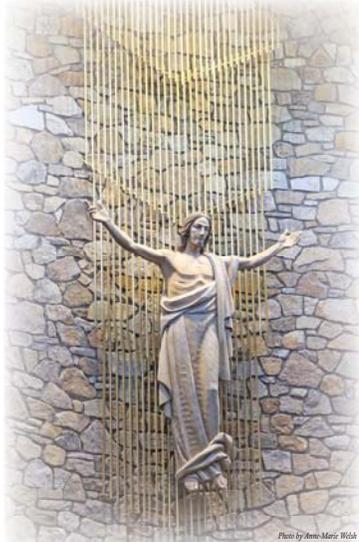


FaithLife



Save May 12 for exciting Catholic Charities event. PAGE 3



Christ redeems us on Easter. This beautiful image of Jesus is located behind the altar at Holy Redeemer Church, Warren.

Bishop's Easter Message

The risen Christ offers joy every day

It's Easter Sunday. Are you more patient? Generous? Forgiving?

If we walked our 40-day Lenten journey to the best of our ability, then today—of all days—we can answer by saying, "Yes! Alleluia!"

All of our Lenten sacrifices and actions help us to cultivate a new spirit. They lead us to God's truth, a truth that is never more clear than on Easter when Jesus rose from the dead.

What is God's truth and what is this new spirit?

There is no other celebration in the church year that better answers these questions than Easter. The power of God—and his love—is at work in and through Jesus' embrace of the cross.

St. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, emphasized the responsibility incumbent upon the followers of Jesus to seek his truth by moving through the struggles of this world.

There are plenty of difficulties, aren't there? Just look at the headlines: Seventeen people killed in one of the worst school shootings in American history. Families torn apart by the opioid epidemic. Racism in our communities.

Christ traveled this road of suffering, but he showed us how to make the passage with trust and faith. Jesus gives us the grace to face the crosses of our lives with

hope. By rising, he restored us to eternal life.

This may sound like a case of easier-said-than-done. So, I ask you to reflect on the thief who hung on a cross next to the crucified Christ in his last hours.

In his agony, the thief said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:42-43).

Think about it: this criminal experienced paradise—even in his suffering—by recognizing in Jesus his Lord and savior.

If we give ourselves over to Jesus, even in our trials, Christ's promise of salvation begins immediately. We can rise with Christ not only on Easter, but every day that he is in our hearts.

This is the Easter joy that our Catholic faith promises. In all 13 counties of our diocese, I see parishes and charitable agencies make this joy come alive through their outreach to those in need. And every day in our schools, students conduct one project or another to benefit the hungry, the homeless, the troubled.

Every day that we share this good news with others is Easter.

May the joy of the risen Christ surround you and your families.



Bishop Lawrence Persico

Lawrence T. Persico

Bishop of Erie

DIOCESAN NEWS

Mercer County church to close

SHARON—Sacred Heart Church in Sharon, founded by mostly Irish immigrants in the latter half of the 19th century, has been closed according to a decree signed March 12 by Bishop Lawrence Persico.

Father Thomas Whitman, pastor of St. Joseph Parish, Sharon, said that his parish finance and pastoral councils had voted in favor of requesting the bishop to close Sacred Heart, which was a secondary church of St. Joseph since their merger in February 2017.

Sacred Heart discontinued the celebration of Sunday Masses at that time.

When a Catholic church is closed, the official verbiage used in the United States is that it will be "relegated to profane but not sordid use." This phrase refers to the canon law process by which a bishop removes the blessing or consecration of a church building.

According to the bishop's decree, the decision to close Sacred Heart was "the best possible means to provide for the care of souls for the faithful" of St. Joseph and the larger Catholic community of the Shenango Valley in Mercer County.

The decree cited security and debt as significant concerns facing Sacred Heart. The area in which the church is located has seen an increase in crime in recent years. In 2017, the rectory attached to the church was vandalized twice. Several fires in the vicinity were ruled as arson.

The merger of Sacred Heart and St. Joseph left St. Joseph Parish with "considerable debt that has further stretched St. Joseph Parish's already-insufficient financial resources," according to the decree.

Sacred Heart Church has undergone many changes since it was founded as a parish in 1864. In 1892, parishioners responded to their growing numbers by building a larger church, which remains standing today.

But demographic changes in the Shenango Valley took a toll on Sacred Heart. According to the decree, by 2010, the city of Sharon had lost almost half of its population since its peak in 1950. Of the 241 registered households that made up Sacred Heart prior to its merger with St. Joseph last year, only about 40 households re-registered as members of St. Joseph.

The members of both parish and finance councils at St. Joseph unanimously supported relegating Sacred Heart Church.



Sacred Heart Church Sharon

Diocese responds to opioid epidemic

BY MARY SOLBERG | FAITHLIFE

Father James McCormick, pastor of St. James Parish in Erie, has buried at least 10 people who've succumbed to opioid addiction.

The statistic—while disturbing—is not surprising when considered alongside national figures showing that an estimated 64,000 people per year die from drug overdoses in the United States. Yet this eastside parish of 1,000 families has found itself in the crosshairs of the national opioid epidemic. Nearly all of the 10 funerals at St. James have involved inactive parishioners or someone who has a connection to families of parishioners.

Each death is a moment in which a pastor is called to be a compassionate shepherd.

"Anytime these events happen, I never preach from the pulpit," Father McCormick said. "I always come down to the parents and say, 'You are not responsible for this. This is a choice—although a bad one—that your loved one made. You cannot feel

guilty about this."

As a pastor, Father McCormick knows he must help families comprehend the misunderstood nature of the epidemic: addiction. Narcotics, particularly heroin, are highly addictive and can be mentally and physical difficult to confront and overcome.

As a member of the newly created Opioid Task Force of the Diocese of Erie, Father McCormick was happy to be part of a recent effort to inform clergy about the growing epidemic. On Feb. 22, the task force presented a panel discussion and resources to dozens of clergy who gathered in the Yehi Ballroom at Gannon University in downtown Erie. Under the direction of Ann Badach,

Overdose deaths by county in northwest Pennsylvania:



(Source: 2016 county coroner reports)

Cameron 0	Erie 90	Potter 2
Clarion 7	Forest 0	Venango 9
Clearfield 11	Jefferson 7	Warren 0
Crawford 32	McKean 7	
Elk 3	Mercer 31	

The Opioid Task Force in the Diocese of Erie was established last fall thanks to grants from the Evangelization Endowment of the Catholic Foundation of Northwest Pennsylvania and from Catholic Charities Inc. Members include:

- Ann Badach, executive director, Catholic Charities
- James Gallagher, superintendent of Catholic Schools
- David González, CEO, St. Martin Center
- Joe Haas, CEO, Catholic Charities Counseling and Adoption Services
- Steven Large, Psy.D., director, Health & Counseling Services, Gannon University
- Father James McCormick, pastor, St. James Parish, and faculty member, Cathedral Prep
- Anne-Marie Welsh, director, Communications Office



Joe Haas, left, CEO of Catholic Charities Counseling and Adoption Services, talks at the Feb. 22 meeting with clergy regarding the opioid epidemic. To his right is Dr. Steven Large, director, Health & Counseling Services, Gannon University.

executive director of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Erie, the task force offered practical and community-specific information regarding the reality of the opioid crisis. Introduced by Bishop Lawrence Persico, task force members offered their expertise in various areas, including drug and alcohol counseling, worship and education. There was a panel discussion, too, which included the perspective of diocesan priests Father John Jacquet, pastor of St. John the Baptist and Holy Rosary parishes, both in Erie, and Father Ross Miceli, pastor of St. Boniface Parish, Kersey, and campus minister for the Elk County Catholic School System.

"We all felt on the task force that

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