**
2,305 inmates; 231 Catholics
Catholic chaplains: Father Christopher Barnes, Deacon Michael Dittman
- **SCI-Houtzdale (medium security, men)**
2,492 inmates; 288 Catholics
Catholic chaplains: Father Marc Solomon, Deacon Robert Hoover
- **SCI-Mercer (minimum security, men)**
1,420 inmates; 238 Catholics
Catholic chaplains: Father Jim Kennelley, Deacon Richard Rueberger

Federal Correctional Institution in the Diocese of Erie:

(Source: FCI-McKean, October 2015)

- **FCI-McKean, Bradford**
1,350 inmates; 250 Catholics
Catholic chaplains: Father Vincent Cieslewicz, Father Jorge Villegas



A prisoner at SCI-Forest depicts in his artwork the power of faith and love when faced with struggle.

Want to volunteer... in the prisons of the Erie Diocese?

Contact Deacon Ralph DeCecco, director of prison ministry, at rdececco@pa.gov or at 814-756-5778, ext. 3376.

Monetary donations to diocesan prison ministries may be mailed (with the memo line "prison ministry") to:

Diocese of Erie
Office of Financial Services
St. Mark Catholic Center
429 East Grandview Blvd., Erie, PA 16504

The Fund for Prisoners

The Joan Chittister Fund for Prisoners, an outreach sponsored by the Benedictine Sisters of Erie and Benetivision, was established in 2006 to provide free inspirational materials to prisons in the Diocese of Erie and across the United States.

This year, the Fund for Prisoners has provided \$68,000 worth of monastic-based materials to 95 prisons, including the Erie County Prison and state correctional institutions at Cambridge Springs and Forest.

To make a contribution to Fund for Prisoners, go to: www.joanchittister.org.



Rita and Rod Hartle stand on the prison grounds of SCI-Forest. They are among many lay volunteers in prisons throughout the diocese.



Bishop Lawrence Persico, center, administers sacraments to inmates at SCI-Cambridge Springs. He is joined by Father Christopher Singer, left, and Father David Poulson.

PHOTOS See photos from Around the Diocese in the next issue of *FaithLife*.

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