Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Peace and Grace be with you. The past two months have been challenging for all of us as we faced the coronavirus. It has forced us to discontinue public celebrations of the Eucharist and to change our way of life in many ways. We long for the opportunity to return to Mass, to return to work, to visit the sick and attend to the dying. These times have truly helped us to appreciate our parish families and those who serve us so generously.

As you are aware, Governor Cuomo has announced plans to open up the State of New York on a region by region basis. The North Country has met the metrics for re-opening and will be eligible to re-open in phases beginning this week (May 15). The good news is that the precautionary measures we have taken the past two months have reduced the number of COVID-19 cases. This good news is tempered by the great suffering and the large loss of life.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3
‘It was the best of times…’

Charles Dickens summed it up well in his famous introduction to "A Tale of Two Cities": "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..."

While "worst of times" is a bit of an exaggeration, that type of duality was on my mind this week as I reflected on what I called my "workiversary," my two year anniversary of starting this position with the diocese.

This job has both challenged me and rewarded me in ways I couldn’t have imagined back on May 14, 2018, when I walked through the door into what is now my office.

Of course, this job has the typical work challenges – deadlines, last-minute changes to projects... On top of that, I’ve discovered challenges that are particular to working in ministry.

There are feelings of unworthiness. I constantly question how I’m qualified to share my ponderings on faith with others when I fail to live my faith well so regularly.

The standard personality conflicts and work disagreements that take place in any office feel harder to process working in ministry. It’s harder partly because I fall into a trap of expecting too much of people. I expect we’ll all be Christ-like 100 percent of the time because we work for the Church (even though, again, I realize I fall short regularly). When people fail to act Christ-like, it’s easy to think, "If this is how Catholics behave, I’m not sure I want to be Catholic.”

And there are other challenges, too, but there are also amazing gifts and rewards.

I’ve had countless opportunities to talk to the amazing people of the North Country about how they’re living out their faith. I see the Lord working in and through others. My faith has been strengthened those interactions.

I have the love and support of an amazing diocesan team, as well as the NCC’s reporters, photographers, columnists and subscribers. I’ve lost count of the times I’ve been helped, been given wisdom or given a kind word exactly when I needed it. I have a folder of emails and a folder of cards from NCC readers who went out of their way to tell me something I wrote meant something to them. I revisit those folders when I have a tough day, and those notes remind me that the struggle has meaning.

This job isn’t always easy, but the blessings far outweigh the challenges. It’s the best of times.

Exploring monastic living

When I think of a saint for a “stay at home” kind of life, I think of Thomas Merton and all the Trappist monks who spend their life in monasteries at prayer. We try to figure out how to live a day at home, a week at home, two months at home.

The Trappist monks spend a lifetime dedicated to the Lord Jesus at home in their monastery. I continue to learn more and more about that monastic life, especially through the writings of Father Louis, Thomas Merton.

Let me again share with you my story and how I got in touch with Thomas Merton and the Trappist monks. Way back in high school (a thousand years ago), I attended the public high school in Fayetteville, New York. As Catholic, we attended religious education in what was called released time. Once a week, we Catholics took off last period and went down the street, about a half a mile for religious education at Immaculate Conception Church. The teacher for our class was Sister – oh, no, I completely forgot her name. However, that Sister had a profound effect on my life, especially my spirituality. I must admit that she also influenced my vocation, also. In addition, she put me on to Thomas Merton.

I remember that I could decide on what to write about for my senior term paper. I mentioned this to Sister – oh, how I wish I could remember her name. She suggested Thomas Merton and the Trappist monks. They truly stayed in the monastery for a lifetime. They were not parish priests or missionary priests, rather they dedicated their lives to the Lord in prayer and work in the monastery, following the Rule of St. Benedict. So, I took Sister’s advice. I delved into the story of the Trappist monks, beginning with St. Bernard and his developing the earliest Trappist Monasteries, where the monks prayed and worked and lived in silence and the writings of the monks throughout the centuries. They studied the Sacred Scriptures and prayed together, prayed the hours of the Divine Office and celebrated Mass each day together.

Working on this term paper, I decided I needed a little personal experience. I discovered there was a Trappist Monastery in Piffard, New York, just south of Rochester – Our Lady of Genesee. I talked my father into driving me there for a day visit. I am certain that he had no idea what he was getting into. The only part of the monastery we could actually visit was the book store, as well as the grounds. However, I was able to talk for a while with the Brother Porter. It was an interesting day. Here was this group of men living and praying and working together in this monastery dedicated to the Lord. I found it truly appealing. I still remember that day well – learning about monks, but also a day of traveling with my father.

So, Sister encouraged me to read Thomas Merton’s "Seven Story Mountain." This was the story of Merton’s early years, his schooling, and his days at Columbia University and his conversion to becoming a Catholic, influenced by his many friends. Then his discovery of the Monastic life, his entrance into the Trappist Monastery in Gethsemane, Kentucky. Merton has written a great deal about the monastic life and prayer. He characterizes the prayer of a monk is the prayer of contemplation. Merton writes this: "Contemplation is really simple openness to God at every moment, and deep peace." I have discovered contemplation as a prayer of silence and solitude – taking some time in quiet prayer and allowing God to become part of your life. As we take time to stay at home with the family and with the Lord, we open our hearts to our Savior. We will all have a story to tell one day of how we stayed at home and the Lord came to be part of our lives, just like the Trappist monks.
caused by the virus. While the situation is improving, the danger is not completely gone. We must be vigilant as we move forward, to assure that we keep our people safe as we resume our public worship and other activities.

As Catholics, we know that Christian worship and sacraments are essential for the well-being of the human person. The challenges presented by this pandemic have highlighted just how essential our faith is – far more important than many commercial activities that are now permitted. The faithful are seeking the Eucharist, Confession and the Anointing of the Sick in this time of great sickness, isolation and anxiety. We know that the Eucharist is the source of our strength, unity and spiritual nourishment, and is needed now more than ever. The grace and comfort offered by the Sacraments is more than essential.

To help us re-open our churches and resume public worship, we rely on the guidance of the New York State Department of Health’s instructions and the guidance of our local public health officials. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Dana McGuire and Dr. Andrew Williams, of the St. Lawrence County Health Department for their guidance and advice in forming this plan for re-opening. Their generous contributions to the formulation of this plan give me assurance that as we move forward toward more normal worship and parish life, we are doing so in a manner that is responsible and safe.

manage risks as we implement and monitor our plan.

I am also indebted to members of our committee for re-opening our parishes: Dr. Tracy LaFlair, Dr. Lisa Brienbach, Rita Crowley, PNP, Sandy Lyons, RN, Nancy Levac, RN, and Father Bryan Stitt for their input and work on the plan. It is reassuring to have a team of professionals to guide us in these complex matters. The re-opening of our churches and return to public worship will be measured and gradual. Your cooperation with our guidelines will be greatly appreciated. In preparing this decree, I have relied on Part III of Guidelines on Sacraments and Pastoral Care, Phased Restoration of Public Masses (“Mass Guidelines”), which can be found on the website of the Thomistic Institute at https://thomisticinstitute.org/covid-sacraments. Where there are differences between the documents found at the Thomistic Institute and our plan and guidelines, the provisions of our plan and guidelines will be followed in the Diocese of Ogdensburg.

Based on the recommendations of church leaders, the Thomistic Institute, public health officials and members of our team, I am issuing the following guidelines for the re-opening of our churches and public worship. These guidelines will become effective when we are able to resume public worship.

1. Attendance will be limited.

a. As a preliminary matter, a priest who is at high risk or has a respiratory infection of any kind should avoid celebrating public Masses or administering the Sacraments during this phase. The same holds true for those who will be assisting at Mass (e.g. deacons, servers, lectors, sacristans and ushers.)

b. Gatherings will be limited to the number of persons mandated by governmental regulations, guidelines or recommendations. At the present time, the federal guidelines state that a church can hold gatherings larger than 10 persons, provided it can provide for strict social distancing. Each parish should determine the maximum number of attendees based on government guidance and the particular circumstances of their church. You should consult with state and local health officials to determine any restrictions that may affect your parish.

c. Those who are at higher risk from the virus should remain at home.

d. Those who are feeling sick or anyone with a cough of any sort should not come to church for Mass or any visit.

e. Each parish will assure that the number of persons attending public worship do not exceed the appropriate limit. For examples of how this may be done, please see Mass Guidelines [e.g. more frequent celebrations, first come, first served, rotation system based on first letter or parishioners’ last name].

f. Non-household members are to sit at least six feet from each other.

g. Locations that have historically had outdoor Masses may continue to do so, provided that all social distancing protocols are strictly followed. Locations that have not had outdoor Masses may not hold outdoor Masses at this time.

2. Screening may be provided.

a. Each parish may wish to assure that participants in public worship will be screened, if possible. Such screening will consist of questions to ascertain risks of infection and non-contact temperature screening by medical professionals (nurses, doctors, EMTs). Those taking temperatures and screening parishioners should be prepared to offer prudent follow up where a person is exhibiting symptoms of coronavirus.

3. Social Distancing will be Practiced.

a. All persons, 2 years of age and older, attending Mass will be asked to wear a mask throughout the liturgy.

b. For Holy Communion, please stay six feet back from the person in front of you. For suggestions on how to implement social distancing, see Mass Guidelines.

c. Each parish should determine the number and location of Communion stations, which should be configured to provide for safe movement of individuals and social distancing.

d. Each parish shall determine the number of persons attending public worship do not exceed the appropriate limit. For examples of how this may be done, please see Mass Guidelines [e.g. more frequent celebrations, first come, first served, rotation system based on first letter or parishioners’ last name].

e. Each parish will assure that the number of persons attending public worship do not exceed the appropriate limit. For examples of how this may be done, please see Mass Guidelines [e.g. more frequent celebrations, first come, first served, rotation system based on first letter or parishioners’ last name].

f. Non-household members are to sit at least six feet from each other.

g. Locations that have historically had outdoor Masses may continue to do so, provided that all social distancing protocols are strictly followed. Locations that have not had outdoor Masses may not hold outdoor Masses at this time.

3. Social Distancing will be Practiced.

a. All persons, 2 years of age and older, attending Mass will be asked to wear a mask throughout the liturgy.

b. For Holy Communion, please stay six feet back from the person in front of you. For suggestions on how to implement social distancing, see Mass Guidelines.

c. Each parish should determine the number and location of Communion stations, which should be configured to provide for safe movement of individuals and social distancing.

d. Each parish shall determine the number of persons attending public worship do not exceed the appropriate limit. For examples of how this may be done, please see Mass Guidelines [e.g. more frequent celebrations, first come, first served, rotation system based on first letter or parishioners’ last name].

e. Each parish will assure that the number of persons attending public worship do not exceed the appropriate limit. For examples of how this may be done, please see Mass Guidelines [e.g. more frequent celebrations, first come, first served, rotation system based on first letter or parishioners’ last name].

f. Non-household members are to sit at least six feet from each other.

g. Locations that have historically had outdoor Masses may continue to do so, provided that all social distancing protocols are strictly followed. Locations that have not had outdoor Masses may not hold outdoor Masses at this time.

2. Screening may be provided.

a. Each parish may wish to assure that participants in public worship will be screened, if possible. Such screening will consist of questions to ascertain risks of infection and non-contact temperature screening by medical professionals (nurses, doctors, EMTs). Those taking temperatures and screening parishioners should be prepared to offer prudent follow up where a person is exhibiting symptoms of coronavirus.

3. Social Distancing will be Practiced.

a. All persons, 2 years of age and older, attending Mass will be asked to wear a mask throughout the liturgy.

b. For Holy Communion, please stay six feet back from the person in front of you. For suggestions on how to implement social distancing, see Mass Guidelines.

c. Each parish should determine the number and location of Communion stations, which should be configured to provide for safe movement of individuals and social distancing.

d. Each parish shall determine the number of persons attending public worship do not exceed the appropriate limit. For examples of how this may be done, please see Mass Guidelines [e.g. more frequent celebrations, first come, first served, rotation system based on first letter or parishioners’ last name].

e. Each parish will assure that the number of persons attending public worship do not exceed the appropriate limit. For examples of how this may be done, please see Mass Guidelines [e.g. more frequent celebrations, first come, first served, rotation system based on first letter or parishioners’ last name].

f. Non-household members are to sit at least six feet from each other.

g. Locations that have historically had outdoor Masses may continue to do so, provided that all social distancing protocols are strictly followed. Locations that have not had outdoor Masses may not hold outdoor Masses at this time.
Celebrating Laudato Si’

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

of our world live in areas
where they cannot catch
t heir breath because they
lack clean breathable air? Every
day, literally millions
of people search for fresh
water to survive, a re-
source we, too often, take
for granted.

These days of isolation
provide us with an oppor-
tunity to reflect on our pri-
orities and relationships,
especially the importance
of family and friends. Let
us work together to create
a new normal. As good
neighbors, we care for
each other by tending
carefully to our common
home, the earth. We can begin by deciding to con-
sume less and recycle
more. We are keenly aware
of how poorer countries
are becoming the dumping
grounds for our throw-
away culture. Clearly, this
is Gospel injustice.

Perhaps, as we reflect on
life these days, we have
come to realize, more and
more, to appreciate what a
real gift it is for us to be
able to call the North
Country our common
home. Can we make an
extra effort to support our
local producers by pur-
chasing items made lo-
CALL TO ACTION

Laudato Si’ is a gift that
begs to be unwrapped fur-
ther. One way to do this is
to be sure to read the in-
formative articles on Envi-
rmental Stewardship
that you will find in the
North Country Catholic.
This Papal document is an
evangelization tool for the
entire faith community but
especially for our youth
who will live with the re-

sults of what we accom-
plish, or fail to accomplish,
today. We illustrate our
love for them, by showing
proper concern for the
land that both feeds our
bodies through the pro-
duce and labor of farmers
and fishermen, and facili-
tates the re-creation of our
souls by inviting us to walk
with our God through
mountains and valleys,
along streams and lakes
and then to simply praise
our God for the beauty that
He has spread before us.
This is indeed God’s
country! Let us take good
care of it. May God be
praised!

Plans to reopen

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

their parish by prayer
and watching the Mass
over the internet or on te-
levision. A list of live-
streamed Masses is avail-
able on our diocesan web-
site.

5. Risk still exists for
those attending Mass.
   a. Even the best health
practices and social dis-
tancing cannot remove all
risks of contracting or
transmitting the coron-
avirus.
   b. Hand sanitizer will be
available near the en-
trances of the church and
all are encouraged to per-
hand hygiene upon
entering and before leav-
ing church.
   c. Our churches will be
cleaned and disinfected as
outlined in the March 12,
2020 Guidance for Clean-
ing and Disinfection for
COVID-19 For House of
Worship (attached). This
document may be up-
dated from time to time.
Updates will be found at
the NYS DOH website:
   d. Missalettes, song
books and other common
use items will be removed
from pews. Single use pa-
pers with music, readings
and prayers may be avail-
able to facilitate partici-
patation.
   e. Reminders will be
given to participants
about the importance of
social distancing and
personal hygiene.

These diocesan guide-
lines are based on CDC
and NYS health mandates
and recommendations.
Each parish will tailor its
plan to conform to its lo-
cation, size, circum-
stances, and local
governmental directives.
There are some changes
that you will notice as we
celebrate Mass. The
changes are intended to
reduce the risk of spread-
ing the virus. These
changes include:
   • Initially, only a certain
number of people will be
able to physically go to
Mass. This is largely deter-
mined by the size of
the church and the re-
quirements of social dis-
tancing.
   • All parishioners will
wear face coverings while
in church to protect them-
selves and others.
   • There will be no holy
water in fonts to reduce
the risk of infection.
   • No offertory proces-
sions.
   • No passing of the col-
lection basket. The basket
will be placed in a fixed
location and parishioners
will be asked to drop their
contributions into the bask-
et as they enter or leave
the church.
   • The distribution of
Communion will be dif-
ferent.
   • No worship aids will
be available for use, such
as missalettes and hymns.
This will reduce the risk of
spreading the virus.
   • There will be no choirs
in the early phases of our
return to public worship.
   • There will be no con-
gregating in the church,
on the steps or at the
doors of the church so we
can maintain social dis-
tancing.
   • I extend the dispensa-
tion of the obligation to
attend Sunday Mass until
further notice.

Our return to public
worship will most likely
be gradual. The changes
to the Mass will require
cooporation and patience.
We do not want to con-
tribute to a rebound effect
that would negate all the
progress that has been
made in stopping the
spread of this virus. Con-
tinuing to follow health
guidelines will enable us

to resume normal Mass at-
tendance in the near fu-
ture. Setbacks would push
a return to normalcy fur-
ther into the future. We
must put the health and
well-being of people
ahead of any urge to move
too quickly.

Your parish will formu-
late a safe plan that takes
into account its particular
circumstances. Let us seek
the intercession of Saint
Joseph, protector of the
Church and Hope of the
Afflicted, as we resume
our public worship. Ask-
ing God to bless you abun-
dantly, I am

Faithfully yours in
Christ,

Most Reverend
Terry R. LaValley
Bishop of Ogdensburg

St. Peter’s Catholic Church in Massena, NY is seeking qualified
candidates to apply for the full-time position of Director of Facilities,
effective July 1, 2020. The Director of Facilities is responsible for the
security, operation, development, maintenance, and physical
appearance of the Sacred Heart Campus of St. Peter’s Parish, including
Sacred Heart Church, Trinity Catholic School, St. Peter’s Parish office
and Sacred Heart Convent. This includes, but is not limited to,
mechanical systems, janitorial upkeep, utilities, grounds, equipment,
and the buildings themselves. These functions and responsibilities
include day-to-day performance of campus operations. A valid New
York State Motor Vehicle Driver’s License is required.

Salary will be commensurate with experience and education. The
deadline for submittal of cover letter and resume will be June 1, 2020.
No phone calls please. Applicants may submit cover letter and resume
to smarion@massencatholics.com or mail to St. Peter’s Parish, Attn:
Human Resources, 212 Main Street, Massena, NY 13662.
St. Peter’s Parish is an Equal Opportunity Employer
Seminarians adapt to COVID-19 formation

By Deacon Kevin Mastellon
Contributing Writer

WATERTOWN – Seminaries teach candidates for the priesthood what a priest ought to know and make them what a priest ought to be. The Diocese of Ogdensburg is blessed to have 13 men in various stages of preparation for the priesthood. Two will be ordained priests for this Diocese in August by Bishop Terry R. LaValley. Two more will be ordained deacons at the same ceremony they find themselves among us: his Christ.

Some of the candidates are still at the college level of their preparation. Others have moved into the major seminary portion of their formation. One definition of a seminary included this description: “A seminary is a school in which priests are trained. A priest is the representative of Christ among us: his mission is to carry on Christ’s work for the salvation of souls; in Christ’s name and by His power, he teaches us what we ought to believe and what we ought to do: he forgives sins, and offers in sacrifice the Body and Blood of Christ. He is another Christ (sacerdos alter Christus). His training, therefore, must be in harmony with this high office and consequently different in many ways from the preparation for secular professions. He must possess not only a liberal education, but also professional knowledge, and moreover, like an army or navy officer, he needs to acquire the manners and personal habits becoming his calling.”

It is that last part, acquiring personal habits becoming his calling, that has been most at risk during COVID-19. Missing from the preparation is the nearby, always open chapel. Gone are the required gathering of seminarians for prayer each morning, evening, during the day and at night. Meals are no longer taken with fellow seminarians dressed in cassocks.

Aaron Ackey from Plattsburgh is at Holy Apostles College and Seminary in Cromwell, Connecticut.

“Holy Apostles had emailed us while we were on our spring break that when we returned, we were going to stay in our rooms and do all on-line classes for the time being,” Akey said. “I went back on a Sunday night and by 9 the next morning, they said they were sending me home.”

The classroom part of distance learning has been fine for Ackey and other seminarians. Father Christopher C. Carrara, diocesan director of Seminarians, agrees.

“I find that they are coping very well with the situation they find themselves in,” Father Carrara said. “And the seminaries are working very hard to see that they have the support they need.”

“A big change for me,” said seminarian Matthew Conger, “has been the loss of the structure of the seminary, being with the guys on your hallway, having meals with them all, praying with them and attending liturgies with them. It’s nice being with my family but it is definitely different.”

Conger lives in Ogdensburg and attends the Christ King Seminary in Buffalo. He will be ordained a Transitional Deacon in August.

Leagon Carlin, also from Plattsburgh, is in his second year of major seminary at Mount St. Mary Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland. He agrees with Conger that the structure is missed. All the seminarians agree the separation from the seminary environment has placed new challenges, and responsibilities, on each of them.

“Part of the reason we are there (in a seminary) to be formed is to develop that closeness and love of the Lord,” Carlin said.

The seminarians each commented on the personal requirement to maintain their prayer life, to go to confession when possible and even attend Mass if their pastor allows.

“I didn’t want this to happen, but the experience has helped me learn and grow,” said Kevin McCullough from Black River. “This has made me more accountable to my professors, my advisors, to myself.”

McCullough is completing his 3rd year at the Pontifical College Josephinum in Columbus, Ohio.

Aside from the unique requirements absence from campus has forced on the students, there is a possible silver lining. Carlin thinks the experience has been a gift to this generation of seminarians.

“When we are ordained a priest, we are thrown out into the parish and for some it will be the first time on our own,” he said. “You have to learn how to schedule your life, your prayer life, and now we are getting a very small glimpse of that. I think in this case, it is a gift.”

“This has made us own our prayer more,” Aaron Ackey said. “No one is responsible for keeping up my relationship with God but me. There is no one taking attendance. We have varying degrees of success. I can see the difference in myself when I say I wanted to spend that time with God, but I don’t. It makes you all the more resolved to cultivate that relationship.”

“I think the guys are doing well,” Father Carrara said. “I don’t have any particular concerns right now, but they do need the support and structure of seminary formation and their conferees.”

None of the seminarians disagreed.

SAINT JAMES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
Gouverneur, New York
Is seeking applicants for the position of
PRINCIPAL
For the School Year 2020-21
Effective July 1, 2020
Applicants should:
• Possess a Master’s Degree in Education and/or Education Administration/Supervision;
• Be a practicing Catholic;
• Have experience as a successful Catholic school administrator;
• Give evidence of administrative leadership skills in the areas of Catholic identity, instructional evaluation, management, promotion and maintenance of an effective learning environment and public relations.
Applicants should send a cover letter expressing their suitability for the position, resume, a completed application (available at https://www.rcdony.org/catholicschools.html), transcripts, two letters of recommendation attesting to the candidate’s proven administrative ability and one letter of recommendation attesting to the person’s adherence to the Catholic Church, no later than May 29, 2020 to:
Sister Ellen Rose Coughlin, SSI, Superintendent of Schools
100 Elizabeth Street; PO Box 369
Ogdensburg, NY 13669

Is your subscription going to expire soon?
How to tell by looking at your mailing label.

** * * * AUTO ** 5
Or
Dry Cleaning
Mr. and Mrs. John Doe
123 Church Rd
Anywhere, NY 12345

If your label is showing that your account is going to expire soon, fill out the coupon to the right or pay online at www.northcountrycatholic.org

** * * * AUTO ** 5
Or
Dry Cleaning
Mr. and Mrs. John Doe
123 Church Rd
Anywhere, NY 12345

If your label is showing that your account is going to expire soon, fill out the coupon to the right or pay online at www.northcountrycatholic.org

** * * * AUTO ** 5
Or
Dry Cleaning
Mr. and Mrs. John Doe
123 Church Rd
Anywhere, NY 12345

If your label is showing that your account is going to expire soon, fill out the coupon to the right or pay online at www.northcountrycatholic.org
Environmental Stewardship

Five years of Laudato Si’

Does it seem possible that it has been five years since the Encyclical, Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home was released not just to Catholics but to every person who inhabits the planet? In his introduction Pope Francis states “I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. Everyone’s talents and involvement are needed to redress the damage caused by human abuse of God’s creation.” (LS. 14)

While we have become more aware of the destruction and pollution caused by human activity and efforts to change it, we know it is not enough. This reality may cause us to feel overwhelmed and discouraged. So, the temptation may be to do nothing and simply pretend it doesn’t exist. So where does one begin?

Interestingly enough the name of the Encyclical Laudato Si’ may provide us with a starting place. As we know the title in Latin means “Praise be to You,” taken from St. Francis of Assisi’s “Canticle to the Sun.” In this Canticle, St. Francis sees all creation — sun, moon, water, fire, etc. — as his brothers and sisters that praise their Creator by their very being. This Canticle reveals an intimate relationship that Francis has with all creatures and with God. “What more, St. Francis, faithful to Scripture, invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness.” (LS. 12) Perhaps our care for creation needs to begin with a prayer and praise for the wonders God has created. Catholic author Kathleen Fischer notes that cultivating the attitude of wonder may seem like a weak response to a world teetering on the edge of catastrophe. However, the experience of wonder reveals the sacred depth found in ordinary things. It is the beginning of spirituality.

Let’s take the advice of the poet, Mary Oliver this week “Be aware. Be amazed. And share it with someone!” Then, praise God and ask for the grace to protect it.

Rest in Peace

This week marks the anniversary of the deaths of the following clergymen who served in the Diocese of Ogdensburg

May 21 — Msgr. John Pendergast, 1998
May 22 — Msgr. Claudius Gobet, 1961
May 23 — Deacon Richard A. Menke, 2003
May 25 — Rev. J. Hector Migneron, 1958
May 26 — Rev. Thomas J. Kelleher, 1889; Rev. Steven H. Gratto, 2012

Protecting God’s Children

The Diocese of Ogdensburg uses the training, Protecting God’s Children for Adults. Due to Covid-19, there are no live trainings scheduled. If you need to complete VIRTUS training, contact Jean Grizzuto, jgrizzuto@rcdony.org or 315-393-2920 x 1413, who will coordinate assigning the training to be completed online.

Ticonderoga school is ‘#betteertogethersafepart’

By Pamela Arzberger
St. Mary’s School

TICONDEROGA — St. Mary’s School anticipated the closure of schools on March 11, 2020. At a March 12th emergency Faculty Meeting, Principal Sister Sharon Anne Dalton discussed the need to prepare all options for Distance Learning for the PreK through Grade 8 school. The teachers and support staff went to work immediately compiling online resources, student login and password information, and practicing accessing the programs with the students. On Friday, March 13th the eighth-grade students went to lower grades and taught them how to use Google Classroom. Grades PreK through 1 already had online programs SeeSaw and Class Dojo up and running for home/school communication and academic work.

Schools officially closed on Monday, March 16, and St. Mary’s began their distance and online learning program that day. Approximately 85% of the students were prepared and learning online the first day. Within the first week 93% of the students were doing their schoolwork and interacting with their teachers online. During the second week of NY PAUSE, St. Mary’s Junior High began classes and meetings online through the group Google Classroom. At this time, all classes work every school day, and students continue to flourish.

“Our school’s great success with Online Learning could not happen without the hard work and dedication of our teachers. They and the parents deserve the credit for our success during this difficult time,” said Sister Sharon. “The teachers continue to find new online sources to use as well as using good old-fashioned teaching techniques. The students are doing a fantastic job, and we appreciate the parents guiding them with the technology. Our students are interacting with their teacher every single day by screen visits, class meetings, email, Google Classroom messaging and interactive lessons with educational apps.”

St. Mary’s School is not only educating its students, but they are also keeping their community connected through social media. Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, there is a spirit theme put out on Facebook where students post pictures of different activities. The school has the slogan #betteertogethersafepart and #stmarysstrong. Since March 23, the school Facebook page has had over 16,000 views of these posts. Students get to see each other virtually and can share fun things or activities they are enjoying during this stay-at-home period. Themes have included sharing artwork, pets, new chores at home, books they are reading, their online gym class, their home classroom, and favorite superheroes. Students have shared projects such as making rainbows, making signs with messages to classmates, and building snowmen in March. Fun spirit days have been a pajama day, “May the Fourth Be With You,” Adulting at Home, and wearing their St. Mary’s blue and white. Students have celebrated Easter, Earth Day, and May Day virtually. It has been a very fun way for the school community to be together when they must stay apart.

On Saturday, May 16, the teachers and Staff of St. Mary’s were in front of the school with signs and messages for the students and families.

“St. Mary’s has been through a lot during our 61 years,” Sister Sharon said. “In 2014 our building was destroyed by an arson fire and we rebuilt. This is a challenging time for everyone, but we will get through this together as a dedicated community and as a family. We are, after all, St. Mary’s Strong.”
American Samoa, an archipelago of seven islands in the South Pacific and the only United States territory south of the equator, is located over 500 miles closer to New Zealand than it is to Hawaii. Over 97% of the territory’s population lives on the largest Island, Tutuila, leaving the small number of residents in the outlying Manu’a islands to be served by one catechist and one priest, who visits monthly to celebrate Mass and to bring sacraments to the faithful. Despite these limited resources, the residents of Manu’a are growing in faith, with more becoming interested in being baptized and welcomed into the Church.

Your generosity has helped sustain this invaluable ministry to the faithful in the isolated environment of the Diocese of Samoa–Pago Pago. By supporting the Catholic Home Missions Appeal (CHMA), you continue a tradition of support for mission dioceses in the United States dating back to 1924.

Support CHMA and strengthen the Church at home.

For more information about the Catholic home missions, visit www.usccb.org/home-missions.

WHAT DOES YOUR GIFT FUND?

2018 FINANCIALS

- Grants and Donations: $9,656,709
- Program Costs: $569,822
- Promotions and Fundraising Expenses: $280,078
- Administrative Expenses: $85,008

Total Expenses: $10,591,617

What Is a Home Mission Diocese?

Home mission dioceses are those dioceses in the United States, its territories, and former territories that cannot provide basic pastoral services to Catholics without outside help. Basic pastoral services include Mass and the other sacraments, religious education, and ministry training for priests, deacons, religious sisters, and lay people. Right now, over 40% of dioceses are considered home missions.
CANTON — Mark McKenna grew up never far from a Catholic Church.

“I grew up across from St. Mary’s Church,” said McKenna, a civil engineer with the Army Corps of Engineers. “I still across from that church. My faith has been important to me since I was a kid. The caretaker at St. Mary’s would pick us up at 6 a.m., noon and 6 p.m. to go over to the church and ring the bells. I started an altar boy in fifth grade, and I continued serving on the altar until senior year of high school. When I was 12, I started working for the church and school mowing lawns, digging graves, cleaning the school... Church has always been part of my life.”

His faith and the teachings to serve others combined with McKenna’s love of sports to help him launch a unique ministry: sled hockey.

“I’ve always loved hockey,” McKenna said.

While he hoped to play the sport in college, he said his coach felt his engineering program’s coursework would be difficult to complete if he played for the school team. Around the same time, McKenna learned of an opportunity to coach youth hockey.

“I coached pee wee’s that year,” he said, referring to teams of youth ages 11 and 12. “I was 18 years old. I later moved on to Bantams, ages 13 to 16. I’m still coaching.”

Coaching youth, McKenna found multiple opportunities to serve the disadvantaged, inspired by Catholic social teaching and a personal desire to help others.

“I owned a sports shop,” McKenna said. “Working in the shop, I met a lot of single parents who were trying to help their kids play hockey. I come from a blue-collar family. It’s getting so expensive to play hockey. It seemed like it was getting exclusive to families who could afford more. I worked with Canton Minor Hockey and CCM (a hockey equipment company) to get scholarships for kids to be able to play and to get starter equipment. The kids had to buy their skates and sticks, but pretty much everything else was provided to them.”

Then, sometime around 2010-11, McKenna had an experience while exercising at Fort Drum that showed him he had another calling.

“A kid came into the gym in a wheelchair,” McKenna said. “He couldn’t reach the pull-up bars. There was this wrestling mat on the floor, and it made it so he couldn’t get to the dumbbells. He got frustrated and left. I went to the manager and pointed out that they had equipment issues that made it so people in wheelchairs couldn’t use the gym. They had two pull-up bars. We lowered one to wheelchair height, and we got rid of the mat. I asked the gym manager if they offered anything like sled hockey or wheelchair lacrosse. He had never heard of it. I thought something needed to be done for these guys who are injured.”

McKenna set to work to create an opportunity for injured soldiers and athletes to participate in sports for both physical activity and community.

The Mountain Warriors Sled Hockey team was born.

In sled hockey, players are seated on a “sled” and use their hands to both move the sled around and to move, pass and shoot the puck.

Working with coaches from St. Lawrence University, Clarkson University, SUNY Potsdam and SUNY Canton, McKenna was able to acquire used hockey equipment. USA Hockey, the governing association overseeing most hockey in the United States, offered a sled lending program. A sled manufacturer based in Canada, one of only two in North America, sent a free sled to the effort.

“I went to the Warriors Transition Unit to recruit soldiers to participate,” McKenna said. “I had 24 sign up for it. I needed six more sleds than what I had through the lending program.”

McKenna said he worked with the Knights of Columbus and VFW – provide all of our food and generally support the team. I’m convinced this couldn’t be done anywhere but here in the North Country where people support our military, support hockey and are good Christian people.”

And the team has meant a lot to the players.

“I’ve had three different guys come up to me and tell me they would’ve committed suicide had it not been for sled hockey and this team,” McKenna said. “I just have to keep this thing going.”

In addition to serving others via sled hockey, McKenna is a member of the Knights of Columbus. He’s also looking to start wheelchair lacrosse in the area, largely to benefit a young woman who was disabled in an accident but loves to play the sport.

“My faith has taught me to serve others and treat them the way you want to be treated,” he said. “I’m trying to live that faith.”
Pope: Christianity is a relationship, not just rules

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Christians must follow the Ten Commandments, of course, but Christianity is not about following rules, it is about having a relationship with Jesus, Pope Francis said.

"A relationship with God, a relationship with Jesus is not a relationship of 'things to do' - 'If I do this, you give me that,' " he said. Such a relationship would be "commercial" while Jesus gives everything, including his life, gratuitously.

At the beginning of his morning Mass May 15 in the chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, Pope Francis noted the day's U.N. celebration of the International Day of Families and asked people to join him praying "for all families so that the Spirit of the Lord – the spirit of love, respect and freedom – might grow in families."

In his homily, the pope focused on the day's first reading and its account of the first Christian converts from paganism being "disturbed" by other Christians who insisted the converts must first become Jewish and follow all Jewish laws and customs.

"These Christians who came from the pagans believed in Jesus Christ, received baptism and were happy – they had received the Holy Spirit," the pope said.

Those who insisted the converts observe Jewish law and customs had "pastoral arguments, theological arguments and even moral ones," he said. "They were methodical and also rigid."

"These people were ideological more than dogmatic," the pope said. "They reduced the law, the dogma to an ideology: 'You must do this, this and this.' There was a religion of prescriptions and, in that way, they took away the freedom of the Spirit, who had brought the converts directly to Christ without first having them become Jewish.

"Where there is rigidity, there is not the Spirit of God, because the Spirit of God is freedom," the pope said.

The problem of individuals or groups trying to impose extra conditions on believers was present from the beginning of Christianity and continues in some quarters of the church today, he said.

"In our own time, we have seen some church organizations that seem to be well organized, to work well, but they are all rigid, each member the same as the others, and then we have discovered the corruption that was inside, including in the founders."

Pope Francis ended his homily inviting people to pray for the gift of discernment as they try to distinguish between the requirements of the Gospel and "prescriptions that make no sense."

Pope joins interreligious prayer to end pandemic

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — At a time of global "tragedy and suffering" because of the coronavirus, and in view of the long-term impact it will have, believers of every religion should beg mercy from the one God and father of all, Pope Francis said.

During his early morning Mass, Pope Francis joined leaders of every religion marking May 14 as a day of prayer, fasting and acts of charity to ask God to stop the coronavirus pandemic.

Some people might think, "It hasn't affected me; thank God I'm safe." But think about others! Think about the tragedy and also about the economic consequences, the consequences on education," the pope said in his homily.

"That is why today everyone, brothers and sisters from every religious tradition are praying to God," he said.

The day of prayer was called for by the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity, an international group of religious leaders formed after Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb, grand imam of al-Azhar, signed a document in 2019 on promoting dialogue and "human fraternity."

During the pope's Mass, livestreamed from the chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, he said he could imagine some people would say that gathering believers of all religions to pray for a common cause "is religious relativism, and you can't do it."

"But how can you not pray to the Father of all?" he asked.
Jesus continues to be present

As the days passed after the Resurrection of Jesus, the Apostles were getting used to their fleeting glimpses of the Risen Christ, appearing here and there so dramatically. He had pretty much cured their depression following the horrible crucifixion on Calvary by finally convincing them that He was alive! They never knew when He would appear next with new commands to preach the Good News everywhere. Now, He suddenly ascends into the air before their eyes, and is lost to sight in the clouds. They must have thought in dismay, “He’s left us again!” So, what did they do? It was one thing to label themselves followers of the Christ when He was not too far away. It was quite another to think of facing the Jewish leaders without his earthly presence. Still shaken at his seeming abandonment, they withdrew together to that upper room to pray and ponder what He had taught them. Wisely, they kept near his mother, Mary in those nine days of waiting for the Holy Spirit.

They must have remembered what Jesus had said to them: “If you really love me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father.” In other words, I have a better way to remain with you. I will live in you and in the Church through my Spirit and in my Vicar. And did they remember his wonderful farewell address in that same upper room just a few weeks before at that strange, sacred meal the night before He died? Did they now understand the reason for his promise of the Spirit and his Institution of the Eucharist?

And they gather in prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, in the Cenacle that held such precious memories, there to await the promised Paraclete. He will teach them everything they need to know to spread the Good News to all the world. The Spirit will also fill them with the courage to be bold and fearless, ready for whatever will await them, even for martyrdom.

Like the Apostles, we need to prepare ourselves this week for a renewal of all those gifts we received at our confirmation. We must not act as though He’s not present. He is present. His being present in the Spirit is far more powerful than His earthly presence would have been. We must go simply and deliberately into our souls daily – into the core of our being – and there listen to Him in silence. Then, strengthened by His grace, we can confidently go about our Mission. We need that grace more than ever in these critical days of the coronavirus!

‘Detailed coordination of a complex operation’

Logistics is defined as “the detailed coordination of a complex operation involving many people, facilities, or supplies.” We will call the operation Mass. Many people are the faithful who are praying for a return to church. Church is the “facility” we have in mind, and the “supplies” are everything from the unconsecrated bread to hand sanitizer. Perhaps you get the gist of these thoughts. It will take a massive logistics effort to bring us all back to church at some point in the future. I suspect the time will not be universal throughout the diocese. I suspect once Bishop LaValley gives his OK to celebrating Mass and the sacraments publicly, pastors will be challenged to make the homcoming work in their churches. When the pastor is comfortable and the bishop is comfortable with a particular parish plan, that is when the doors will open in your church.

“Bishop LaValley wants us to become aware of the changes we will have to make once public worship is allowed.” We are warned. When the day comes for your parish church and my parish church to open the doors to congregations, things are not going to be as they were.

You might find the size of the congregation limited. Ushers will count heads and tell some folks “you can’t come in just now.” That is a long way from telling folks in the pew to “move in so we can make room for more Mass goers. I am betting some ushers will tell their pastors they do not want to be the one who says “you can’t come in.”

There might not be any Holy Water in the fonts. Masks will be the order of the day. Everyone not in the sanctuary will have to wear a mask. Communion will be distributed in one kind and how and when we receive communion might be different.

The bottom line is, it would be irresponsible for pastors to just throw open the doors and invite everyone and anyone back to Mass. The responsible approach during this pandemic, and the one I think the bishop is considering, is to follow the recommendations of the health community, federal and state agencies and unique local circumstances before welcoming parishioners back to church. Even then, we will have parishioners who do not think we should have opened the church doors. There will be some who, for health reasons, should not have come to church but will. There will be some who just do not like the changes (that sounds familiar) and so will not come back.

There is one phrase missing from the definition of logistics: “and rarely is everyone happy with the plan.” But the end result is the important one: to bring our people back to the celebration of God’s Word and Jesus’ Sacrifice, to offer our prayers of thanksgiving and hope and to receive Him in Communion. Pray for the logisticians.

Deacon Kevin Mastellon ministers in Watertown.
He is the Director of Permanent Deacons for the Diocese of Ogdensburg.
Death and burial in the ‘beautiful valley’

By Father Daniel Chapin

It was Holy Week 2017 – Holy Thursday – in the central Bolivian city of Cochabamba, nestled in a valley of the Andes Mountains; the beautiful, April sunny afternoon displayed blue skies and soaring white clouds. I was preparing to head over to the Parish of Our Lady of La Salette, where I had been helping out since my arrival six months earlier. I had been asked by the pastor to help wash feet at the evening’s Mass of the Lord’s Supper, something I had been asked to do since my arrival. I was deeply moved.

Suddenly, a call came in from the parish: a family was requesting a priest to offer prayers at the funeral and burial of their newborn son. I raced over in a taxi to the parish where a man on a motorcycle was waiting to take me to the family home a few blocks away in a barrio called the “Beautiful Valley.” When I arrived at the home there were many family, friends and neighbors keeping vigil near the body of little two-month old Jhonatan Gabriel. He was in a small, white casket surrounded by flowers and candles. I noticed a sign that read “St. Matthew’s Funeral Home.” I greeted the children and adults; it struck me that there were no elderly present. A dog lay sleeping in the shade of the table on which was placed Jhonatan’s casket. I knew right away who the mother was – she was the one with the grief-stricken face. The parents informed me that Jhonatan was a twin and had been sick with a cold and bronchitis and brought to the hospital, where he died. His twin brother was also sick but was getting better. There were two other brothers, 5 and 2 years old. I was told that none of the children were baptized. Prayers were offered and Scriptures read. Then we all piled into taxis and headed to the cemetery.

A sign at the entrance read “Cemetery of the Beautiful Valley: no drunks, no minors, no medicine men.” A large map showed the different burial sections, the largest one being “in ground,” where the poorest are buried. Jhonatan was to be placed in the section for babies: row 147, niche 7. I reflected on the number 7 in the Bible as signifying perfection, fulfillment, completion; how little Jhonatan’s life was fulfilled and complete at just two months and my life at 70 was still not. Looking around, many niches had no one date listed – birth and death on the same day.

Two men with mouth and nose covered arrived to prepare a slab of cement and bricks that would be used to seal the niche. It was evident these men had done this way too often. I thanked them and wondered how frequently they received expressions of gratitude. I blessed the niche, prayers were said and a “Hail Mary” was recited at the end. As the casket was about to be placed in the niche, Jhonatan’s parents began to weep profusely, as did I. Our tears fell onto his casket (a kind of Baptism of Desire) as goodbyes were uttered; the body was placed, the niche sealed and beautiful, white flowers were offered. I embraced the parents and promised prayers; the customary Mass to be celebrated nine days later in the parish was requested. Before leaving the cemetery, liquor was offered, then Coca Cola followed by coca leaves.

A short time later, I was at the parish, in imitation of Jesus washing the feet of my brothers and sisters, disciples all, and my thoughts flowed back to the “Cemetery of the Beautiful Valley” and to our tears that bathed little Jhonatan Gabriel. I could not have been better prepared to enter into the spirit of the Sacred Triduum: passion, death...Resurrection.
New aid bill cuts benefits to Catholic schools

CLEVELAND (CNS) — Catholic leaders expressed deep reservations about a new $3 trillion tax cut and spending bill in response to the economic fallout caused by the coronavirus pandemic that would restrict support for Catholic school students.

Unveiled May 12 by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-California, the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act, or HEROES Act, includes a provision that would rescind funding of equitable services to nonpublic schools, including Catholic schools, that had been established in the CARES Act, an earlier $2.2 trillion emergency aid package.

Other provisions in the Democrats’ bill that has rocked the country’s private education sector include the lack of direct assistance to families for tuition expenses or tax incentives that can be used for tuition; a measure that cuts out nonpublic schools, except in limited cases for children with disabilities, from $90 billion in school aid; and it rescinds a discretionary fund utilized by the secretary of education established under the bipartisan CARES Act.

Disallowing emergency aid to one part of an affected community and allowing it for another runs contrary to long-held social policy, Catholic education advocates said.

Within days of learning of the bill’s content related to nonpublic schools, Bishop David M. O’Connell of Trenton, New Jersey, urged the state’s Catholics in a post on the website of The Monitor, the diocesan newspaper, to contact members of Congress to express their concern about the legislation.

Saying the bill has “a lot of good things,” he cautioned that “some real problematic areas” exist.

“We’re trying to urge Congress to maintain equitable access to federal funding for nonpublic schools and their (students’) families as they have in previous legislation,” Bishop O’Connell told Catholic News Service May 15.

In the first 24 hours after the post, the bishop said, more than 7,000 messages were sent to Congress, including 5,200 from the Trenton Diocese.

“We just want to make sure that as we face the economic difficulties we’re all facing, that those who have children in nonpublic or Catholic schools have the equal opportunity to provide what the government offers us. We want to make sure we get our fair share.”

Urged on by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, state Catholic conferences have mobilized as well around the bill as to stop what education advocates consider a major step back from long-established federal policies.

“The key thing to this bill is not that it is an education bill, it’s an emergency relief bill. When in history have we excluded those suffering from an emergency from federal relief?” said Jennifer Daniels, associate director for public policy in the Secretariat of Catholic Education at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

“When Congress releases emergency relief bills, it’s available to everyone who is suffering from that emergency. All we’re saying is that private schools are suffering right next to the public schools, and we should have access to emergency relief funds. All we want is our fair share and for our children to be served in an equal manner,” Daniels told CNS.

The private education sector has rallied to oppose the provision specifically to school funding.


The USCCB is a member of the council, which is known as CAPE.

“If passed, these provisions would eliminate from eligibility for aid almost all students enrolled by their parents in nonpublic schools,” Schnell wrote, adding, “To approve such policies would be to send a message that the House of Representatives is only concerned with the safety of some of America’s students and teachers, not all.”

The letter raised concern that the HEROES Act education provisions reopens the CARES Act “to restrict which private school students will be eligible for relief voted on by Congress, and signed by the president, over a month ago.”

Presentation Sister Dale McDonald, director of public policy and educational research at the National Catholic Educational Association, said the bill as written would harm nonpublic schools across the country because it “reinterprets” what is emergency aid versus what is traditional education aid.

State Catholic conferences across the country have been alerted to the bill’s measures. The conferences have joined a nationwide effort to make sure the provisions are dropped from any final bill.

The bill includes $1 trillion for state, city and tribal governments to avoid layoffs; $200 billion for “hazard pay” for front-line workers; a new round of cash payments for individuals and households; $175 billion in housing assistance for rent and mortgage payments; $75 billion for medical testing; a 15% increase in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; subsidies for laid-off workers to pay for health insurance premiums and maintain COBRA; an employee retention tax credit for businesses; and $25 billion for the U.S. Postal Service.

The House of Representatives debated the bill May 15 and was expected to pass it largely along party lines.

However, the likelihood of the Republican-controlled Senate taking up the measure as written is slim. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky, told reporters at the Capitol there was no “urgency” to act and that consideration of any relief measure by the chamber would not happen until after Memorial Day.