

Venerable Father Baker

Celebrations planned to mark progress in Father Baker's sainthood cause, page 2.



FaithLife

Investing in our youth

Knights of Columbus present check for youth ministry, page 4.



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BI-WEEKLY NEWS BULLETIN OF THE DIOCESE OF ERIE

February 13, 2011

Church Calendar

Events of the local, American and universal church

Feast days



Gian Lorenzo Bernini's sculpture behind the main altar in St. Peter's Basilica is lit by candles on the Feb. 22 feast of the Chair of St. Peter, Apostle. The annual feast day, celebrated since ancient times, marks the role of St. Peter and his successors as head of the church.

- Feb. 13 World Marriage Day
- Feb. 14 St. Cyril and St. Methodius
- Feb. 17 The Seven Founders of the Order of the Servites
- Feb. 21 St. Peter Damian
- Feb. 22 The Chair of St. Peter
- Feb. 23 St. Polycarp

Clergy appointments

The Most Rev. Donald W. Trautman, STD, SSL, Bishop of Erie, announces the following clergy appointments:



Deacon Ralph DeCecco, appointed coordinator of the diocesan prison ministry for a term of five years while continuing as staff chaplain at State Correctional Institution (SCI) Albion and deacon assistant at St. Andrew Parish, Erie. Effective January 28, 2011.

Father Thomas Hoderny, appointed senior associate at St. Catherine of Siena Parish, DuBois. Effective January 28, 2011.

Msgr. Daniel Magraw, appointed assistant to the Tribunal while continuing as pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish, Erie. Effective February 7, 2011.

Father Chris Singer, appointed Adjutant Judicial Vicar of the Diocese of Erie on an interim basis. Effective February 7, 2011.

Msgr. Robert J. Smith, appointed Judicial Vicar of the Diocese of Erie on an interim basis. Effective February 7, 2011.

www.ErieRCD.org
The website of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Erie

Do you know someone away from the Catholic Church? Help bring your friends and loved-ones back to the church. Find out more about Catholics Come Home.

Regionalization of Catholic schools announced in the Shenango Valley

Sharon, Hermitage elementary schools to merge; Kennedy Catholic to include new middle school

By Jason Koshinski
FaithLife editor

The Diocese of Erie, along with parishes and schools in the Shenango Valley, recently announced several changes that will lead to the regionalization of Catholic schools in the area.

St. Joseph School in Sharon and Notre Dame School in Hermitage will merge, with students in preschool through fifth grade attending the new Blessed John Paul II Elementary. The new school will be housed at the current Notre Dame School.

Students in grades 6 through 8 at St. Joseph and Notre Dame, along with students at Msgr. Geno Monti School in Farrell, will attend the new Kennedy Catholic Middle School, which will be housed in a separate wing at Kennedy Catholic High School's campus in Hermit-

age. Bishop Donald Trautman met separately with faculty and parents at both St. Joseph School and Notre Dame School Jan. 26 to make the announcements and discuss the future of Catholic education in the region.

The changes will take effect in the fall at the beginning of the 2011-12 school year.

Each of the schools—elementary, middle and high school—will have its own principal. The entire system—pre-K through 12th grade—will be a diocesan school, overseen by a local board of pastors and laypeople.

Msgr. Geno Monti School will continue to educate students from preschool through fifth grade.

Also under consideration is the rental of the St. Joseph School building to the Sharon School District, which is engaging in a major capital proj-



Beginning in the fall, St. Joseph School in Sharon and Notre Dame School in Hermitage will merge, with students in preschool through fifth grade attending the



new Blessed John Paul II Elementary. The new school will be housed under the current Notre Dame School campus.

ect. "We stand here tonight at a pivotal point to secure and strengthen Catholic education for the future of the Shenango Valley," Bishop Trautman said during the meetings.

"The graduates make us all proud," he said. "But the times and circumstances are now far different from when the schools first opened. The time is right for a change to a regional system of Catholic education."

During his meetings, Bishop Trautman said that the Catholic schools in the Shenango Valley share a number of challenges and

concerns. They include decreasing enrollment, baptisms and parish offertories, rising costs and parish debt. He noted that the decline in enrollment parallels what is going on in both public and Catholic schools throughout Pennsylvania and the diocese.

"I acknowledge that it's heart-wrenching when we have to move away from the buildings and communities that were made possible by the faith and commitment of those who came before us," Bishop Trautman said. "But our responsibility is not just to preserve the real estate or the institutions. It is to live out that same faith and commit-

ment." Noting that regionalization has proven successful in other areas of the diocese, including DuBois and St. Marys, the bishop pointed out that this change is part of a national trend, particularly in Catholic dioceses.

The regionalization of Catholic schools will bring about a number of benefits, he said. Among them are:

- The creation of a strong school system that would be a regional asset excelling in education, faith formation, fine arts and sports.

See MERGE, page 3

After serving Hispanic Catholics for nearly 20 years, Father Jorge Villegas says adios

By Jason Koshinski
FaithLife editor

ERIE — When Father Jorge Villegas first visited the Diocese of Erie in 1976 as part of the Mission of Friendship, he wrote something prophetic in his report to his supervisors.

"I remember one of my recommendations," Father Villegas recalls. "'Don't bring priests and seminarians only for two months. If you want to really take this seriously, bring someone to stay with the people.' I never thought that was going to work."

It turns out Father Villegas, pastor of St. Stephen Parish in Erie, took his own recommendation to heart.

Father Villegas, who came to the diocese in 1995 as administrator of its Hispanic Apostolate, will soon be returning to his native home of Mexico.

In 1971, the Diocese of Erie and the Archdiocese of Yucatan, Mexico, began the Mission of Friendship as a formalized exchange in what

is believed to be one of the longest running sister diocese partnerships in the United States.

Initially, Father Villegas was tapped for a three-year appointment as administrator of St. Stephen, a Hungarian-rooted parish which was welcoming Hispanic Catholics to establish their spiritual home at the church. Now, after 16-plus-years of serving both the English and Spanish-speaking congregations at St. Stephen, Father Jorge is saying goodbye.

At the time of his initial visits to Erie—for three months in 1975, a year in 1991 and the summer of 1994—Father Villegas' full-time work was teaching at the archdiocese's seminary in Mexico.

"I met so many families that are now in the parish," he said.

While a number of priests came to minister to the growing Hispanic population, it would be only for a few months at a time.

"The problem was, if you came for a summer, you made



Father Jorge Villegas greets parishioners following the noon Spanish Mass Feb. 6 at St. Stephen Parish in Erie. After guiding both the English and Spanish speaking communities at the community for more than 16 years, Father Villegas is returning to his native home in Mexico.

the people feel happy and you made the people accustomed to having a priest," he said. "Then for nine or ten months, they are without a priest. I didn't think that was too good."

So when the archbishop asked him to come to Erie for a longer stay, he came.

"It was like starting from zero," he said. "I came, and I didn't know anything about anything. My English was really poor, and I had to learn English just by talking to people."

He was familiar about American culture through his schooling. Even today, his fa-

Farewell Mass for Father Villegas

The diocesan family is invited to join in a farewell Mass for Father Jorge Villegas on Sunday, Feb. 20 at 4 p.m. at St. Peter Cathedral in Erie.

vorite hobby is collecting jazz CDs. Father Jorge said it was important to immerse himself in the culture.

"If you are going to work in one place, you need to embrace the whole environment," he said. You have to embrace the whole culture to understand the people—and not only to understand Americans but to understand Hispanics who are coming from other places and are now part of the American culture."

From the beginning of his ministry here, Father Jorge was welcomed by the 250 Hispanic families at St. Ste-

See FR. VILLEGAS, page 4

The new Roman Missal

The Roman Missal and Vatican II

Sacrosanctum Concilium (the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) was promulgated on Dec. 4, 1963 during the Second Vatican Council and is the blueprint for our liturgical renewal. It asserts that liturgy is a celebration of Christ's paschal mystery and that we are all to share in it through full, conscious and active participation. The church is so concerned about our whole-hearted participation because liturgy is the source and summit of our whole Christian life. —from the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions

To view the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy online, visit www.vatican.va/archive and click on II Vatican Council, then Sacrosanctum Concilium.

COUNTDOWN: There are 288 days to the implementation of the new Roman Missal (as of Feb. 13)



Catholic Services Appeal 2011

Commitment Sunday Feb. 26-27

The annual Catholic Services Appeal helps fund the Diocese of Erie's ministries and provides support for health and social services, pastoral services, education and diocesan administration throughout the 13 counties in northwest Pennsylvania.

The needs throughout the diocese are ongoing. Costs go up and the needs of the church continue to grow. Help support our ongoing diocesan ministries.

By supporting the CSA, here are just a few diocesan ministries you assist:

- Catholic Charities
- Tuition assistance
- Parish Care and Concern groups
- Religious education
- Marriage Tribunal
- Faith magazine and FaithLife news bulletin
- Lay ministry training
- Youth and young adult ministry
- Refugee ministry
- Family life and support programs
- Campus ministry
- Adult education

Parishes also benefit from the appeal. Each parish is assessed a financial goal. Once a parish reaches its assessment, every dollar pledged over that amount stays within the parish for local projects.

Last year, parishioners pledged more than \$6 million.

Last year, more than \$2.3 million was kept by parishes for local projects.

Parishes throughout the diocese will conduct Commitment Sunday the weekend of Feb. 26-27. Please give generously to the 2011 Catholic Services Appeal.

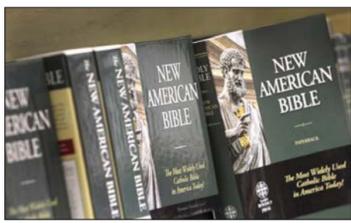


A special extra CSA issue of Faith magazine was mailed to all registered Catholic households in the Diocese of Erie last week. The magazine highlights the needs that are met through the Catholic Services Appeal, takes a behind-the-scenes look at how the diocese operates and presents a number of parishioners who discuss why they support the CSA.



IN THE U.S.

■ Revised Bible provides 'more clarity, more detail' for today's Catholic



The revised New American Bible that will be released on Ash Wednesday, March 9, may seem most notably different to casual readers for its efforts at providing context and clarity in how the passages fit together, according to the coordinator of its publication. "It will be like going from regular TV to high-definition," said Mary Elizabeth Sperry, associate director of New American Bible utilization for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. What is being called the New American Bible Revised Edition, or NABRE, will include the first revised translation since 1970 of the Old Testament. The New Testament translation is the same as in 1986's Second Edition of the New American Bible. The NABRE also will include the updated Book of Psalms, which was revised in three phases between 1991 and 2010 and has been included in Third Edition versions of the New American Bible published since 1991. Sperry explained that some of the updating in the Old Testament resulted from developments in biblical scholarship since the last time it was translated. For instance, recent archaeological discoveries have provided better texts, which affected scholarly views on how certain passages should be translated, she said.

■ New York Archdiocese to close 27 schools in reconfiguration plan

Twenty-seven Catholic schools in the New York Archdiocese — victims of low enrollment and rising costs — will close at the end of the school year in a move that archdiocesan education officials describe as part of a

strategy to ensure long-term success of the overall system. The schools — 26 elementary schools and one parish high school — were among 32 cited in November as "at risk" of losing their archdiocesan subsidies and likely to close. However, four of the schools originally called at risk will remain open after presenting viable plans to continue operating, and a decision on a fifth school was deferred for a few weeks for further review, the announcement said. The closings are in line with the strategies of "Pathways to Excellence," a wide-ranging strategic plan that focused on the "3 R's" of reconfiguration, regionalization and reinvestment over the next three years. The goal is a modernized school system that is academically excellent, fully enrolled and affordable.

AROUND THE WORLD

■ Church leaders follow Egyptian unrest with interest, concern



A protester shouts during an anti-government demonstration in Cairo Jan. 30.

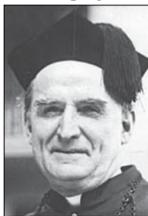
Church leaders were watching the unfolding political drama in Egypt with a mixture of hope for reform and concern over potential violence, said the head of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land. Father Pierbatista Pizzaballa told Vatican Radio Jan. 30 that the widespread unrest has weakened the 30-year rule of President Hosni Mubarak came as a surprise to Catholics in the region. "We all sense that these are epochal changes. None of us would have imagined these kinds of developments a few months ago," he said. "This means that there are currents, espe-

cially in the Arab world, that now have found visible expression. This is certainly a positive sign, but it's also worrying because we don't know how all this will end — we hope with the least possible amount of violence and bloodshed," he said. Father Pizzaballa said he hoped that "respect for religious minorities will be preserved" in Egypt. His concern appeared to reflect the fact that Mubarak's opponents include both radical and moderate Muslim groups, and it was unclear who might assume power if the president resigns.

PEOPLE OF FAITH

■ Celebrations planned to mark progress in Msgr. Baker's sainthood cause

As Msgr. Nelson Baker continues on the road to canonization, the Diocese of Buffalo has planned two special celebrations to honor the priest who devoted his life to helping those in need in the name of Our Lady of Victory. A March 18 vespers service for parishioners of Our Lady of Victory National Shrine and Basilica in Lackawanna, N.Y., has been scheduled along with a March 19 Mass of thanksgiving for invited guests and employees of the Our Lady of Victory Institutions founded by the priest commonly known as Father Baker. March 19 marks the 135th anniversary of Father Baker's ordination as a priest, as well as the feast day of St. Joseph, patron saint of the Diocese of Buffalo. Father Baker, a Civil War-era soldier and grain dealer who became a Buffalo diocesan priest in 1876, served as pastor of Our Lady of Victory for more than 50 years. He operated soup kitchens and a hospital as well as homes for unwed mothers, homeless and troubled boys and abandoned infants. A Vatican decree issued Jan. 14 confirmed Father Baker's heroic virtue and added the title Venerable to his name. The development completes the first step in a three-step process toward canonization.



Msgr. Nelson Baker

By the Way...

The Diocese of Erie was well represented among the record-breaking crowd at the annual March for Life Jan. 24 in Washington. Parishes and youth groups throughout the 13 counties arrived in the early morning to unseasonably cold temperatures in D.C. But the weather didn't snuff out their enthusiasm.



Jason Koshinski

Bishop Donald Trautman concelebrated the opening Mass of the National Prayer Vigil for Life at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington Jan. 23 and met with a number of diocesan groups at the march.

Bishop Trautman also met with Rep. Mike Kelly, who hosted a reception in the Cannon House Office Building. Kelly also greeted groups from the 3rd District including St. George School in Erie and Gannon University Students for Life, among others.

Sister Trish Tyler, RSM, reports that things are going well at the new Rural House of Mercy in Jefferson County. Sister Trish and Sister Margaret Park, RSM, established the Rural House of Mercy at the rectory at St. Mary Parish in Reynoldsville this summer as a way of bringing a permanent presence of women religious to the county. The ministry is sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy.

"Right now we're doing hospice training for a Catholic presence on the local hospice team," Sister Trish said. "We've made a lot of visits to the homebound and shut-in parishioners. It's nice to see their faces the second time around. They're a little surprised and say, 'Oh, you came back.' And we say, 'Well, we said we would.'" They've also visited area schools to read to first graders.

Joe Hoag, the Diocese of Erie's director of Stewardship and Annual Appeals, has accepted a new position with Cathedral Corporation based out of Rome, N.Y. Hoag will be the company's national sales representative residing in Erie.

He has served the diocese for the past 11 years. Under his leadership, the annual Catholic Services Appeal has reached the highest amounts realized in its history.

"One of the things I'm most proud of is our work with the CSA," Hoag said. "We've tried very hard to show people what their pledges are helping to do throughout the diocese. It's important for people to give, and it's equally important for people to understand what they're supporting."

He said he's also proud of helping to develop a sense of true stewardship in our parishes.

"The meaning of true Christian stewardship is that we are called to live out our faith," he said.

Many will recognize Hoag as a columnist from *Faith* magazine. His last official day with the diocese is Feb. 18.

Jason Koshinski is editor of *FaithLife*. Contact him at JKoshinski@ErieRCD.org or 814.824.1171.

March for Life marks Roe v. Wade

By Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — House Majority Leader Eric Cantor of Virginia said that after being out of power on Capitol Hill for the past couple of years, pro-life supporters in Congress and across the nation have been re-energized since last November's elections brought in "the biggest pro-life freshman class in memory."

"The tide has turned," Cantor said in remarks at the March for Life rally on the National Mall, held Jan. 24 to mark the 38th anniversary of the Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion.

Jan. 22 was the official anniversary date, but the March for Life was organized for the following Monday to allow participants to visit their representatives on the Hill after a noon rally and a march along Constitution Avenue to the Supreme Court.

Chartered buses started arriving on Capitol Hill around 4:30 a.m. Pro-lifers came in waves throughout the morning and then headed down to the Mall.

Bundled up against the cold, with the temperature hovering in the mid-20s, people streamed toward the rally site from various points, carrying all manner of signs, many of them homemade.

Among the messages were: "Choose life: Your mother did," "Unborn babies feel pain," "Face it: Abortion kills a person," "I regret lost fatherhood" and "Defund Planned Parenthood."

One couple waiting for the rally to begin held identical signs that read: "To the mother of our 4 adopted children: Thank you for their lives."

The pro-lifers created a sea of colors on the Mall and on the march. Many were high school and college students. Hundreds donned matching knit caps, scarves or identical jackets to identify their group; at least one group had its members wearing bright yellow ponchos. Still others held aloft big banners that announced their hometown, school and/or pro-life association.

Some estimates pegged the number of marchers at approximately 400,000, about the same as 2010.

"But other experienced observers thought that the crowd was much larger than last year, especially considering that tens of thousands of marchers got a jump start and reached Capitol Hill before the main contingent even left the staging area," said a statement on the March for Life website.

Nellie Gray, 85, is founder and president of the March for Life Education & Defense Fund — the group that organizes the march.

She called it "an evil" that more than 50 million abortions have been performed in the United



March for Life participants kneel in prayer alongside an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in front of the Supreme Court building in Washington Jan. 24. The annual pro-life demonstration marks the 1973 Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion across the nation.

States since 1973. "We come to our government ... to bring the life principles to our government. ... We ask our government to overturn Roe v. Wade now," she told the crowd to loud applause.

There have been incremental steps in the past 38 years to try to address the fallout of what she called the "unconstitutional" court decision but nothing short of overturning Roe is acceptable, Gray said.

She said pro-life supporters had come to Washington to bring their message to Obama "with love, and we're willing to work with you ... as the president of all the people, including the unborn."

She expressed disappointment with the statement the president issued Jan. 22, in which he noted the anniversary of Roe, "the Supreme Court decision that protects women's health and reproductive freedom, and affirms a fundamental principle: that government should not intrude on private family matters. I am committed to protecting this constitutional right."

Members of the House pledge to institute a government-wide ban on the use of federal funds for abortion, said Cantor. He acknowledged that any pro-life legislation will face an uphill battle in the Senate and with President Barack Obama, a supporter of keeping abortion legal, but "the people's House will stand unapologetically for life."

House Speaker John Boehner of Ohio reiterated the new Republican majority's pledge to ban tax dollars from paying for abortion. He noted that the Jan. 21 news conference he and others held to discuss the introduction of bipartisan legislation to codify the Hyde Amendment "and similar policies and ensure that taxpayer dollars are never used to pay for elective abortions."

Survey: Women entering religious life well-educated, active in parishes

By Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Women entering religious orders today are highly educated and active in parish ministries, according to a new national survey.

The results of "The Profession Class of 2010: Survey of Women Religious Professing Perpetual Vows" were released in advance of World Day for Consecrated Life Feb. 2.

It was conducted by the Georgetown University-based Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) and commissioned by the U.S. bishops' Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations.

The survey was sent to sisters represented by the two conferences of religious women in the United States — the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious — and to contemplative communities.

Major superiors of women religious who participated in the survey reported a total of 79 women who professed perpetual vows in 2010. Of that number, 68 responded by Dec. 15, representing 52 religious congregations, provinces or monasteries, according to a news release from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Eighty-four percent of the major superiors who responded to the survey reported they had no one professing perpetual vows last year.

The 2010 class of women religious was more diverse by race and ethnicity than the U.S. population of women religious in general. Six in 10 identified themselves as white; one in five as Asian and one in 10 as Hispanic. Six percent were African-American or African.

CARA said in a 2009 study that 94 percent of all U.S. women religious were white, 2 percent identified as Asian and 3 percent were Hispanic. Less than 1 percent identified themselves as African-American or African.

Among other findings:

- The average age for these new women religious is 43. Women religious making perpetual vows in 2010 ranged in age from 25 to 62.

- Eighty-seven percent of the sisters were born Catholic and eight in 10 came from families where both parents are Catholic.

- Although 71 percent of the new women religious were born in the United States, the new women religious came from 10 different countries of origin. The most popular non-U.S. countries of birth were Mexico (7 percent), Philippines (4 percent) and Nigeria (3 percent).

- Half of responding women religious attended a Catholic elementary school.

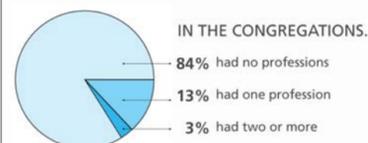
- More than 25 percent earned a graduate degree before entering their religious institute. Nearly six in 10 entered religious life with at least a bachelor's degree.

- Most women religious were active in parish life before entering their religious institute. Four in 10 participated in a youth group and three in 10 participated in a young adult group. Eighty-five percent had ministry experience before entering their religious institute, most commonly in liturgical ministry, faith formation or social service.

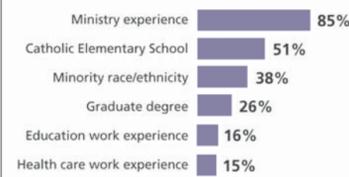
- Most women religious of the class of 2010 participated in some type of vocation program or experience prior to entering their religious institute. Most commonly this was a "come and see" experience or a vocation retreat.

Entering the Sisterhood

An overwhelming majority of U.S. religious congregations had no women taking final vows in 2010.



A look at 79 women who made final professions:



The number of women taking final vows in 2010 may have been greater. The survey was voluntary, with 368 major superiors responding, about 63 percent. Source: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University

FaithLife
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"We Make House Calls"



Briefly

Sign interpreted Mass for the deaf

SHARON — The sign interpreted Mass for the deaf in Sharon will be celebrated on Sunday, Feb. 20 at 10 a.m. at St. Joseph Parish, 79 Case Ave. For more information, call 800.374.3723 Ext. 257 or e-mail JJohnson@ErieRCD.org.

Reflection Day for Women

KANE — The sisters of Catholic Rural Ministry in McKean and Potter counties will sponsor a Reflection Day for Women on Friday, Feb. 25 from 1-5 p.m. at the St. Callistus Parish Center, 342 Chase St. in Kane.

The theme for the day is "Uncommon Gratitude—Alleluia for All that Is." The program includes presentations, time for conversation, private reflection and prayer.

Reservations are due by Monday, Feb. 21. For more information, contact Margaret French at 814.945.6245 or Sister Phyllis Schleicher, OSB, at 814.544.8017 or e-mail crm@zitomedia.net.

Donation for the program is \$5.

Engagement Encounter

Planning your wedding in 2011? An Engagement Encounter is scheduled for Feb. 25-27 at St. Mark Catholic Center in Erie.

Engagement Encounter satisfies diocesan requirements for marriage preparation. Catholic and interfaith couples are encouraged to attend.

Contact the Family Life Office at 814.824.1261 or visit www.ErieRCD.org/familylifeoffice.asp to register.

Transitions – a support group for separated, divorced and widowed persons

ERIE — Transitions, a monthly support group for separated, divorced and widowed persons, will meet on Sunday, Feb. 27 from 2-4 p.m. at St. Mark Catholic Center, 429 E. Grandview Blvd. in Erie.

For more information, call 814.824.1265 or e-mail familylife@ErieRCD.org.

F5 youth rally and Catholic Life Conference

ST. MARYS — The F5 youth rally and inaugural Catholic Life Conference (CLC) is coming to Elk County Catholic High School in St. Marys March 26-27.

This two-day event is for students in 8th through 12th grade and is designed to be a time of growth, fun, faith and renewal. Join other diocesan youth to come together and celebrate God's love for each of us.

Music videos, general information and registration forms are available online at www.theF5.com. Pre-registration is due by Friday, Feb. 18.

For more information, call or text 814.771.1807 or e-mail info@theF5.com.

Natural Family Planning

Natural Family Planning is the practice of achieving or postponing pregnancy by observing and recording a few simple observable fertility signs.

The Office of Natural Family Planning and Chastity Education is sponsoring a series of classes throughout the diocese. NFP is chemical-free, inexpensive and easy to learn. Class sessions are taught once a month for three consecutive months.

To see the full schedule through June, including future sessions and locations, visit www.ErieRCD.org/nfp.asp.

■ Erie — Classes start Wed., Feb. 16 from 7-9 p.m. at St. George Parish. Call Gretchen at 814.866.3008.

■ DuBois — Classes starting Thurs., March 3 from 7-9 p.m. at instructors' home. Call Judy at 814.371.5852.

■ Meadville — Classes start Mon., March 7 from 7-9 p.m. at St. Brigid Parish. Call Amy at 814.724.6104.

NOVA – for remarriage preparation

ERIE – NOVA is a one-day marriage preparation program for couples free to remarry in the Catholic Church. Topics include adjustments, blending families, legal issues and others.

Offered only four times per year, the next NOVA is scheduled for Saturday, March 12 in Erie. Couples preparing for convalidation are encouraged to apply.

To register, contact the Family Life Office at 814.824.1261 or e-mail familylife@erieRCD.org.

Three cheers for school choice

By Amy B. Hill
Pennsylvania Catholic Conference

"What do we want? School choice! When do we want it? Now!"

Hundreds of students and their parents filed into the state Capitol Rotunda last month for a rally to cheer for Senate Bill 1 – the Opportunity Scholarship Act. SB 1 proposes a significant increase to the Education Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program. If passed, the EITC will increase to \$100 million making more scholarships available to qualified students. It also proposes vouchers for the poorest students in chronically failing schools. Parents can use the voucher to pay tuition at any school they choose, including a Catholic school if they wish.

It is not hard to see why students and their parents are cheering for this bill. The Opportunity Scholarship Act includes scholarships for both public-to-public and public-to-private school choice. Qualified families could access a number of educational options, giving them the opportunity to choose a school that best meets the needs of their child.

By virtue of their zip code, many families have no choice but to send their child to the school in their neighborhood, even if that school is failing. Most do not have the economic means to relocate to another district or

pay tuition somewhere else. Parents in these areas who desire something better for their children are the loudest cheerleaders for SB 1.

The Catholic school community is also cheering the Opportunity Scholarship proposal. Because of constraints on the state budget, the voucher program starts small. In the first year, only low-income students currently attending a failing public school qualify. Eligibility will be expanded in the second and third years. Eventually every low-income student will be eligible. The increase in the EITC program will grant more scholarships to qualified families who are not included in the voucher program right away.

Not every qualified student will choose a Catholic school, but it is likely that many will. Catholic educators can already attest to how the EITC has helped Catholic schools; SB 1 will allow even more families a chance to get a Catholic education. More students in our classrooms is good news for our schools; more students will help keep Catholic schools open.

Citizens who care about Pennsylvania's

future are cheering, too. Not everyone is the parent of a school-aged child but most of us are taxpayers. School choice saves tax dollars because non-public schools often provide an excellent education for a fraction of the cost of public schools. Every child in Pennsylvania is entitled to an education. If we can redirect a portion of the state subsidy to provide the same child an education in a less costly program, isn't it worth considering? Nonpublic schools should be included, not excluded, from the plan to create a more effective educational system.

A good education helps children grow up to be good citizens. Growing as many good citizens as we can will help ensure a better and brighter future for all of us.

Add your voice to the school choice cheerleading squad. Visit, call, write or e-mail your state legislators and ask them to support the Opportunity Scholarship Act – SB 1. Join the Advocates for Catholic Education in PA to receive the latest news and action alerts on Catholic education issues.

Learn more at www.pacatholic.org/current-issues/school-choice.

Amy B. Hill is communications director of the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference – the public affairs arm of Pennsylvania's Catholic bishops and the Catholic dioceses of Pennsylvania.



Amy B. Hill

Sharon, Hermitage elementary schools to merge; Kennedy Catholic to include new middle school

MERGE, from page 1

■ The opportunity to provide educational enhancements that the schools could not provide individually.

Father Jeff Noble, pastor of Notre Dame Parish in Hermitage, said the announcement has been well received at the parish and school, with parents already coming forward wanting to be involved in the transition.

"I would hope we'd be able to continue the same strong faith values and education and do even more in pulling our resources together and being innovative in the classrooms," Father Noble said. "At this point, it's much more about the opportunity for the students—having more students and some variety in the classroom. That itself presents options for students and teachers."

He added that the consolidation would also help both parishes find some cost savings.

The students are already familiar with each other—the schools are less than two miles apart—Father Noble said. A broader socialization typically happens during their freshman year at Kennedy Catholic High School.

"Now they'll foster a sense of unity earlier as Catholics, as friends and as classmates," he said.

Father Glenn Whitman has served as pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Sharon for the past seven years. In that time, he said there have been a number of discussions and debates in the Valley about various ways to stabilize Catholic schools in the area.

Various models have been proposed over the years, Father Whitman said—some by local leaders, some by the diocese. But

none of them received a consensus or proved to be fiscally viable.

"I'm hoping (regionalization) can be community building," Father Whitman said. "When we think about the traditions and the things that we've done, we don't have to do away with any of it. Hopefully this is a formula to put it all together. We have a chance to make what we have stronger. The inevitability of this is hard to deny."

The parishes combined to sponsor a ministry day last fall. Approximately 90 parish ministers from the diocese's Sharon Deanery attended the event, which included Mass, keynote speakers and a day of renewal.

"The ministry day was a great success," Father Whitman said. "It showed that we can strengthen our ties and work together as a church. Probably the most im-

portant thing is handing on our faith, and of course Catholic education is part of that. We have an opportunity to make what we have stronger."

In his closing remarks at the meetings, Bishop Trautman said there are a number of components of the new Catholic school system which will require conscientious attention, including affordable tuition rates, principal and teacher selection, parish subsidies and usage of facilities.

With regard to the selection of principals for the elementary and middle school, Father Nicholas Rouch, the diocese's vicar for education, said the Catholic Schools Office will work closely with the local board to hire the best persons for the positions. The principals will then work side by side with the Catholic Schools Office to hire teachers.

DEATH NOTICE

Sister Marie Celine Bucholz, OSB

Sister Marie Celine Bucholz, OSB, 88, died January 8, 2010, at Mount St. Benedict Monastery in Erie.

Born in Oil City and baptized Beatrice Marie, Sister Marie Celine was a daughter of the late John and Elizabeth Bucholz. She entered the Benedictine Sisters of Erie on Aug. 18, 1941 and pronounced her perpetual vows on Aug. 21, 1945. Her silver, golden and diamond jubilees were celebrated in 1967, 1992 and 2002, respectively.

Sister Marie Celine held bachelor's degrees in social studies, English and mathematics from Villa Maria College, a master's in theology from Notre Dame University and a master's in mathematics from Youngstown State

University. She was also the recipient of four National Science Foundation grants for study in mathematics.

For five years, Sister Marie Celine taught in Catholic elementary schools in Sharon, Clarion and Erie before moving to secondary education where she spent 29 years as a teacher in schools including Cathedral Prep and St. Benedict Academy in Erie, St. Joseph High School in Oil City, Immaculate Conception High School in Clarion and Kennedy Christian High School in Sharon.

From there her ministry in education

continued at the college level for 17 years, in teaching and administration at Mercyhurst College and Penn State-Behrend.

While ministering in education, Sister Marie Celine served on various committees in the Benedictine community including the Mount St. Benedict Community Life Renewal Committee and the Government Study Committee.

After completing 45 years in the field of education, Sister Marie Celine worked as an administrative assistant at the Erie Community Food Bank before becoming an instructor and administrative assistant at St. Benedict Education Center for 10 years. Upon her retirement in 1997, she did tutoring and archives work at Mount St. Benedict Monastery.

As an infirmarian resident at the monastery, Sister Marie Celine engaged in the ministry of prayer and presence.



Sister Marie Celine Bucholz, OSB

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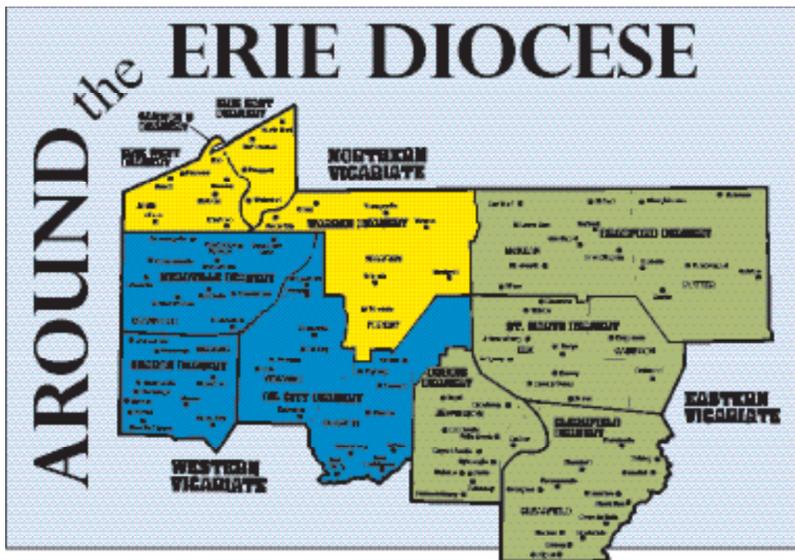
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Visit ErieRCD.org/faithlife.asp to download quick and easy photo tips on a wallet-size card.



Knights of Columbus present check for youth ministry

ERIE – Officials from the Central West Region of the Knights of Columbus recently presented Bishop Donald Trautman with a check for \$10,000 to benefit the youth ministry of the Diocese of Erie.

The funds came from the Knights' youth project, which includes the sale of calendars associated with the Daily Numbers of the Pennsylvania Lottery. The Knights typically run the project for two years before presenting funds to the bishop.

"If we conduct the calendar sales for two years, then we are able to present the bishop with a sizable amount for the youth," said Charles Mahood, state family director of the Knights of Columbus.

The Central West Region includes 65 councils in the Diocese of Erie and 7,000 Knights of Columbus.



Pictured from left to right are: Ray Barber, former state secretary; Charles Mahood, state family director; Bishop Donald Trautman; Father Steve Schreiber, director of youth and young adult ministry for the diocese; and Steve Cash, former master.

Sisters of St. Joseph establish nursing scholarship in honor of former Saint Vincent CEO

ERIE – The Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania have announced the establishment of a \$50,000 nursing scholarship in the name of C. Angela Bontempo, past president and CEO of Saint Vincent Health System.

Bontempo retired Dec. 31 and was honored at a celebration on Jan. 20 at Lake Shore Country Club.

The C. Angela Bontempo Nursing Leadership Scholarship will be awarded over the course of the next five years. Each year, a \$10,000 scholarship will be given as an individual award or shared among multiple recipients. Candidates must be full-time nurses, employed at Saint Vincent Health Center and be currently pursuing a master's degree. Scholarship recipients must commit to two years of employment at Saint Vincent Health Center in a nursing leadership position at the completion of their studies. The first scholarship will be presented in July.

"Despite many changes during the sisters' 150-year history in the Erie Diocese, our commitment



Sister Mary Ellen Dwyer, SSJ (left), president of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania, presents a check to Angela Bontempo for the establishment of the C. Angela Bontempo Nursing Leadership Scholarship.

ate to honor her with the establishment of this scholarship."

When recruited in 2001, Bontempo became the first lay person to serve as president and CEO of Saint Vincent — Erie's first hospital and one of western Pennsylvania's only remaining Catholic hospitals. The Saint Vincent Board of Trustees and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania selected Scott Whalen, Ph.D., to succeed Bontempo, effective Jan. 1, 2011. Whalen previously served as Saint Vincent Health Center's president and chief operating officer.

"I am humbled by the Sisters of St. Joseph," Bontempo said. "The trust they placed in me as the first lay person to serve as CEO and president of Saint Vincent Health System has been a true honor. And, now, to place my name as part of a nursing scholarship fund is an overwhelming feeling. But as a former nurse, I know that helping to develop great nursing leaders will affect the quality of care we continue to provide our patients."

to education and healthcare has been constant," said Mary Ellen Dwyer, SSJ, president of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania. "As Angela's retirement occurs during our anniversary year, it seems appropri-

St. Stephen pastor to return to native Mexico



Father Jorge Villegas (waving in the front row, left) poses with the Hispanic community at St. Stephen Parish in Erie. With a growing population of Hispanic Catholics, Father Villegas said he hopes for another Hispanic parish within the city.

FR. VILLEGAS, from page 1

phen as one of their own. He was raised in the Hispanic culture and he spoke Spanish as his native tongue. He said his initial goal was to give them a sense of belonging.

"One of the ideas that we are following is that the Hispanic community is no longer a segregated community; it's part of the diocese," he said. "In our Catholic faith, we believe that we have to feel part of the universal church, not just the little church of St. Stephen. If we are Catholic, we are universal."

Father Jorge said he enjoys offering the sacraments and a priestly presence for the small yet vibrant parish. He also looks forward to his time ministering

at area prisons. He regularly visits FCI McKean and has spent time at SCI Albion, SCI Cambridge Springs and SCI Mercer.

"There is a big Hispanic population in each one, and it's a growing number," Father Villegas said. "With the work in the prison — it gives you more than the things that you give. It gives you strength, it gives you passion. You have to be patient, but the people appreciate you being there."

He said he hopes that both the English and Spanish speaking communities will continue to work for the greater good of the parish.

"This is a very good parish," Father Jorge said. "It's a welcoming parish."

In the future, Father Villegas

said he hopes to see the addition of Hispanic parishes.

"I hope there will be at least two in the city," he said. "The Hispanic population in Erie is large, and it's growing. But it's not only growing in the city. You're finding more Hispanic families in Meadville, Bradford, DuBois, Emporium, Clarion, Sharon. We need to make them feel welcome. They deserve to have the sacraments."

His final Mass at St. Stephen will be Feb. 27. He leaves for Mexico on March 3.

"After 16 years, it is not easy to just go back," he said.

He believes his next assignment will be in a parish in the archdiocese, although he hasn't received it yet. He said he hopes to come back and visit, possibly for a week this summer during the parish picnic.

Welcome Father Matias



With Father Jorge Villegas going back home to Mexico, St. Stephen Parish in Erie will not be left without a priestly presence.

Father Amilcar Matias Rosado Sosa, through the Mission of Friendship between the Diocese of Erie and the Archdiocese of Yucatan, Mexico, has been appointed to serve the parish. Father Matias celebrated his first Mass in English there on Feb. 4.

"He is going to take on the challenge very well," Father Villegas said.

Father Matias is from La Purisima Concepcion Parish in Baca, Mexico, which is the sister parish of Sacred Heart Parish in Sharon.

Before saying adios, Father Villegas said he is thankful for the participation of St. Stephen's English and Spanish speaking communities.

"Without them, I couldn't have done anything," he said. "If there was anything done, it was because of both communities. For them, I hope and pray for the best."



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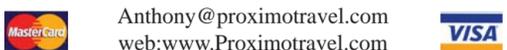
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