

Eboo Patel shares interfaith message.



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BI-WEEKLY NEWSPAPER OF THE DIOCESE OF ERIE

February 28, 2016

DIOCESAN NEWS

Bishop to preside at Holy Week liturgies

Bishop Lawrence Persico will preside at the following Holy Week liturgies scheduled at St. Peter Cathedral, 230 W. 10th St., Erie:

- Palm Sunday, March 20 at 11 a.m.
- Christ Mass, March 21 at 4 p.m.
- Mass of the Lord's Supper, Holy Thursday, March 24 at 7 p.m.
- Celebration of the Passion of the Lord, Good Friday, March 25 at 3 p.m.
- Easter Vigil, March 26 at 8:30 p.m.

Newman Club at Grove City College recognized nationally

GROVE CITY—The Newman Club at Grove City College in Grove City recently was named as one of the top 50 best college Catholic Newman Centers in the United States.

Best College Reviews recognized the Newman Club at Grove City as No. 28 on the list. It is affiliated with Church of the Beloved Disciple Parish in Grove City.

According to Best College Reviews, the Newman Club offers fellowship and community for Catholics on the Mercer County campus. It offers regular Masses and rides to Mass, book clubs, dinners, social events and regular meetings.

"The Newman Club at Grove City College is dedicated to educating students of all faith traditions who are interested in the Catholic faith," Best College Reviews stated. "Their desire is to answer questions from all students so that they may have an authentic understanding of the Catholic Church and her teachings."

Newman Centers are named after the famous 19th-century English intellectual and convert, John Henry Newman, whose work "The Idea of a University" is still studied in schools around the world today.

188 make journey to the Catholic faith

Hundreds of people gathered for Rite of Election ceremonies in Erie and St. Marys Feb. 14 to witness 188 people take the next step toward being fully welcomed into the Catholic Church.

Many of those making the journey to the Catholic faith are young, according to Sister Nancy Fischer, SSI, coordinator of the Office of Christian Initiation for the Diocese of Erie.

"It's always encouraging to see that people are interested in coming into the church," Sister Nancy says. "As an evangelizing diocese, I hope we will continue to invite others to join us. This is the visible sign of what Jesus asked us to do: to spread the faith."

Of the 188 elect in the diocese:

- 66 are catechumens (people who were never baptized in any faith)
- 82 are candidates who were previously baptized in a faith outside the Catholic Church
- 40 are candidates who are completing their rites of initiation, including first Communion and confirmation.

The Rite of Election is part of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA), a process that was restored to the Catholic Church after Vatican II. Catechumens and candidates will be welcomed into the faith at Easter vigil services March 26.



Lisa Schell of the Church of the Good Shepherd, West Middlesex, met Bishop Lawrence Persico Feb. 14 at the Rite of Election at St. Peter Cathedral.

ROADMAP to EXCELLENCE

Diocese announces historic plan for schools

BY MARY SOLBERG | FAITHLIFE

A much-anticipated, historic plan to reinvigorate Catholic schools in the Diocese of Erie—featuring the creation of a new school system with an embedded middle-school program in Erie County—was announced this month by diocesan officials.

Under the plan unveiled by Bishop Lawrence Persico Feb. 16-18, three elementary schools and one Catholic high school in the diocese will close in the near future. The bishop and other officials believe it will finally stop the hemorrhaging of its educational institutions that has persisted for decades.

"I really don't like to move from crisis to crisis. My hope is that what we're doing now will make a difference," Bishop Persico said after announcing his final plan, titled "Building in Truth and Love."

Since the early 1980s, the diocese has closed 14 elementary schools. After coming to Erie, Bishop Persico launched a two-year pastoral planning process to assess the health and vigor of parishes and schools.

"One of the important aspects of our diocese is our Catholic schools," Bishop Persico said. "We have to do our utmost to maintain them while keeping an eye on their viability."

Calling the new school plan "a roadmap for faith-based academic excellence," the bishop released specific details on the future of Catholic education in the 13 counties of northwestern Pennsylvania.

By this summer, officials will hire a superintendent to oversee all Catholic schools throughout the diocese. The superintendent will work closely with the president of each school system within the diocese, including DuBois, the Shenango Valley, Elk County, and the newly created Erie Catholic School System, which will replace the current independent, parish-based schools in the city and surrounding area.

The new superintendent also will work with pastors and principals of the 11 remaining parish-based schools in smaller communities. Those 11 schools will be part of a separate diocesan collaborative. (See related information box on this page.)

The new Erie Catholic School System is expected to officially open in September 2017 and will comprise six campuses. (See information box on this page.) Unlike the preliminary plan proposed last year, sixth through eighth grades will remain embedded within these pre-K-8 buildings. They will benefit from a multi-million-dollar fundraising effort to support middle-school education and diocesan-wide professional development opportunities for Catholic school personnel.

Many people who participated in a month-long feedback period after the preliminary plan was introduced voiced strong support for maintaining a pre-K-8 model. Schools officials decided to retain sixth through eighth grades in each building and will expand academic and spiritual programs for middle-schoolers. Among the highlights will be a focus on science, technology, engineering and math across the curriculum, emphasis on public-speaking skills, wellness programs, and career education and



The new school configurations for the Diocese of Erie were the result of two years of discussion and research.

Teacher, principal hiring process explained

BY ANNE-MARIE WELSH for FAITHLIFE

An important component of the new school plan for the Diocese of Erie is that all teachers and principals in the new Erie Catholic School System will need to go through a rehiring process.

Principals at each of the six pre-K-8 schools have been sent a timeline for this process.

According to Father Nicholas Rouch, vicar for Education, the Catholic Schools Office plans to visit each of the schools to discuss the process with current faculty.

"This process will occur, in part, because teachers will no longer be employed by the parish but by the new Erie Catholic School System," Father Rouch explained. "The vast majority of teachers and principals will be rehired."

Under the new plan, about 15 teaching positions will be lost with the closings of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St. Boniface schools. Due to retirement and attrition, about 25 positions usually need to be filled at the beginning of each academic year.



Contemplating the future of Catholic schools are: Father Nicholas Rouch, vicar for education; Bishop Lawrence Persico; Dr. Sam Signorino, director of Catholic Schools; and Kim Lytle, director of curriculum.

exploration.

"We are deeply committed to system-wide, age-appropriate opportunities for middle school students," said Father Nicholas Rouch, vicar for Education.

Also under the new plan, schools in the western and eastern vicariates will bolster their strategic goals and enhance affiliations. Two elementary schools will become satellites of Elk County Catholic. (See related information box.)

According to Father Rouch, much work remains as the diocese reviews tuition rates, teacher compensation and enrollment.

"We want to work with the school communities of Venango

Catholic High School, St. Peter Cathedral School, Our Lady of Mount Carmel School and St. Boniface School [all set to close]," Father Rouch said. "The students, educators and parents have some transitions ahead, and we want to help as much as we can."

Bishop Persico agreed, saying some of the changes will take time to process. He lauded the efforts of all the sisters, priests and lay people who nurtured generations of young people in diocesan schools.

"Now it's our turn to assume that responsibility," he said. "We can do no less."

NORTHERN VICARIATE

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>SCHOOLS CLOSING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ St. Boniface (after 2016-17) ■ St. Peter Cathedral (after 2015-16) ■ Our Lady of Mount Carmel (after 2016-17) | <p>CONTINUING AS HIGH SCHOOLS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Erie Catholic Preparatory School (Cathedral Prep and Villa Maria Academy) ■ Mercyhurst Preparatory |
| <p>PRE-K THROUGH GRADE 8 (ERIE CATHOLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Blessed Sacrament ■ Our Lady of Peace ■ Our Lady's Christian ■ St. George ■ St. James ■ St. Luke | <p>SPONSORED MINISTRY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Villa Maria Elementary School will remain a sponsored ministry of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania <p>SEPARATELY INCORPORATED DIOCESAN SCHOOL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Holy Family (pre-K-8) |
- * See St. Gregory in the box titled, 'New Collaborative'

EASTERN AND WESTERN VICARIATES

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>SCHOOL CLOSING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Venango Catholic H.S. | <p>DEVELOPING COMPREHENSIVE STATÉGIC PLANS AND/OR UPDATING ADVANCEMENT PLANS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ DuBois Area Catholic ■ Elk County Catholic ■ Kennedy Catholic Family of Schools |
| <p>NEW SATELLITE CAMPUSES OF ELK COUNTY CATHOLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ St. Boniface, Kersey (pre-K-5) ■ St. Leo, Ridgway (pre-K-8) | |

NEW COLLABORATIVE (Parish-Based Schools)

- Eleven Catholic schools in the diocese will form a collaborative in order to improve academic quality and operational efficiency. Schools in the collaborative will include:
- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Immaculate Conception, Clarion (pre-K-6) ■ Seton Catholic, Meadville (pre-K-8) ■ Ss. Cosmas and Damian, Punxsutawney (pre-K-6) ■ St. Bernard, Bradford, (K-8) ■ St. Francis, Clearfield (pre-K-8) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 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) |
|---|---|

Pope responds to Zika

ABOARD THE PAPAL FLIGHT FROM MEXICO (CNS)—With physicians across Central and South America urging women to postpone pregnancy because of the Zika virus that causes birth defects, Pope Francis said using contraceptives could be a “lesser evil.”

Holding a news conference Feb. 17 en route to Rome after a six-day visit to Cuba and Mexico, the pope was asked if the use of artificial contraceptives or abortion could be considered “a lesser evil” when the baby had a high risk of birth defects.

“Abortion is not a lesser evil—it’s a crime,” Pope Francis said. “It is the deliberate taking of an innocent human life. It’s an absolute evil.”

The concept of a “lesser evil” may apply to artificial birth control, however, he said, pointing to Blessed Paul VI’s consent in the early 1960s for women religious in the then-Belgian Congo to take the pill when rape was being used as a weapon of war.

“Unlike abortion, he said, “avoiding pregnancy is not an absolute evil. In certain cases, as in this one and such as the one I mentioned of Blessed Paul VI, it was clear.”

At the same time, Pope Francis pleaded with doctors



Pope Francis talks to reporters during the papal flight to Rome from Mexico.

and scientists “to do their utmost to find vaccines against these mosquitoes that carry this disease.”

Health officials have urged women to postpone their pregnancies for two years, because the Zika virus has been linked to microcephaly, a neurological condition that causes smaller heads in newborns.

The Catholic Church is opposed to artificial birth control, but promotes natural family planning.

Interfaith leadership vital to future—just ask Eboo



Editor's Notes

Mary SOLBERG

In the 1980s, I amassed a collection of peace activist buttons: “Bread—Not Bombs,” “No Nukes!” “Practice nonviolence.” “If you want peace, work for justice.”

Today, with social media cataloging every moment of our lives, it seems that inspirational buttons have become passé. A simple tweet goes viral and, in an instant, millions of people support an idea. Although social media has been a boon for good causes, it also has created a wider forum for words that increasingly alienate, aggravate and assault.

That’s why it was so important that Eboo Patel came to Gannon University in Erie last week. The founder and president of Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), Patel challenged students to build bridges, not barriers. The IFYC is a national nonprofit that works to make interfaith cooperation a social norm.

What better place to do that than on a college campus, where young minds are ready to take on the most pressing concerns of our times.

In an interview before his visit, Patel said people must search for common ground despite the narrow, often limited, insight they have of other religions.

“The modern media sensationalizes violence and extremism. If all that you know about Islam is what is reported on the evening news, then your window into that 1,400-year-old tradition, which comprises 1.6 billion people, is remarkably small,” he said. “I think this speaks to the power of college campuses and higher education. Those institutions are, in ef-

fect, charged by our society with breaking people out of easy paradigms.”

The IFYC visits about 250 campuses every year, training students and staff to develop what Patel calls “sustainable ecosystems of interfaith cooperation.” Religion, he believes, can unite people for good.

Faith-based institutions, like Gannon, are even more likely to be leaders in interfaith cooperation, he said, because “they already have a language and a framework from which to deal with religious identity.”

Patel and the IFYC reflect the message

of Pope Francis, who regularly calls for interfaith dialogue as a necessary condition for world peace.

According to Patel, the Holy Father has given a “clear directive” to the Catholic Church to be a leader in interfaith cooperation. It’s the only way to quell what Patel describes as the “ugly and nefarious winds” of religious prejudice, religious conflict and religious extremism.

Gannon can “be the change,” as an old button used to say.

Mary Solberg is the editor of FaithLife. Email: msolberg@ERIECD.org Call 814-824-1171 Twitter: @ERIECDsolberg



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Newsmakers



Snippets of Catholic headlines and stories from around the world

from Catholic News Service

■ Pope Francis calls for jubilee moratorium on the death penalty

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Pope Francis called for a moratorium on executions during the Year of Mercy and said the fifth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill,” applies not only to the innocent but to the guilty as well.

“Even a criminal has the inviolable right to life, a gift of God,” he said Feb. 21 after reciting the Angelus with visitors gathered in St. Peter’s Square.

Marking the beginning of the international conference “For a World without the Death Penalty,” sponsored by the Community of Sant’Egidio, the pope expressed hope that it will strengthen efforts to abolish the death penalty.

Increasing opposition worldwide to the death penalty as “an instrument of legitimate social defense” is “a sign of hope,” he said.

“This issue has to be considered within the perspective of a penal justice, which is more and more in compliance with human dignity and God’s plan for humanity and society,” the pope said.

The pope appealed to world leaders to reach an international consensus on the abolition of the death penalty. He also proposed that Catholic government leaders “make a courageous and exemplary gesture by seeking a moratorium on executions during this Holy Year of Mercy.”

“All Christians and people of goodwill are called today to work not only for the abolition of the death penalty, but also to improve the conditions of life in prison, in the respect of human dignity of people deprived of freedom,” he said.

■ Pontiff urges rethinking of a ‘throwaway culture,’ incarceration

CIUDAD JUAREZ, Mexico (CNS)—Pope Francis urged society to rethink its ideas of locking up inmates and throwing away the key, calling such an approach another symptom of the “throwaway culture” he often decries and “a symptom of a culture that has stopped supporting life, of a society that has abandoned its children.”

Speaking in a prison previously plagued by riots and controlled by drug cartels in a city once considered the “murder capital of the world,” the pope proposed focusing on prevention, reintegration and a system of “social health,” instead of only on incarceration and insisting that inmates pay for their crimes.



Pope Francis embraces a female prisoner as he visits Cereso Prison in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, Feb. 17.

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EVENTS

Deaf, hard of hearing invited to Notre Dame

FAIRVIEW—All deaf, hard of hearing and interested individuals are invited to an afternoon with Father Michael Polineck at Camp Notre Dame, 400 Eaton Road, Fairview, on March 5 from 3 to 8 p.m.

A Mass and a free dinner will be offered. RSVP by Feb. 29 to Susan McLeod at 814-240-0809 (VP) smcleod@neo.ro.com or Monica Dvoranichik at 703-851-9580 (voice/text) or moe25@hotmail.com.

Save May 6 for the Catholic Charities Ball

ERIE—The public is invited to attend the annual Catholic Charities Ball May 6 at 6:30 p.m. at the Bayfront Convention Center in Erie. Funds raised at the “Light the Way” ball support Catholic Charities-affiliated agencies.

Tennessee Backporch will provide music for the evening, which includes a plated dinner, a dance contest, and the presentation of the Helping Hands Award to Dr. Peter and Ellie Scobetta. Direct questions to Barbara McNamara at 814-824-1258.



SSJs offer faith formation series for jubilee year

ERIE—The formation team and the Justice and Peace and the Integrity of Creation Committee of the Sisters of St. Joseph are sponsoring adult faith formation sessions marking the Year of Mercy. The focus of the series will be on Catholic social principles that call everyone to be people of mercy. The program will be offered one Thursday per month,

through June 16, from 6 to 7:15 p.m. at the Community Living Center Chapel, 5031 West Ridge Road, Erie.

Each session will include prayer, Scripture, a presentation by a guest speaker, and time for reflection and sharing based on “The Faith Series” developed by Paulist Evangelization Ministries: Faith in Action—Transforming the World.

For information, contact Nancy Donnelly and/or Linda Kuhn at 814-836-4134, or call Sister Rosemary O’Brien, SSI, at 814-836-4212.

Prince of Peace Center to host Bowl-a-Thon

FARRELL—The Prince of Peace Center in Farrell will host Bowl-a-Thon 2016—“Strike Out Poverty” on March 6 at Thornton Hall Bowling Lanes in Sharon. Sign-up starts at noon and bowling begins at 12:30 p.m.

To register a team or individuals, call 724-346-7777, ext. 15, or go to www.princeofpeacecenter.org. Although the registration deadline has passed to be assured a t-shirt, registrations are still welcome. The event will include prizes, a gift auction and a 50-50 raffle.

Speaker series scheduled at Our Lady of Mercy

HARBORCREEK—Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Harborcreek will host a speaker series on Wednesday evenings during Lent. Each evening begins at 5:30 p.m. with the celebration of the Eucharist, followed by a soup supper (no charge) at 6:15 p.m., and concluding with a 7 p.m. speaker.

The next scheduled evening is March 2, featuring Bishop Emeritus Donald Trautman discussing “The Joy of the Gospel.”

St. Joseph/Bread of Life offers a prayer brunch

ERIE—All are welcome to attend a prayer brunch at St. Joseph/Bread of Life Community Center in Erie March 12 from 9:30 a.m. to noon. The speaker will be Dr. Jacqueline Phillips-Sabol of Erie, a board-certified neuropsychologist who leads the Padre Pio prayer group.

The cost is \$8.50. Registration deadline is March 7. Make checks payable to Word of Life Center, and mail to: Word of Life Catholic Charismatic Renewal Center, c/o St. Mark Catholic Center, 429 E. Grandview Blvd., Erie, PA 16504.

Gear up for St. Patrick’s Day in Greenville

GREENVILLE—St. Michael School in Greenville is hosting a St. Patrick’s Day dinner/dance March 12 from 6 to 10 p.m. at Lateran Hall on Orchard Street. Doors will open at 6 p.m. Tickets are \$20 each (by pre-sale only).

An authentic Irish dinner and draft beer will be provided, with live music from 7 to 10 p.m. Those in attendance also will receive a complimentary souvenir cup. For more information or to purchase tickets, call 724-588-7050 or 724-866-1082.

Hard as Nails leader to speak in St. Marys

ST. MARYS—Justin Fatica, executive director of Hard as Nails Ministry, will visit St. Marys next month to offer practical steps for families to draw closer together. His presentation will be held March 13 at Queen of the World Church, 134 Queens Road, St. Marys. The program begins with Mass at 5 p.m., followed by Fatica’s presentation from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

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First agrégées welcomed

Nine women pronounced a vow of fidelity to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania at a ceremony in January at the Community Living Center in Millcreek. The women represent the first group of agrégées affiliated with the congregation.

The new agrégées are Cindy Brown, Arlene Chaney, Charlene Kellerman, Jeanne Marie Ryan, Cindy Polonsnak, Deb Seng, Michelle Tortorelli, Tammy Van Buren and Betsy Wiest.

Sister Susan Herzing, SSJ, director of agrégées, said it was uplifting to journey with the women for the past three years. "I look forward to watching their lives," Sister Susan says. "They are not finished. They have just begun."

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania are the third Sisters of St. Joseph congregation in the U.S. to have agrégées, according to Sister Mary Ann White, SSJ.

Agrégées (a French word meaning "attached to") are Catholic women who feel called to commit themselves to Christ by embracing the mission of unity of the Sisters of St. Joseph. The agrégées connect themselves to the congregation through prayer, participation, personal relationships and a vow of fidelity.

For more information on the Sisters of St. Joseph agrégées, contact Sister Susan at 814-836-4066 or s.sherzing@sjerie.org.



The first agrégées of the Sisters of St. Joseph, in the front row, from left, are: Tammy Van Buren, Arlene Chaney, Charlene Kellerman and Cindy Polonsnak. In the back, from left: Cindy Brown, Deb Seng, Betsy Wiest, Jeanne Marie Ryan and Michelle Tortorelli.

OBITUARIES

Father Ronald E. Gmerek

Educator dies in 45th year of ministry

Father Ronald E. Gmerek, 70, died Feb. 11 in Erie. He was an ordained priest of the Diocese of Erie for nearly 45 years.

Born in Morran, Pa., he graduated from Moshannon Valley High School and then attended Gannon University in Erie, where he earned his bachelor's degree in biology before entering Christ the King Seminary in Buffalo. He was ordained by Bishop Alfred Watson at St. Peter Cathedral, Erie, on May 20, 1971.

Father Gmerek began his priestly ministry teaching at Kennedy Catholic High School in Hermitage, while assisting on weekends at St. Michael Parish in Greenville. In 1976, he moved to a position at Cathedral Preparatory School in Erie, while

serving as assistant at St. Jude, Erie. In 1986, he was appointed chaplain for Harborcreek Youth Services, a position he held until 1993.

From 1993-96, he studied at Penn State University. During that time, he lived at Christ the King Parish in Houtzdale. In 1996, Father Gmerek taught at DuBois Central Catholic High School, while assisting at Immaculate Conception Parish,



Father Ronald E. Gmerek

Brookville. He was appointed to teach at Gannon University in August 1996, serving on the faculty there until 1998.

During his time at Gannon, he also served as weekend assistant at Our Lady of Peace Parish, Erie.

Survivors include his sisters Barbara (Francis) Moore of State College, Pa., and Diana (Andrew) Kitko of Michigan; his sister-in-law, Gloria, and many nieces and nephews.

Visiting hours were observed Feb. 18 at St. Casimir Church, Erie, followed by a funeral Mass with Bishop Lawrence Persico as the main celebrant. Private burial was at St. Barbara Cemetery, Houtzdale.

Father Justin Withrow, OSB

Benedictine monk served in Diocese of Erie

LATROBE—Father Justin Withrow, OSB, a monk of Saint Vincent Archabbey, Latrobe, died unexpectedly Feb. 3 as he was preparing to leave for his pastoral ministry duties as chaplain at Westmoreland Hospital in Greensburg.

Father Withrow served as parochial vicar at St. Mary's Parish in St. Marys from 1991-94.

Born in Allentown, Pa., March 12, 1955, Father Withrow graduated from the Seminary of Christ the King in Mission, British Columbia, in 1974. He received a

bachelor's degree in medieval history from Mount Angel College, St. Benedict, Ore., in 1986, and a master's degree from Mount Angel Seminary from 1978-81.

He received a master of divinity degree from Saint Vincent Seminary, Latrobe, in 1989.

Father Justin made simple profession of vows at Saint Vincent Archabbey on July 10, 1985, and solemn profession on July 11, 1988. He was ordained a priest on June 2, 1990, by Bishop Anthony G. Bosco of the Diocese of Greensburg.

He served as chaplain at Exempla Health Westmoreland Hospital in Greensburg and Latrobe, from 1995 until the time of his death. He also served as chaplain at Jeannette District Memorial Hospital from 1995 until it closed in 2011.

Over the years, he served in various capacities at Saint Vincent Archabbey and at Saint Vincent College, and was assigned to many parishes.

A Mass of Christian burial was celebrated Feb. 5 by Archbishop Douglas Nowicki at Saint Vincent Archabbey Basilica, followed by a Rite of Committal at Saint Vincent Cemetery. A memorial service was held Feb. 13 at Saint Vincent Archabbey Basilica.



Father Justin Withrow, OSB

Sister Mary Irene Lunger, SSJ

Taught piano to generations of children

Sister Mary Irene Lunger, SSJ, 80, died Feb. 16, only weeks after retiring from a long career of teaching piano.

A native of Ridgway, she entered the Sisters of St. Joseph on Aug. 30, 1953, from St. Leo Magnus Parish. She professed final vows on Aug. 15, 1959.

She attended St. Leo Elementary School, Ridgway, and graduated in 1953 from St. Leo High School. In 1965, she received a bachelor's degree in elementary education from Villa Maria College, Erie. She also studied at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania and Gannon University. In 1970, she did advanced independent work in music at the University of Wisconsin.

Sister Mary Irene recently retired from teaching piano at Villa Maria Elementary, Erie. She also served as choir director at the school. Earlier in her ministry, she taught music at the school

and piano and organ at Villa Maria Conservatory. All told, she served Villa Maria Elementary for more than 40 years. At the end of January, many former and current students, parents, faculty and staff gathered to celebrate her years of music ministry at the school.

For 24 years, she served as assistant director of liturgies for her congregation, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania. She taught elementary school music and piano at St. Andrew School in Erie. During that time, she also worked with the children's choir at St. Paul Parish

and St. Joseph's Home for Children, both in Erie. Additionally, she taught at Sacred Heart and Blessed Sacrament schools in Erie; St. Bernard, Bradford; and St. Leo, Ridgway, while teaching piano on a part-time basis.

For 20 years, she served as a foster mother to infants through Catholic Charities Counseling and Adoption Services.

"I love little children," she said in a *FaithLife* interview only weeks before her death.

Besides members of her religious community, survivors include several nieces and nephews.

A Mass of Christian burial was held at the Sisters of St. Joseph Community Living Center, Erie. Burial was at Calvary Cemetery.

Memorials may be made to the Community Support Fund of the Sisters of St. Joseph, 5031 West Ridge Road, Erie, PA, 16506-1249.



Sister Mary Irene Lunger, SSJ

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Seton School students excel at PJAS regional competition



MEADVILLE—All 18 students from Seton School who participated at the Pennsylvania Junior Academy of Science Region 10 competition at Penn State-Behrend last month won first honor awards. Projects were diverse, ranging from a study on the effect of roof material and color on the internal temperature below, to whether different types of 3D printer filaments are less susceptible to warping while printing.

In addition to the first-place honors, these six students also received special awards by the judges who deemed their work to be exceptional examples of student research: Jillian Ball, Ava Waid, Katie

Lynn, Grace DiGiacomo, Liam Reese and Careigh Murphy. Those who earned first honors will advance to the state competition May 15-17 at Penn State's University Park campus.

Student winners pictured in the front row, from left, are: Marcus Rust, Katie Lynn, Adrienne Sopher, Grace DiGiacomo, Carlie Longo, Alayna Zieziula, Jillian Ball and Careigh Murphy.

In the back row, from left, are: Liam Reese, Gabriella Sommers, Noah Guanzon, Charlie Waid, Sarah Dean, Riley Hayek, Ava Waid, Sydney Pearson, Tiffany Onyewu, Amanda Hunter, and teacher Cathy Gorman.

Bishop Malone of Buffalo visits seminarians



ERIE—Bishop Richard Malone of the Diocese of Buffalo visited St. Mark Seminary in Erie Jan. 25 for a Mass, dinner and evening prayer with the seminary community. Bishop Malone met with the 13 seminarians, five of whom are from Buffalo. Pictured in the foreground, from left, are: Patrick Strycharz, Waylon Duncan, Michael Awungkeng, Bishop Malone, Daniel Weaver, Joseph Tokasz, Adrian Fritzsche and Devin Crouse. In the back row, from left, are: John Hepinger, Kevin Holland, Joseph Petrone, Eric Eggert, Brandon Feikles and Michael Pleva.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity celebrated at Our Lady's Christian School



ERIE—Pastor Bob Lewis of Lakewood United Methodist in Erie joined in a prayer service last month with Father John Detisch, pastor of St. Jude Parish, Erie, and the students of Our Lady's Christian School. The service marked the celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Pastor Lewis told students that religious beliefs may be different, but happiness, humility and forgiveness are a part of all religions.

Second-grader baptized in Greenville

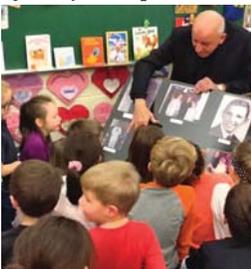
GREENVILLE—The baptism of Jacob Rust, a second-grader at St. Michael School, Greenville, took place after a school Mass at St. Michael Church Jan. 29.

Father David Foradori performed the ceremony. Jacob is the son of Stephanie and Robert Rust of Greenville, who say their son kept saying he'd always remember his baptism. The entire school community was on-hand to witness the sacrament.

Congratulations, Jacob!



School president shares his journey to the priesthood



DuBOIS—Msgr. Charles Kaza, president of DuBois Central Catholic, shares photos about his life and his calling to the priesthood with elementary students during Catholic Schools Week. Reading the book, *What a Priest Does*, was the highlight of his visit.

Year of Mercy artwork created at Mercyhurst

ERIE—To assist in the celebration of Pope Francis' Jubilee Year of Mercy, Mercyhurst Prep art teachers Lindsey Corle and David Schroek, along with student members of the National Arts Honor Society, created a work of art on the school's main chapel doors. Pictured, from left, are: teacher Lindsey Corle, and students Maggie Schoenig, Ashlyn Pieri, Will Baldauf, Catherine Duda and Chelsey Bielania. Missing from the photo is Katie Schneider.

SSJs share gifts from annual dinner



ERIE—The Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania, in cooperation with Gannon University, raised nearly \$50,000 at their annual Thanksgiving dinner in November. Funds in excess of the cost of the dinner were shared recently with more than 30 social service agencies, including shelters and food banks. Pictured, from left, are: Lora Caldwell of the Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network; Sister Mary Herrmann, SSJ, president of the Sisters of St. Joseph; and Sister Phyllis Hilbert, SSJ, also of the Neighborhood Network.





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