

THE CATHOLIC MISCELLANY

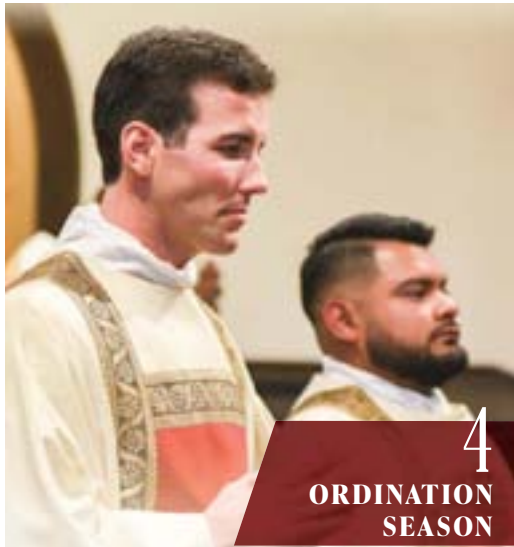
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JULY 2023



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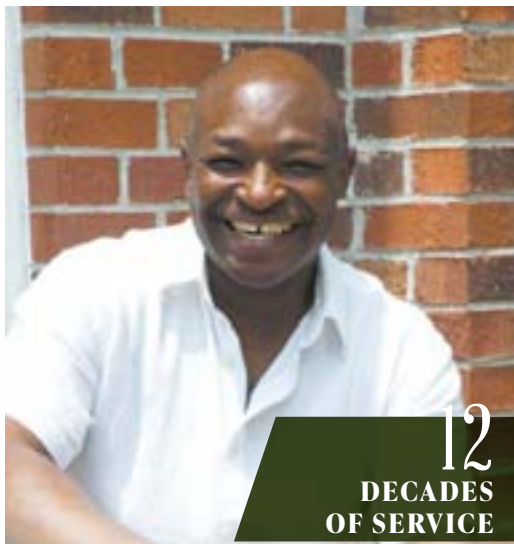
*Heart
of Christ*

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF CHARLESTON



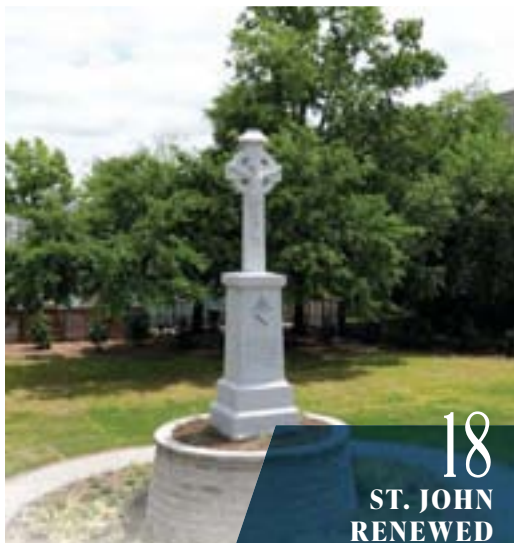
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THE CATHOLIC MISCELLANY

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FROM THE BISHOP



PHOTO BY DOUG DEAS

MY DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

As we celebrate Independence Day this month, I wanted to reflect on the nature of freedom. What is it, and what does it truly entail? We cannot discuss freedom without first addressing free will and the gift of reason. An all-knowing Creator endowed us with the ability to choose or reject him in our thoughts, words and deeds. This humbling fact reflects God's power and greatness and the unceasing love he has for each of us. When we choose to live out our calling to love the Lord and our neighbor as ourselves, we begin to comprehend the nature of true freedom.

We are called to the freedom that can only be attained in the total abandonment to God's divine will. Our burdens feel light when we offer our concerns and struggles to Jesus. The freedom we desire in the depths of our hearts was accomplished on the shoulders of Christ on the cross. That moment — eternally embodied in the living sacrifice of the Eucharist now dwelling in tabernacles in every corner of the world — is freedom incarnate.

We have the responsibility to uphold the freedom gained for us by others who have gone before us, and we have the duty to perfect it, with Jesus' help, for those who will follow us. We read in the book of Galatians, "You brothers were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather, serve one another in love" (5:13-14).

As Jesus came to redeem the human person for the greatness of the Father, we are called to stand by our brothers and sisters in their personal journeys to true freedom. We are social creatures, made to echo the Word — the message of all goodness and freedom — to our human family. Only when we devote the whole of

our beings to the mission of Christ, the great liberator, can we experience freedom. Then, it will flourish in our communities, our families and in the hearts of every person we encounter in the nation.

Freedom is not possible without love. It is enunciated through virtuous living and the imitation of Jesus, who broke the shackles of sin and death. Today, think of one way you can restore freedom in your own home and personal life. Start with something small, perhaps offering a few moments for an unspoken act of charity for another, and watch as your life and our culture are transformed.

Happy Independence Day! †

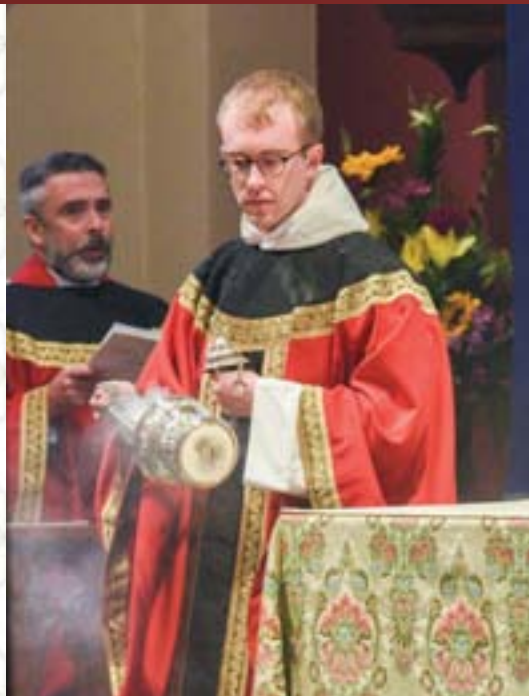
In Christ's love,

Most Rev. Jacques Fabre-Jeune, CS
Bishop of Charleston



Celebrating

THE UPSTATE'S NEWLY ORDAINED



A celebration is definitely in order when not one, but two men from the same church are ordained – one as a priest and the other as a transitional deacon. But when the ordination of another transitional deacon happens at the same time, you call that an outright triumph.

BY THERESA STRATFORD

Theresa Stratford is a freelance writer for The Miscellany. She lives in Charleston with her husband and three children and attends the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist. Email her at tmmart89@gmail.com.

PHOTOS BY DOUG DEAS

That’s exactly what happened for St. Mary Church in Greenville. Father Vincent Bernhard, OP, was ordained to the priesthood for the Dominican Friars of the Province of St. Joseph on May 20. Peter O’Steen was ordained as a transitional deacon on May 26, along with Erik Roman, whose home parish is St. Anne Church in Rock Hill.

Father Bernhard was ordained at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., while Deacons O’Steen and Roman were ordained at St. Mary in the Upstate. In 2024, the deacons will be ordained to the priesthood for the Diocese of Charleston.

On Pentecost Sunday, May 28, Father Bernhard celebrated Mass at St. Mary with Deacon O’Steen assisting. Father Jay Scott Newman, pastor, noted the significance of having two vocations from the parish on the altar together.

“Each Wednesday afternoon at St. Mary’s Church, we prayed to the Lord for vocations to the priesthood and religious life during an hour of eucharistic adoration, and in May our prayers were fulfilled in a beautiful way,” Father Newman said. “To have two sons of this parish together at the altar was a splendid blessing for our congregation and for all those whom these men will serve as instruments of God’s grace. And then the newly ordained Deacon Erik Roman will spend the summer with us for his first experience of diaconal ministry, thus crowning these gifts of grace in response to so many prayers for the Lord to send laborers to his harvest.”

FATHER VINCENT FERRER BERNHARD, OP

It is often thought that priests feel called to religious life, or perhaps an “aha” moment made them realize the priesthood was right for them. For Father Bernhard, who grew up in Easley, it was much simpler.

“Today, we tend to over complicate the notion of discernment,” he said. “For one living the life of grace through the sacraments and prayer, the desire is enough for one to pursue a vocation to the priesthood and religious life. The simple desire to become a priest made me go down this path, fostered in a Catholic family and strengthened through prayer and the sacramental life of the Church.”

Although he knew from a young age that he wanted to be a priest, Father Bernhard didn’t know until later on that he wanted to pursue the Dominicans’ charism.



“*For one living the life of grace through the sacraments and prayer, the desire is enough for one to pursue a vocation to the priesthood and religious life.*”

“At first, I considered pursuing the priesthood as a diocesan priest in the Diocese of Charleston. It is a great diocese! But when I met the Dominicans in college, I realized the desire to pursue the priesthood after the pattern of St. Dominic,” he said.

Father Bernhard entered the Dominican Order in 2017 and took solemn vows in 2022. He said he is excited to see how the Lord uses him in the work of salvation.

“Dominican friars are men fascinated by grace — it is often said that we are an order of grace. I look forward to existing as a conduit of this grace as a priest, especially as a minister of the sacraments.”

Father Bernhard offered advice to others considering the priesthood.

“Thank God for the desire to consider the priesthood, and ask him to fan the flame into a fire of burning priestly charity if he so wills,” he said. “Make time for silence and pray every day. Entrust yourself to Mary through the rosary.”



She will work in your life in amazing ways if you ask her! And of course, talk to someone, such as a priest or a trusted friend. Don't be afraid to take part in vocation weekends for the Diocese of Charleston or a particular religious order."

DEACON PETER REX O'STEEN

When Deacon Peter O'Steen recalls his childhood, he describes it as a fairly normal upbringing with all the usual age-related ups and downs.

"I was born and raised in Greenville. I grew up in a stable household with my two parents, Rex and Srebranka, and four brothers: Luke, Paul, Jordan and Andrew. I attended public school my entire life. From kindergarten to fifth grade, I went to Sara Collins Elementary. My time there was full of fond memories and lasting friendships engulfed in childhood innocence. In third grade, my mother became the school nurse at Sara Collins. For me, that was a dream come true because I love my mom."

In middle school, Deacon O'Steen said that his focus began to change when he was exposed to more outside influences.

"I began to shift my academic attention to trying to grow in popularity," he said. "I no longer cared about being on the honor roll. I felt more gratification at making a good joke in class or getting a laugh out of my friends."

He admitted that it continued throughout high school and even into college at the University of South Carolina, where he joined a fraternity.

"This was a recipe for disaster. The disciplinary troubles that began in high school only got worse. To make a long story short, during the fall semester of my sophomore year of college, I got into some serious trouble with my fraternity. I got kicked out of the fraternity, the fraternity house and I was worried that I would get kicked out of school as well. This was one of the lowest moments of my life," he said.

Determined to turn things around, Deacon O'Steen and his twin brother Jordan decided to move to a new apartment that happened to be near St. Thomas More, the university's Catholic Student Center.

The brothers resolved to pray the rosary daily, and after a few months, "many changes began to occur in my life. Firstly, the faith began to make much more sense to me. For the first time ever, I believed in the Real Presence of the Eucharist, and I began to attend daily Mass. I also had a desire to read the Scriptures and the lives of the saints. I dropped many of the sinful habits I had grown accustomed to and found myself desiring to grow in sanctity instead. I even began to ask God what he wanted me to do with my life. Lastly, God blessed me with the example of many holy Catholic men who helped me grow deeper in my love for Jesus."

For Deacon O'Steen, there wasn't an "aha" moment that made him decide to pursue the priesthood. It was during Lent of his sophomore year that the idea popped into his head.

“I just remember I couldn’t get it off my mind,” he added. He decided to share the thoughts with his twin brother and a mentor.

“Voicing it out loud was extremely helpful. Additionally, I decided to talk with the priest at St. Thomas More. Father Marcin [Zahuta, who died in 2020] gave me wonderful advice that probably saved the initial sparks of my vocation. He advised me to keep these thoughts to myself, to continue to grow in my prayer life and to continue to meet with him for direction.”

As graduation approached, Deacon O’Steen knew what he had to do and applied to be a seminarian for the diocese. He graduated with a degree in management science in December 2017 and was simultaneously accepted to the seminary. He began studying philosophy at St. Vincent De Paul Regional Seminary in Boynton Beach, Florida, in the fall of 2018 where he is currently studying, and added, “I’ve never been happier.”

Deacon O’Steen said he advises anyone thinking of becoming a priest to “pray, get a spiritual director and move forward with a decision either way. It’s never good to stay frozen because of fear. Life is about walking in faith and sometimes it involves taking scary leaps of faith. Remember that Jesus is with you, and he will lead you where you need to go. But for him to lead, you need to start walking.”

DEACON ERIK BERISTAIN ROMAN

The pivotal moment of discernment for Deacon Erik Roman came to him in high school. Before that, he always saw himself working in sports, maybe as a commentator. He grew up in Rock Hill with his parents and three brothers. Deacon Roman said he owes his spiritual formation to his parents’ closeness to the church and to St. Anne School in Rock Hill, which he attended from first to eighth grade.

Although he attended public high school, it was then that he realized priesthood could be in his future.

“I shuddered and sort of scoffed when the thought of the priesthood entered my mind because it was something that I knew other people had thought about for me — my mom and the pious ladies at the parish — but not something that I had ever taken seriously,” he said.

His mother signed him up for a retreat while he was in high school, and at that retreat, a priest asked him to consider becoming one.

“I went to confession with a priest, and during his counseling, he asked if I had ever thought about becoming a priest. Needless to say, I was stunned. I told him that I hadn’t really thought about the priesthood in a serious way, and he advised me to simply open my heart to the priesthood and see what happens. So that day, my heart became open to the idea,” he said.

Although Deacon Roman continued on to have a fairly normal time in high school playing sports, focusing on



“

There’s a certain peace and joy I see within priests that love what they do and that makes me want to be that for others as well.”

his grades, working and dating, he said he always felt like he was running away from something.

“Eventually, I just got tired of running,” he said. “I took time in prayer and then set my sights on what it would look like to enter seminary.”

He knew one thing: he was always happiest when he was at Mass. Deacon Roman recalls a time in high school when a career counselor came to talk to his class about the future. He said students searched online to find resources on the careers in which they were interested.

“I found myself on [the former] charlestonvocations.com looking for more insight on the seminary,” and he signed up for a discernment retreat with the diocese. Ultimately, it led to his full commitment to becoming a priest.

“I have never met a sad priest or one that regretted his decision to join the priesthood,” Deacon Roman said. “There’s a certain peace and joy I see within priests that love what they do and that makes me want to be that for others as well.”

He said that God never left his side, and that “there is no reason to doubt his presence now.”

The new deacon is most looking forward to the intimacy experienced by priests in the confessional, since that is where the journey to the priesthood began for him.

“It’s being the person of Christ for what are such pivotal moments in people’s lives. I know how that feels, because that is how it was for me,” he said. †



Catholic Radio in SC marks 20

“If Jesus was alive today, he would have his own podcast,” according to Gary Towery, president of Mediatrix SC, Inc. He would know – Towery has been the key figure in spreading Catholic radio across this state for 20 years, but it wasn’t always this way.

amazing. I always ask God to put people in my life who can help me, and God put Michael in my path,” Towery said.

Brennan recalled, “I was semi-retired, and Gary and I just stopped and talked, and he said, ‘You should come out to Catholic radio and see what’s going on.’ A year later, we connected again. Then in February 2008, I started trying to help a little bit.”

The Difference

At first, Towery and Brennan wondered whether anybody was listening.

“Then we would get a call from someone who said how Catholic radio had helped them,” Brennan said. “There have been people who have been on the brink. You never know how the Holy Spirit will use Catholic radio to change somebody’s life.”

He recalls a mother of eight who phoned in and said that she had fallen away from the Church but came back because of Catholic radio.

It even helped Brennan.

“I became culturally Catholic for about 15 years. I just wasn’t practicing,” he said.

He began listening to apologists Steve Wood and Scott Hahn, and that is

Michael Brennan, vice president who runs day to day operations for Mediatrix, said it all changed when donors spearheaded efforts to raise funds for a small station in Charleston. WQIZ went on-air July 4, 2003, and broadcast programs provided by Mother Angelica’s EWTN.

“I didn’t know anything about radio, but I knew I wanted a station in the Upstate,” Towery said.

The retired businessman came on board to help spread God’s word across the Palmetto State.

“In 2004, he knocked on every door,” Brennan said of Towery’s efforts. “The donors, they all came together to make Greer possible,” and WCKI came on-air Oct. 13, 2004, serving the greater Greenville/Spartanburg area.

“Even though Gary and I get a lot of the credit, priests, private donors and Catholic businesses have supported Catholic radio from the

beginning,” Brennan said.

“In the early years, we got many calls, many horrible calls,” Towery said. “Twenty years ago, there used to be a visible anti-Catholic mindset in South Carolina.”

That has changed as God’s message has hit the air one station at a time across the state. Towery, Brennan and the Mediatrix team mapped out 11 Catholic population centers.

“We wanted to put Catholic radio where the major clusters of Catholics were,” Towery said.

“In the early years, I traveled all around the state. It was very exciting to visit all these parishes,” he said.

The largest clusters were in Charleston, Beaufort and Savannah. The second largest clusters were in the Upstate, Towery added. Then, Mediatrix targeted Florence and the smaller parishes.

“We focused on these sites, and God’s hand took over,” he said. “It’s

BY JOEY REISTROFFER

Joseph Reistroffer is a long-time writer who teaches religious education classes at St. Paul the Apostle Church in Spartanburg. Email him at jrjoeyr@gmail.com.



years of broadcasting

when he realized he needed “to go back to church, to go to confession, to participate more and to be a real Catholic,” Brennan said.

Towery credits Brennan for the expansion of Catholic radio across the state, plus prayer and the dedication of those praying for their success. One other important component is a chapel built into the station in Greer. Brennan said it’s a critical part of everything they do. The chapel was blessed after it opened and wonderful things began to happen, according to Towery.

“I think that chapel has been key to this whole thing,” he added.

“We encourage listeners to come in,” Brennan said. “I’m willing to come back and open the door so they can spend time in the chapel with God.”

The Expansion

Brennan has a background in corporate marketing and advertising, and said he had been involved in music production and recording. It was perfect for what Towery needed. The first remote broadcast of a Mass occurred on Sept. 14, 2008, from Prince of Peace Church in Taylors. Catholic radio also held live broadcasts of the ordinations of Bishop Robert E.

Guglielmone on March 25, 2009, and Bishop Jacques Fabre-Jeune, CS, on May 13, 2022.

Mediatrix has also helped Catholic schools and other Catholic organizations apply for Low Power FM stations. Seven were eventually licensed: WSEJ at St. Paul the Apostle Church in Spartanburg; WFOC at the Columbus Club in Florence; WROP at the Basilica of St. Peter in Columbia; WXJP at John Paul II in Bluffton/Hilton Head; WGWY at Monsignor Gwynn Knights of Columbus in Simpsonville; WZJO at St. Joseph Church in Columbia; and WMHE was moved to Bishop England High School in Charleston.

Progress continued as Mediatrix applied for and received the license for two translators, which are repeater signals.

“These allow you to broadcast your AM signal as an FM signal,” Towery said.

People can now hear God’s word loud and clear, but the Mediatrix team refuses to rest on its laurels. They are working to keep up with technology and put out even more content.

In October of 2022, the team rolled out the MediaTrix app, which features 12 portals with podcasts and blog posts

that deal with everything Catholic, from history and culture to apologetics and prayer.

“Now you can hear us anywhere, anytime. And there is such a variety,” Towery said.

It can be downloaded for free in the Apple App or Google Play stores, Brennan said. In only four months, it has garnered 15,000 downloads.

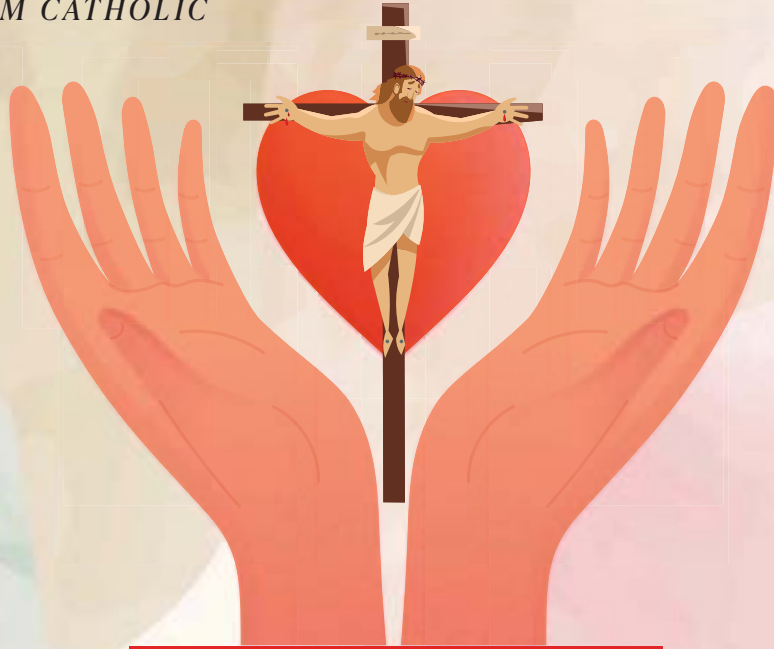
“Those podcasts are interesting. I’m addicted to them,” Towery said. “I don’t read many books anymore because of them. It’s hard to say which is my favorite, but I like Father (Dwight) Longenecker. I also like Father (Jeffrey) Kirby,” Towery said.

God’s word on the airwaves has come a long way in South Carolina. It started with one small station on the coast and now it has a bright, broad future.

“All you have to do is get connected to the internet,” Towery said. “We’ve wanted to do this for a long time. Everything you hear on the radio you can now hear on this app. We’ve arrived.”

Catholic radio has made giant strides across this state in 20 years.

And it happened because “God wanted Catholic radio in South Carolina,” Towery said. †



Who's your best friend?

Several years ago my husband and I were walking out of a local Catholic church on a Saturday afternoon when we were approached by a young man. He smiled widely and asked us, “Who’s your best friend?” We were a little taken aback by this, since we had never met him before.

BY ALISON BLANCHET

Alison Blanchet lives in Panama City with her husband and three children. She works as a therapist for children and teens. Email her at alisondblanchet@gmail.com.

“Uh...” we both stammered. “Hold out your hand,” he continued. We hesitated a minute and then complied. The man dropped a small crucifix in each of our hands and said, “That’s Jesus. He’s my best friend.”

We would soon learn the name of this 19-year-old evangelist, Hunter, and that this had begun with his grandfather. Hunter explained that his grandfather was very devout, and he had memories from when he was a teenager of seeing his grandfather wake up at 4:30 a.m. to read the Bible. His grandfather had an experience in prayer, hearing God ask him to share a crucifix and his friendship with Jesus exactly how Hunter did when he encountered us.

After his grandfather’s first encounter, Hunter explained, he ordered crucifixes by the thousands and would

share his friendship with Jesus with anyone he encountered.

“We’d be following a hostess to our table at a restaurant,” Hunter explained, “and granddaddy would be stopping at every table we passed to ask, ‘Who’s your best friend?’ and share a crucifix and his friendship with Jesus.”

Hunter describes this as impacting his own relationship with God. He said his grandfather didn’t always have the words to explain what he believed, but he was like Abraham — a father whose faithfulness affected the generations that followed.

Sharing faith with our children and grandchildren can feel overwhelming when we look at the temptations, inaccuracies and harmful habits the world holds. I often fall asleep worrying about the many ways

“Not all of us are comfortable sharing ... if we pray for opportunities they tend to present themselves.”

my kids can be led astray, wondering if what they are learning from myself, my husband and their teachers will be enough to keep them close to God as they enter adulthood.

“Who’s your best friend?” Education and faith formation is important, but our encounter with Hunter reminds me that he didn’t approach us with a brochure, book or podcast pitch. Instead, Hunter shared the real friendship that his grandfather had with Christ.

I often think about what I want to share about the Catholic faith with my children. My mind goes to the biggest questions or challenges I think they’ll have in their young adult lives and what answers I can give them. Answers and explanations are important, but above all else, do my loved ones know that Christ is my most important relationship?

Not all of us are comfortable sharing our friendship with Christ in the very transparent and outspoken way Hunter and his grandfather did. But, I believe that if we pray for opportunities they tend to present themselves. Asking how we can pray for someone, sharing why a song or Scripture has helped us in a difficult time or having a meaningful religious image or quote in our home or office that we feel comfortable talking about — all of this can open the door for us to share that our faith goes far beyond explanations. It offers us a real, personal and saving relationship with Christ.

There is so much we can share about our faith. But before we share facts — do our friends and family know that Jesus is our best friend? †



Gesty Images/Charaday Penn

O BEAUTIFUL... IN THE SPLENDOR OF CREATION AND HUMAN LIFE

Among my father’s memorabilia that my mother kept was an autograph book from his high school days. For decades, these books, smaller than a Kindle or Nook reader but larger than an iPhone, offered pages in which friends and classmates could write messages. They were often standard “Remember me forever” sentiments, or references to youthful pranks or good times – much like the autographs in high school yearbooks.

BY SISTER PAM SMITH

Sister Pamela Smith, SSCM, Ph.D., is the diocesan director of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. Email her at psmith@charlestondiocese.org.

But they also typically had at least a page on which the owner of the book could put personal data. My dad’s included a place for him to name his favorite song. Unlike my mother, who loved music and had an elegant soprano voice, Dad was pretty much monotone with nondescript musical tastes. I imagine he felt pressed for something to name when he designated “America the Beautiful” his favorite song.

Yet his life gave testimony to that choice. He and my mother both served in the U.S. Coast Guard during World War II. They believed in American principles and the American dream. Upon return and marriage, my dad was dedicated to exploring whatever region in which we found ourselves. When we lived in Queens, New York, we had to take a ride up the Hudson to Bear Mountain to see something other than cement, tall buildings, row houses and subway platforms. When we moved to north central

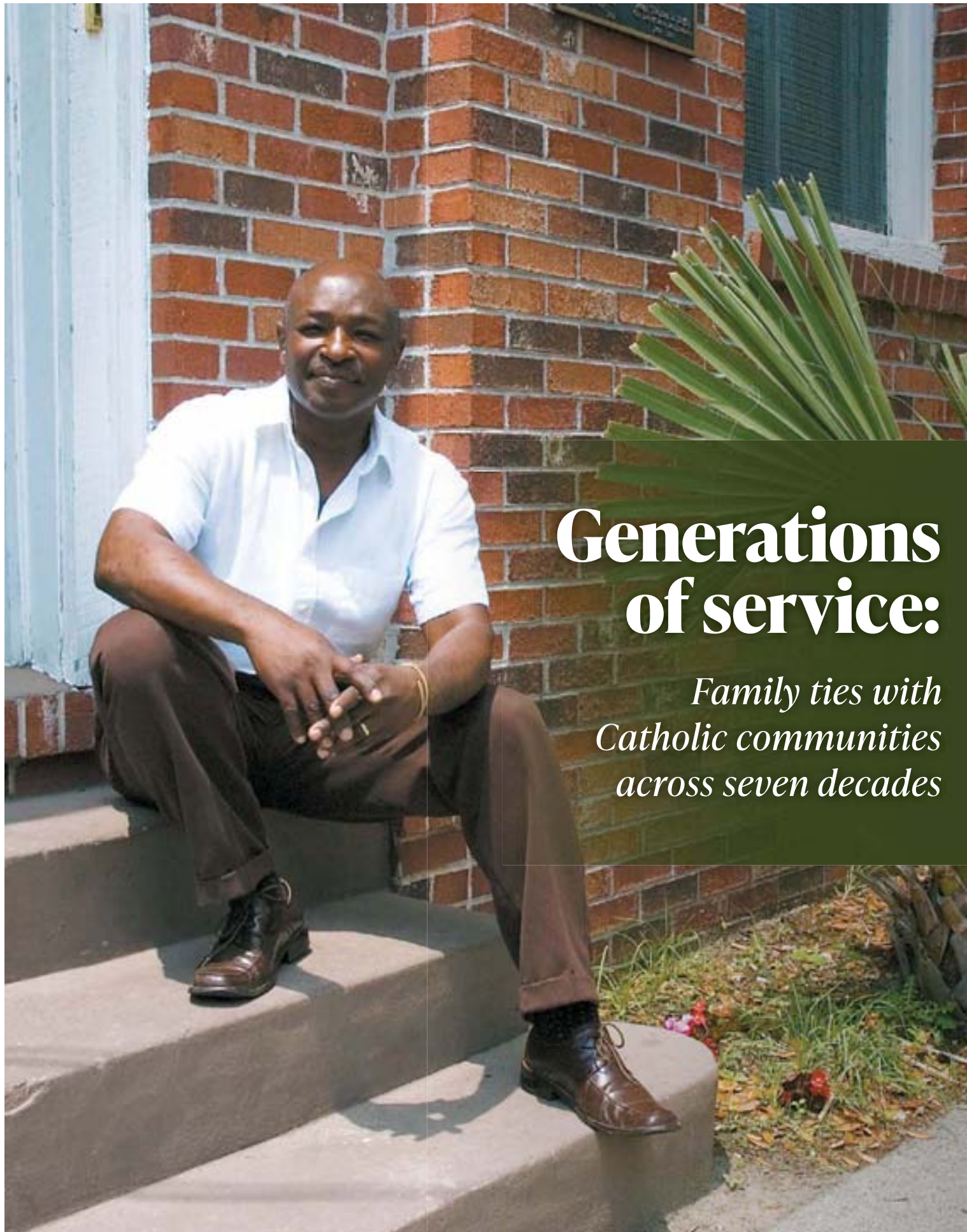
Pennsylvania, we explored every rural road within a 50-mile radius. He loved taking me to Girl Scout camp and my brothers to Boy Scout camp and noted all the scenery. When we went to visit my aunt who lived year-round at the Jersey Shore, he headed gladly for the dunes and the water, though I never saw evidence that he, a city boy, could swim. In short, he loved America and he loved its manifold beauty.

America’s natural beauty is still striking, and we can name many of its wonders, from Alaskan glaciers and the Grand Canyon to the Hawaiian Islands, the Great Lakes and the Green Mountains of Vermont, to name a few. Many of our neighborhoods are beautiful, and those which aren’t – slums, for example, or rows of rickety trailers – periodically make some attempts to create oases of beauty for the residents. Sometimes it’s a wildflower planting project in a vacant lot; other times it’s a community vegetable and herb garden. There’s a theology of beauty that insists natural and humanly created beauty inspire us, soothe the soul and speak of God. Theologian John Navone has noted that Jesus Christ is what he calls “the transforming glory of God,” and he urges that this transforming glory can also be found in the beauty of the created world and in human life on earth.

All that having been said, we can wonder about the status of the deeper beauty of America. We have much about which to examine our consciences, and if we are honest, we will confront some ugliness there. The casual attitude toward abortion is our fatal flaw. Our acceptance of capital punishment, dismissive attitudes toward refugees, persistent racism, cavalier attitudes of the underserved and our environmental apathy are grave wrongs. Though news from around the world and our neighborhoods is accessible second by second, we are content to tune out and return to our own interests, comforts and financial concerns. We admire our beautiful churches, liturgies, properties, nature preserves and parks, but I wonder whether we often enough dig deeply into our beautiful call to be lovers of God and neighbor.

There is a liturgical prayer that shows up on the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time. In quoting it here, I hope that it will inspire us to heed beauty, value it mightily and let that beauty who is God transform us: “God our Father, open our eyes to see your hand at work in the splendor of creation, in the beauty of human life. Touched by your hand, our world is holy. Help us cherish the gifts that surround us, to share your blessings with our brothers and sisters, and to experience the joy of life in your presence.”

Having prayed that for years, I hope we open our eyes and our arms. As we celebrate one more Independence Day, may we — like my Dad and Mom and uncountable others who have sung beautifully, with patriotism and piety — sing of America, “God shed his grace on thee/And crown thy good with brotherhood/From sea to shining sea.” †



Generations of service:

*Family ties with
Catholic communities
across seven decades*

There's no denying the connection multi-generations from the same family share, but it's particularly unique when the connection comes in the form of careers with the Catholic Church.

BY THERESA STRATFORD
PHOTO BY AMY TAYLOR.
HISTORIC PHOTOS PROVIDED.

There's a particular Lowcountry family, all of whom hail from a melting pot of different religious backgrounds — and none of them Catholic — but their work within the Church serving people in need is something beautiful.



Neighborhood House

The story begins with Esau Jenkins and his efforts in the Civil Rights movement. He and other community leaders strategized from Neighborhood House in downtown Charleston in the 1950s and 1960s. Neighborhood House was founded by Sister Mary Anthony Monahan of the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy (OLM).

Jenkins worked to secure voting rights for Black people, to end segregation and ultimately he was instrumental in ensuring that Black people were able to attend school, vote and have access to banking service.

He died in 1972.



Hope House

This was right around the time that his granddaughter, Jacqueline Jefferson, began working in administration and marketing at St. Francis Hospital

with the same religious women.

She went on to work with the OLMs at the Christian Hope House on Johns Island. Her grandfather had toured the Sea Islands in the decades before with the religious order to show the great need for assistance. Esau Jenkins knew something like Neighborhood House was vital, and needs only increased after the devastation of Hurricane Hugo in 1989. That same year, Christian Hope House opened.

Jefferson was employed at Hope House, which later became Our Lady of Mercy Community Outreach, until her retirement in 2022 — a 45 year commitment. During that time, yet another family tie became clear.

Sea Island grants

As late as the 1990s, many homes in the Johns Island area were still using outhouses for bathrooms. Jacqueline Jefferson's mother, Ethel Grimball, worked from 1991-2001 with the OLMs identifying grants and programs. Grimball was perfect for the job since she had worked for Charleston County writing grants. She helped many Sea Island homeowners with getting indoor plumbing and also worked with the community on adult literacy.



Restorative Justice program

Finally, Nikki Grimball — Ethel Grimball's son, Jacqueline Jefferson's brother, Esau Jenkins' grandson — found himself following in

the family footsteps in 2011.

Prior to his career with the OLMs, Grimball worked in Columbia for 30 years with the South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs. He and his wife wanted to move back to the Wadmalaw Island area so Grimball began applying to various nonprofits. He applied to Our Lady of Mercy and, just like that, he was in the "family business."

When he took a position at Neighborhood House, unbeknownst to him, Grimball was in the same office where his grandfather Esau Jenkins used to organize and strategize for Civil Rights.

Grimball worked as the director of Neighborhood House for six years.

"I was walking in the footsteps of my grandfather," he said. "I had no idea he was in that office when I took the position. The connections that my family has had through this work is incredible, and I don't think we realized how significant it really is."

Grimball officially retired from Neighborhood House seven years ago, and he is back in Columbia now working with Catholic Charities of South Carolina (CCSC) as the program specialist for Restorative Justice (see story page 14). The program assists formerly incarcerated people with reintegrating into society after they serve their time.

Other denominations and serving

Although no one in the family was Catholic — Esau Jenkins was United Methodist, Ethel Grimball served in the Presbyterian Church, Jacqueline Jefferson attended an African Methodist Episcopal church for most of her adult life and Nikki Grimball is non-denominational — it was their faith and Catholic engagement that brought them together to assist people in need.

The family members worked closely with Catholic religious sisters and became sought-after experts in various programs that CCSC provides for local communities.

"There is a reason we were all brought together like this throughout the years," Grimball said. "It's so much more than a coincidence." †



REDUCING *Recidivism* ONE LIFE AT A TIME

The best case scenario for people in prison is that after their time is served, they are reformed and reintegrate into society.

BY THERESA STRATFORD

Sacred Scripture tells us that care for the “least,” or most in-need, of our brothers is care for Christ Jesus. “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me” (Mt 25:35-36).

To put it simply, people need people, and coming out of prison should not be done alone. That’s where the Catholic Charities of South Carolina (CCSC) Restorative Justice Program steps in.

Per the organization’s website, charitiessc.org, “Every day... [the] Restorative Justice Team shares their gifts by giving back to a community that remains a stigmatized and untouchable population,” that is, people who are or have been incarcerated.

The Renew Team under the CCSC Restorative Justice Program began in 2016 with Nikki Grimball serving as the program specialist.

The program assists incarcerated

individuals — those who have finished or are about to finish prison sentences — in obtaining necessary paperwork to secure employment and housing, like IDs, birth certificates and Social Security cards.

According to Lydia Doyle, executive director of CCSC, when the program started, the goal was to get people jobs coming out of prison, but Grimball quickly realized the barriers to reentry were more fundamental than that: 80% of people identified as potential clients lacked any form of legal ID. It meant that they could not get a hotel room, let alone a job, apartment or anything else. The system to get those IDs was circular — you need a birth certificate to get a driver’s license or Social Security card. But you needed a driver’s license or Social Security card to get a birth certificate. Without any of those things, people were stuck and didn’t have the tools or knowledge to be able to navigate that system.

“Sometimes just having those

documents in hand is the foundation needed in order to live independently in society,” Grimball explained.

Restorative Justice is a connection of support for these individuals to get reacquainted with society.

“I’ve seen it happen, if a person can’t get the necessary paperwork to get a job or a home, everything will just fall apart. They’ll end up back in the same mess that got them arrested in the first place, and then they’ll end up back in prison,” he said.

Luckily, the S.C. Department of Corrections works with select inmates on résumé writing and even job training. Having that foundation is critical, but other resources are needed once people get out, especially if they can’t go back to where they are from.

Grimball explained that it “takes a village” at times. Some people will need more resources than others to get reestablished.

“We work with a number of agencies to help these individuals get on track to where they need to be,” he said. “It is truly a case by case basis, and no two situations are ever the same.”

He said they work with the S.C.



FOR MORE INFORMATION, visit charitiessc.org/restorative-justice.

Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) for birth certificates and the state's Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) for IDs. Once people have the documents they need, Grimball said Restorative Justice works to empower the men and women to advocate for themselves.

"We want them to have the tools so that they can go out there and do everything for themselves," Grimball said. "They can get lost and discouraged without the right tools, and they'll do whatever they have to do to survive, which normally gets them incarcerated again."

The Restorative Justice program also has housing sponsorships and addiction specialists. Since its inception, the team has seen over 3,000 individuals, and the vast majority are men.

Grimball said the program is audited annually to see which clients, if any, are back in the custody of the Department of Corrections. He said they work with anywhere between 25-50 formerly imprisoned individuals each month, and the work spans all 21 incarceration facilities in the state.

Recidivism is the tendency of a formerly-convicted person to commit another crime. The national rate is approximately 44%. Just before the program got off the ground, the state's rate was 33%, but now recidivism in South Carolina is just under 22% — and Restorative Justice clients are only 8-9%.

"Gov. Henry McMaster actually recognized the low rate in 2021 and said it was one of the lowest rates in the nation," Grimball said. "He acknowledged that Catholic Charities is one of key partners in making this shift a possibility."

"It's really easy when we look at the program to see the number of people served, which is truly remarkable and a huge achievement," Doyle said.

"What's harder to quantify is the fact that Nikki has not just saved thousands of lives directly through the program, he has fundamentally changed the way that our state operates. His work allows an uncounted number of people beyond our program to move forward with their lives."

With help from the Restorative Justice program, the Department of Corrections now works independently with DHEC and the DMV to secure birth certificates and IDs for people while they are in prison so they can have access to those documents once they are released. Grimball credits having those personal documents for the success of the program and reduced recidivism.

"We are merely a resource," he explained. "We realize we can't contain everything within our four walls."

He said that many homeless people were formerly incarcerated.

"It really goes hand in hand, and so many people say that you can't find employment with a record," he added.

But Grimball said they have a solution for that too since Restorative Justice also works with the offices of the Public Defender and District Attorney to assist some former inmates with prior offenses.

"The public defenders will come out and look at their pending charges and help to get those off their dockets," he said.

They even have a volunteer who will work with program participants to identify any financial support that the men or women may be eligible for, such as back taxes, COVID-19 pandemic stimulus awards, or reconnections to Medicaid or Medicare.

"These are people who would face homelessness and now have the capabilities to have some money and move forward," he said. "We are just helping them build the structures they need to move forward."

"Nikki talks a lot about the importance of doers, which is true," Doyle added. He "is so much more than that though. He has this amazing ability to be not only a doer, but also some-

one who can identify problems and inspire other people to work with him to solve them. He has this remarkable way of being a force without ever being combative."

Grimball concluded with a success story.

"This guy was 67 or 68 years old," he said. "He was incarcerated originally in his 20s and since then, he had been incarcerated seven different times. He hadn't been independent of the prison system for more than eight months in all that time.

"We worked with him in 2016. We suggested that he not go home since it seemed like in the past every time he went home, it ended up with him back in jail.

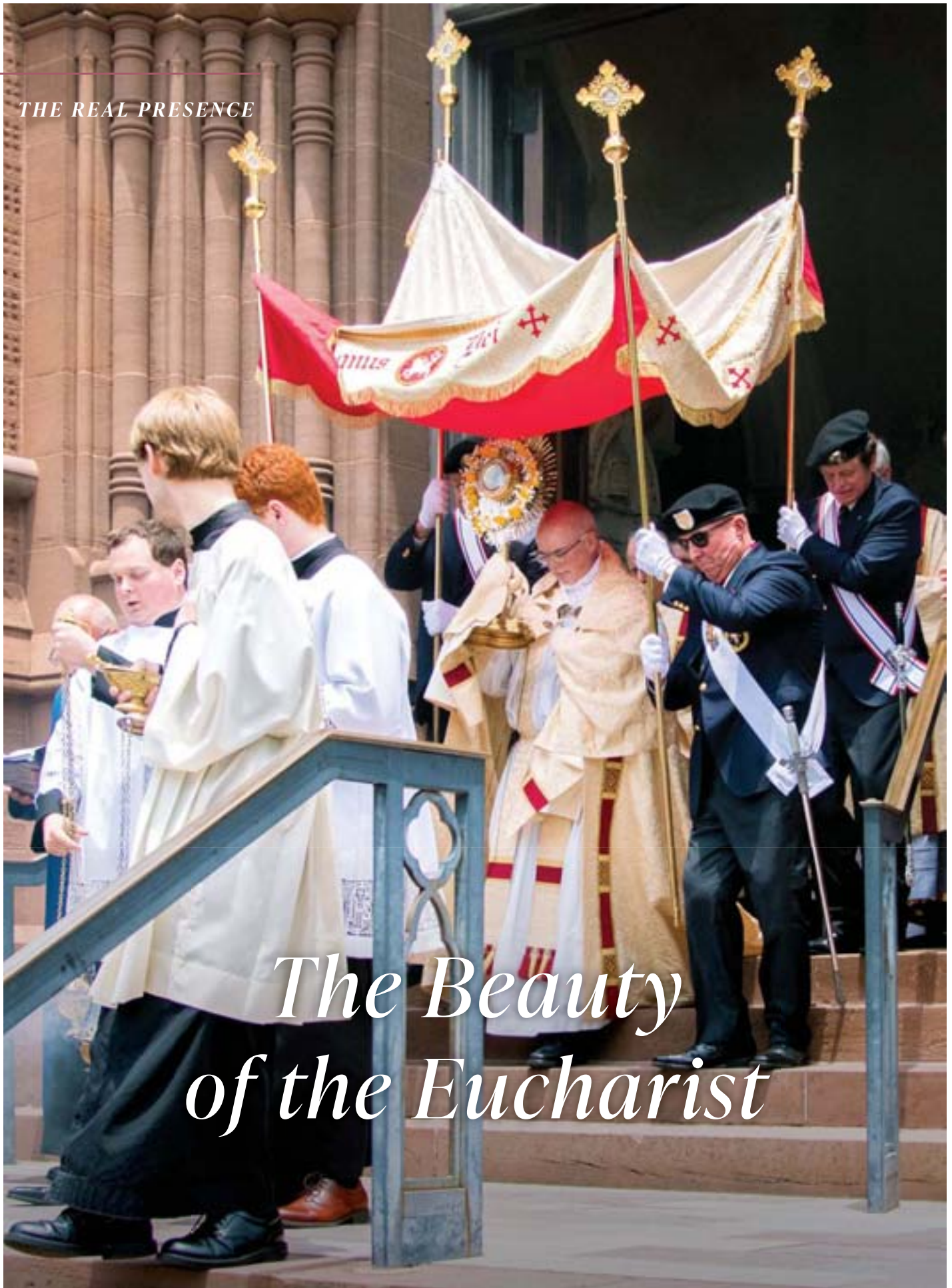
"He thought about it and decided that he didn't want to go home to Greenville. We got him in a program for addiction-related issues, he got a job with the City of Charleston where he got benefits and steady pay. He got an apartment and a vehicle.

"We haven't heard from him since 2020, but actually, that is the way we prefer it. We are 'what was' to him. The best case scenario is that they move on with their lives without us. But I like to tell his story because it really motivates people," Grimball added.

"His goal is always to bring partners to the table," Doyle said of Grimball, "to bring people together so that we can collaborate to find the best solutions for those in need of support. For every person he works with, his goal is to fundamentally transform their lives such that they have the tools and knowledge they need to care for themselves. We — the diocese, Catholic Charities, our clients and the state — are better because of him, his gifts and his work." †



WE GOT HIM IN A PROGRAM FOR ADDICTION-RELATED ISSUES, HE GOT A JOB WITH THE CITY OF CHARLESTON WHERE HE GOT BENEFITS AND STEADY PAY."



*The Beauty
of the Eucharist*

As we have mentioned on several occasions, during this process of Eucharistic Revival in the United States, we are each being asked not only to reinvigorate our personal eucharistic faith, but also to share that faith with others. One of the difficult challenges in this task is moving our society from apathy to faith. Apathy is different from unbelief – it is not primarily an intellectual issue. Put another way, conversion is about a movement of heart rather than a movement of the mind (not to say the two are disconnected). So, how do we approach this task of evangelization?

**BY DR. MIKE
MARTOCCHIO**

Michael Martocchio, Ph.D., is the secretary of evangelization and the director of the Office of Catechesis and Christian Initiation. Email him at mmartocchio@charlestondiocese.org.

**PHOTO BY
DOUG DEAS**

Since the issue is not only an intellectual one but also an affective one, our responses should be intellectual and affective. In ministry circles we often talk about the need for an “encounter with Christ.” There are many things we mean by this; after all, there are many ways our Lord makes himself present to us. But when we talk about nourishing eucharistic faith, we need to consider sharing that faith through good intellectual explanations and a profound sense of the sacred. We find this sense in the beauty of the Mass and in the beauty of various eucharistic devotions outside of Mass. In this beauty, we get a taste of the transcendent, the “always more” of God.

In what is arguably the defining document of his pontificate so far, the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (the Joy of the Gospel), Pope Francis spends some time discussing the *via pulchritudinis*, or the way of beauty. It touches the heart and opens it to receive God’s truth

and goodness (EG 167). Our eucharistic zeal, then, begins with us allowing the beauty of the Eucharist to move our hearts — but the beautiful is not a consideration of taste nor attention to what’s fashionable and trendy. Rather, true beauty is universal and timeless.

Anyone who has visited an art museum has a sense of this. There is a reason that masterpieces have been preserved over time. They capture something, often that “something” is difficult to articulate in words. The reason we are a sacramental people is that we realize that the Word, God’s Word, who is God, was made flesh precisely because that Word has more to say than any of our words can ever express.

Christianity is not a set of good ideas. There is “always more” than words and ideas; there’s always a “beyond.” Christ, and by extension Christianity, is the concrete expression of the transcendent God who is always beyond anything else we know and can describe, yet who is always most intimately near to us. The beauty of the Eucharist is found in the aesthetics of the liturgy, in the silence of adoration, in the simplicity yet profundity of the gift, in the depth of the sacrifice, in the invitation of the meal and in the yearning of those who receive.

It is for this reason that we are moved by the witness of others: love for Christ is beautiful. The beauty of the witness of others gets us beyond concepts and into relationship.

Conversion is not simply the determination that the Church has the right ideas, but rather the experience of having our hearts captured by the mysterious love of our lives, God himself. When we hear of this mysterious one capturing the hearts of others, our own hearts are opened also. That’s why our duty as Christians is to share our faith and to share eucharistic faith specifically. We need to share the idea of the faith and the Real Presence, but also, the experience of the intimate relationship that we have when we encounter Christ in the Eucharist. That can open the hearts of others. It is the invitation to experience that beauty for oneself — maybe beginning in simple, incremental ways, like a short time in adoration — that is really an invitation into divine intimacy. The beauty of this intimacy is life-changing and transformative.

As an appendix to our reflection, I would like to highlight some concrete opportunities to practice this witness. In a few short months, the Diocese of Charleston will gather together to share the witness of our love for Christ in the Eucharist at our first Diocesan Eucharistic Congress April 6, 2024, at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center.

We are also sponsoring a “witness” video contest where people can briefly share (30 seconds or less) how the Eucharist has been a gift in their lives. It will be shared on diocesan social media, our website and in other ways. Check out charlestondiocese.org/eucharistic-revival for more information on both of these opportunities.

Assembling to worship Christ in the Eucharist and deepen our own knowledge and faith is a form of witness to our eucharistic faith that we can practice together as a Church. The beauty of the Church assembled around the Eucharist can move hearts, beginning with our own. The authentic intimacy of individual witness brings with it the same beauty. †

“

In this beauty, we get a taste of the transcendent, the ‘always more’ of God.”

Historic St. John Cemetery renewed and restored

Neglect can kill a cemetery, and that is what happened to St. John on Coming Street in the heart of downtown Charleston.



BY JOEY REISTROFFER

The Diocese of Charleston purchased a plot of land in 1843 and consecrated the ground so African American Catholics, free and enslaved, could bury their brothers and sisters. Since then, more than 1,000 souls have been laid to rest in St. John.

Desegregation, however, was not kind to the cemetery or the property around it.

In 1967, two historically Black churches — Immaculate Conception and St. Peter — were closed near the cemetery, and parishioners were merged into St. Patrick Church. Burial records from 1843-1882 were lost during the transfer.

Then Immaculate Conception Catholic School near the cemetery was shut down, and a blaze damaged buildings on the land. The structures were razed. And, it got worse.

The S.C. Department of Transportation used eminent domain to take a portion of the land to build the Crosstown Highway, according to records.

“For more than 20 years, the property remained vacant and unmarked. Gravestones were lost, destroyed or removed. Its history forgotten or overlooked, the diocese sought to sell the property in the 1990s,” according to a report by the Catholic Carolina Professionals (CCP).

“The neighborhood was a rough neighborhood,” said Frank Dirks, member of the CCP. “The cemetery was forgotten. The field was turned into a de facto parking lot,” he said.

He said it took action by concerned African Americans, and Calvary Episcopal Church that overlooks the cemetery, to alter the fate of the historic cemetery. In 1994, the

Episcopal church prompted a study by the Chicora Foundation, which showed that the land was indeed a consecrated Catholic cemetery with about 1,000 people buried there. With the results of that study, the diocese decided not to sell the property and had a fence built around it.

Dirks, who said he lived not far from the cemetery, first learned about this forgotten field in 2019. He and the CCP knew they had to get involved.

“The Holy Spirit inspired us,” he said. “It is our obligation; it is our duty to remember the faithful departed.”

They got in touch with Karmin Meade, director of cemeteries for the diocese. She and her team were ensconced in a five-year plan to revitalize the eight diocesan cemeteries in their care. St. John was tended to weekly as years of neglect were peeled back and the beauty of the sacred space was restored one layer at a time.

“Covid delayed us but never diminished our commitment to this effort,” Meade said. “Frank Dirks and I were able to sit down with Bishop Robert E. Guglielmo, who has been a constant supporter of our cemetery revitalization efforts, to discuss future plans for St. John Cemetery specifically. The bishop and I shared our plans for St. John with Frank, who offered the assistance of Carolina Catholic Professionals in helping us realize our goals.”

The initial concept for a crucifix memorial was born in that meeting and additional funding was committed by the bishop for its design, fabrication and installation.

In March 2020, the CCP began raising funds, Dirks said. Those efforts brought between \$75,000-\$80,000 despite the pandemic.

“We have more than \$200,000 between the diocese and Catholic Carolina Professionals dedicated to the cemetery,” Dirks said.

When the group encouraged Dominion Energy to remove its power poles from the grounds, the utility company did so willingly and then provided a grant of \$15,000 toward renovation efforts. Dirks added that the good will and grace of the Holy Spirit truly is at work at St. John. Graces continued to flow when Meade put Southland Landscape Management in charge of reviving the grounds.

“Our team had made significant progress in restoring St. John and all of our cemeteries, but the historic cemetery really began to shine when Southland took on the heavy lifting,” Meade remarked.

Landscape plans were developed, shrubs and trees were pruned or removed and new irrigation, lighting, trees and shrubs were installed.

“David Schwartz with Southland has been an amazing partner,” she added. “He listened to our needs and embraced our vision. The result of our collaboration at St. John is a serene, park-like space that properly honors those who lie at rest there.”

A 19-foot obelisk of Jesus on the cross was installed at its center on Feb. 2 this year.

“Bishop Guglielmone chose the prayer that is inscribed on it,” Meade said.

The front inscription is from John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.” The inscription on the back comes from Micah 6:8, part of which is emblazoned on Bishop Guglielmone’s coat of arms: “You have been told, O mortal, what is good, and what the LORD requires of you: Only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God.”

Not only is St. John Cemetery no longer forgotten, “it is now a beacon of hope to all who drive by on the Crosstown. You cannot pass through downtown Charleston without being touched by Jesus,” Meade said. “It is my hope that by honoring our dead we are also giving hope to the living.”

As a finishing touch, “the diocese installed four benches. Each one is dedicated to a Black Catholic parish, past and present, in our community,” Dirks said. “It is truly a memorial park, a place of reflection.”

It is also an opportunity for evangelization, he added, one that he believes motorists on the heavily traveled Crosstown Highway will see. As people drive past this hallowed ground restored, the crucifix clearly stands above the trees and is easily visible from the road. Those drivers will now see a well-groomed cemetery, Meade said.

The opening ceremony and blessing by Bishop Jacques Fabre-Jeune, CS, was held June 19 in conjunction with the diocesan Juneteenth 2023 celebration. The national theme this year was *Perfecting Unity*, to bring all Americans together to celebrate the common bond of freedom through recognition, observance and historical preservation. The



renovation of these hallowed grounds exemplifies the meaning of the occasion.

And now, because of the dedication, passion and collaboration of local Catholics, the families and relatives of those buried at St. John Cemetery need never again worry about neglect of the faithful departed. †

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REASONING OUR FAITH:

Encyclicals for Dummies

America was, in part, built on freedom of religion. While freedom of religion is generally considered to be between religions – that is, one is entitled to practice any religion they choose – there is also the issue of freedom within religion, as expressed by St. John Paul II in his 1998 encyclical letter on faith and reason entitled *Fides et Ratio*.

BY DR. TOM
DORSEL

Thomas Dorsel, Ph.D., is professor emeritus of psychology and a graduate of the University of Notre Dame. He lives on Hilton Head Island with his wife Sue and is a parishioner at St. Francis by the Sea Church. Visit him at dorsel.com.

Letter? Well, that is putting it mildly: 80 pages worth. And while I am no more likely than you to curl up with my favorite encyclical, I did read the whole letter, two pages at a time for 40 days, because it addressed my scientific and philosophical nature in trying to understand my faith.

I would now like to save you from the tedium of reading an entire encyclical by summarizing the key points of *Fides et Ratio*, as I understand them.

In other words, let me offer myself up as Exhibit A in a potential new series entitled *Encyclicals for Dummies*. Here are some key takeaways.

All cultures have a piece of truth

We are inquisitive creatures when it comes to trying to understand ourselves and our existence. All cultures, East and West, have made valuable contributions to this process, and all have a piece of the truth.

Our job is to find a common core of philosophical insight, certain universal principles that serve as a point of agreement for all philosophical schools of thought.

Interestingly, man uses his capacity to reason to try to understand beyond reason, where faith must take over because reason can go no further.

Knowledge must allow for faith

The eternal God entered time through Jesus Christ, who brought divine revelation with him. The sequence of understanding what we can't humanly know is as follows: God reveals, reason takes us as far as it humanly can in understanding what God reveals and then faith takes over.

It is wise to seek knowledge, but it must allow for faith — the faith that “only God knows all things.” Reasoning and the pursuit of knowledge can't understand everything.

It is impossible to verify every truth

Man should seek truth through philosophy and science. He should also be open to truths that transcend philosophy and science. The actual truth, when found, is universal for all people.

Seeking truth defines human beings. Furthermore, humanity would not begin the search if we knew it was futile. Like scientists, we all expect to find an answer.

Consider that we cannot verify for ourselves every truth (fact) regarding events and things around the world. Not many have personally seen Mount Everest, yet we believe it exists because

others have told us so. Generally, we try to verify as much as we can personally, but in large part, we have to believe and trust in others.

The things Jesus told us may never be fully understood in our human condition, but that does not mean we shouldn't believe them any more than we shouldn't believe Mount Everest exists because we haven't seen it.

Seeks understanding, suspend judgment

The desire to understand the transcendent spurs reason to go further and further. When reason faces the incomprehensible, it should be satisfied if it simply makes further progress. Reason does not have to accomplish resolution of the incomprehensible — which would be impossible, or it wouldn't be incomprehensible. It merely has to seek further understanding, all the while suspending judgment as to what the final answers might be.

Truth is a generational task

St. Thomas Aquinas said that faith and reason are gifts from God. Hence, there can be no contradiction between them. It is simply the extended task over the course of history for each generation to continue to try to understand the relationship between faith and reason. No single generation should expect or demand immediate answers at any one time in history.

Aquinas sought the truth wherever it might be found — theology, philosophy, science. Curiously, it was theology that was open to freedom of exploration by science and philosophy; but science and philosophy, in return, rejected theology rather than working together to understand the incomprehensible. It would seem that the incomprehensible made scientists and some philosophers nervous — that is, they couldn't tolerate uncertainty or suspension of judgment.

Philosophy leads to revealed truth

The Church has no philosophy of her

own. Indeed, philosophy has to be on its own in seeking the truth. However, since the truth has been revealed in Jesus, an accurate philosophy must lead to that truth or that philosophy is in error. The Church's job is to consider all philosophical positions in light of faith in what has been revealed, thereby trying to bring reason on board with faith.

This seems like a tough thing to take — the Church seems to be saying, "Go ahead and think about the transcendent, but you must come to the same conclusion as we, the Church, have." Perhaps an analogy might help — if one knows the answer (the truth) to a riddle, and others (different philosophies) are guessing at the answer, then the bearer of the answer (the truth) is entitled to say certain guesses (philosophies) are

accurate and others are inaccurate.

More concretely, if a tree exists and scientists are theorizing about what goes into the tree's existence, then they can theorize all they want. But, their theories can't come to the conclusion that the tree doesn't exist.

Multifaceted convergence on truth

The Church is in no way against philosophy or science. The truth has been revealed in Jesus — we just want to understand it more fully. And if philosophy and science can help in that regard, the Church welcomes it.

The ultimate goal is to become unified in our vision of the truth, with all sources of knowledge converging on the truth, rather than being segmented and working in isolation. No modern currents of thought have all

the answers. There must be a merger of ideas all leading to the truth.

The search points beyond

Science never purports to prove anything or to find any truth, but only to conduct research that supports movement in the direction of whatever the truth (facts) might be regarding any topic. So, why then is it so difficult for science to accept the notion of a transcendent truth that is beyond science's capability to prove? It seems like the ultimate task for science is to accumulate support for the Theory of God.

Science reminds us, and should remember itself, that the search for truth is never ending. It always points beyond the immediate object of study, always leading to more questions that give access to greater understanding of the ultimate mystery, the truth. †




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St. Thomas More USC



A Catholic school in the Charleston area is looking for an artist with **experience in creating murals** for a project to be completed on a 30 x 9-foot wall. Interested artists can contact the Director of Community Outreach (below):

MURAL PAINTER

Una escuela católica en el área de Charleston está buscando un artista con **experiencia en la elaboración de murales** para un proyecto que se completará en una pared de 30 x 9 pies. Artistas interesados pueden ponerse en contacto el Director de Alcance Comunitario (a continuación):

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Victim Assistance

The Catholic Church is committed to respect for the dignity of each human person. Acts of sexual exploitation or abuse, particularly against children or the vulnerable, will not be tolerated by the Diocese of Charleston.

If you have been abused by a member of the clergy or any other representative of the church, we encourage you to call the Victim Assistance Coordinator, Kristin Eyre, at 800-921-8222 or 843-856-0748.

Additionally, if you are reporting abuse by a sibling bishop, you can make a report online at reportbishopsabuse.org or at 800-270-1562 after contacting law enforcement.

Office of Child and Youth Protection

Asistencia a las víctimas

La Iglesia Católica está comprometida con el respeto a la dignidad de cada persona humana. La Diócesis de Charleston no tolerará los actos de explotación o abuso sexual, en particular contra los niños o las personas vulnerables.

Si usted ha sido abusado por un miembro del clero o cualquier otro representante de la iglesia, le animamos a llamar a la Coordinadora de Asistencia a las Víctimas, Kristin Eyre, al 800-921-8222 o 843-856-0748.

Además, si está denunciando un abuso por parte de un obispo en funciones, puede hacer una denuncia en línea en reportbishopsabuse.org o en el 800-270-1562 después de ponerse en contacto con las fuerzas del orden.

Oficina de Protección de la Infancia y la Juventud

CHARLESTONDIocese.org/CHILD-AND-YOUTH-PROTECTION

*FAITH IN THE
PUBLIC SQUARE*



LED BY FAITH & CALLED TO SERVE: MEET THE CATHOLIC LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Pamela S. Evette is the 93rd lieutenant governor of the Palmetto State. Her journey to politics began in the private sector, where she established a successful career as a businesswoman and entrepreneur.

MISCELLANY STAFF REPORT

Since taking office in 2019, Evette has used her professional background to assist people and small businesses, with focuses on building strong families and early childhood education and reading. She is currently the highest ranking Catholic in state government. Her passion for making a difference in people's lives is fueled by her deep love for God and her faith. As a wife and mother, Evette

said she always remembers to serve her first vocation — her family. Evette and husband David attend Prince of Peace Church in Taylors and have three children, Amanda, Joseph and Jackson.

Here, the lieutenant governor answers a few questions on what it means to maintain her Catholic identity while navigating the life of a public servant.

What does your position in government mean to you as a Catholic?

It has been an honor to hold the position of lieutenant governor as a Catholic. In the south, there are many misconceptions of what we believe as Catholics. I believe some of this is due to leaders who are not in full communion with the Church or who do not respect its teachings. I am always careful to consult the authority of our faith to inform my moral decisions regarding policies I support.

What does your faith mean to you as a leader, wife and mom?

I have always used my faith to guide me in all aspects of my life. It gives me the moral compass to rely upon before making decisions. As a mother and wife, it has always been important for me to make sure I passed my faith on to my children just as my parents did to me. I am also dedicated to putting my family above all else just as Jesus did for the Church. My husband and I have sacrificially chosen to send all our children to Catholic school to ensure the faith and teachings at home were reinforced in their education.

How do you meld your faith with your public office?

I believe it is important to act with integrity and respect in all things. My faith has given me the ability to forgive and not to judge others, but rather to work with people and look past their mistakes.

Where have you found the greatest joy in your public service?

I have found the greatest joy in helping people in need. I enjoy solving problems and making positive differences for our state. This work gives me the motivation to face every day with renewed energy.

What is your greatest challenge?

My greatest challenge is caring too much about things I cannot control. I always remind myself that all things happen in God's time, and patience is a virtue.

What are the most pertinent issues to you in 2023?

Life is the most pertinent issue. 2023 brought us back into the fight for life. When the Heartbeat Law was overturned by the S.C. Supreme Court in January, our state quickly turned into an abortion destination. While neighboring states were adopting stronger life-affirming legislation, the number of women traveling to our state seeking an abortion increased 20-fold. In response, our state legislature passed a stronger and reformed Heartbeat Bill. Our policies should build a culture of life and help all mothers in need.

Second, we are committed to doing all we can to strengthen the family. Strong families are the building blocks of our state. We need better jobs to ease everyday

financial burdens, and we need to make sure we protect parental rights. Parents are the primary educators of their children. They should have a say in what their children are taught and what decisions are made in the classroom.

Finally, we must make sure we are making policies to protect our elders. As citizens age, we must make sure their wisdom is respected and ensure the resources are present to accommodate their physical and social needs.

What is the importance of the sacraments in your daily life?

Holy Communion and the sacrament of confession are very important to me. I find great comfort in my faith and in the sacraments. I believe that Communion brings me closer to God, and confession is a necessary gift that strengthens me to carry the burdens I face in life.

Who is your greatest inspiration as a public servant?

It wasn't until recently that I considered Queen Elizabeth to be my inspiration. She never let public opinion change her beliefs and moral convictions. Right is right and wrong is wrong, no matter the reason or time. Queen Elizabeth let her faith guide her decisions. Today, this kind of integrity and leadership informed by faith is inspiring.

Who is your favorite saint and why?

I can't say that I have a favorite saint as I look to so many of them to give me strength and protection. However, I do find myself praying to St. Anthony every time something goes missing. He always has a way of making things appear.

What would you say to a Catholic pursuing public office?

I would encourage people of good will, with a desire to serve with kindness and grace, to get involved. Our world needs people of integrity to lead. Here in South Carolina, there are so many ways to serve the community. Whether it be on a board or commission, or serving on a local school board, your presence and involvement is crucial. †



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SOMOS LIBRES POR EL
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LA REVISTA DE LA DIÓCESIS CATÓLICA ROMANA DE CHARLESTON



MIS QUERIDOS HERMANOS Y HERMANAS EN CRISTO,

Ya que este mes celebramos el día de la independencia, quería reflexionar acerca del concepto de libertad. ¿Qué significa y qué implica realmente? No podemos hablar de libertad sin abordar primero el libre albedrío y el don de la razón. Nuestro omnisciente Creador nos dotó con la capacidad de elegirlo o de rechazarlo con nuestros pensamientos, palabras y obras. Este acto de humildad refleja el poder, la grandeza y el incesante amor que Dios tiene por cada uno de nosotros. Cuando elegimos vivir nuestro llamado de amar al Señor y a nuestro prójimo como a nosotros mismos, es cuando empezamos a comprender la naturaleza de la verdadera libertad.

Estamos llamados a la libertad que sólo puede alcanzarse por medio del abandono total a la Divina Voluntad. Nuestras cargas se sienten ligeras cuando le ofrecemos nuestras preocupaciones y luchas a Jesús. La libertad que anhelamos en el fondo de nuestro corazón se nos fue alcanzada en los brazos de Cristo en la cruz. Ese momento —eternamente renovado en el sacrificio vivo y verdadero de la Eucaristía, y presente en cada tabernáculo a lo largo y ancho del mundo— es la libertad encarnada.

Tenemos la responsabilidad de defender la libertad que han ganado para nosotros aquellos que nos han precedido; y tenemos el deber de perfeccionarla, con la ayuda de Jesús, para aquellos que nos seguirán. Leemos en la carta a los Gálatas: “Vosotros hermanos fuisteis llamados a ser libres. Pero no uséis vuestra libertad para dar rienda suelta a la naturaleza pecaminosa, sino servíos unos a otros con amor” (5, 13-14).

Así como Jesús vino a redimir al ser humano para la mayor gloria del Padre, nosotros estamos llamados a acompañar a nuestros hermanos y hermanas durante su viaje personal hacia la verdadera libertad. Somos criaturas sociales, creadas para ser

un eco de la Palabra —el mensaje que contiene toda bondad y libertad— en nuestra familia humana. Sólo cuando entregamos todo nuestro ser a la misión de Cristo, el gran libertador, podremos experimentar la verdadera libertad. Entonces, ésta florecerá en nuestras comunidades, en nuestras familias y en el corazón de cada persona que encontremos en nuestra nación.

La libertad no es posible sin amor. Es manifestada a través de una vida virtuosa y siguiendo el ejemplo de Jesús, quien rompió las cadenas del pecado y de la muerte. Hoy les invito a pensar en una manera en la que pueden restaurar la libertad en su hogar y en su vida personal: Comiencen con algo pequeño, tal vez ofreciendo un acto oculto de caridad por otra persona, y observen cómo se transforman su vida y nuestra cultura.

¡Feliz día de la independencia! †

En el amor de Cristo,

Excmo. Mons. Jacques Fabre-Jeune, CS
Obispo de Charleston



NUESTRO MAYOR TESORO ES LA SAGRADA EUCARISTÍA

Nosotros sabemos que el domingo es un día especial cuando pasamos tiempo con la familia, salimos de paseo, visitamos a nuestros amigos y realizamos muchas otras cosas. Todas estas cosas son importantes, pero entre todas estas cosas buenas que hacemos el domingo, hay una que es la primera y la más importante de hacer que es dedicar tiempo a Dios para darle gracias por todo lo que él hace por nosotros. Una manera de dar gracias a Dios es participar de la santa Misa, a la que todos debemos asistir a celebrar la sagrada Eucaristía.

Para comprender mejor el significado de la Eucaristía, tenemos que definir esta palabra que proviene del griego y significa acción de gracias. Con esto, demostramos gratitud por el sacrificio que hizo Jesús al morir en la cruz por cada uno de nosotros. Jesús, en la última cena que celebró con sus discípulos, dijo: Esto es mi cuerpo y esta es mi sangre, hagan esto en memoria mía (Mt 26, 26-30). Su Presencia Real y viva continúa entre nosotros en el sacramento de la sagrada Eucaristía, donde Jesús perpetúa su amor por cada uno de nosotros.

En cada Eucaristía, celebramos el gran milagro de la

muerte y resurrección de Jesús. Cuando se consagra el pan y el vino, ya no es solo pan ni vino, sino se convierte en el cuerpo y la sangre de Jesús. Parece pan, sabe a pan y es pan. Pero sucede algo maravilloso que se llama transustanciación, que significa “por la consagración del pan y del vino se opera la conversión de toda la substancia del pan en la substancia del Cuerpo de Cristo nuestro Señor y de toda la substancia del vino en la substancia de su Sangre”, aunque las apariencias de pan y vino permanecen (Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica, N 1376).

La sagrada Eucaristía es el fundamento y centro de nuestra fe. Es el más grande regalo que Dios nos ha dado a la humanidad, y es el mayor tesoro de la Iglesia Católica. Jesús nos dice en las sagradas escrituras: “Yo soy el pan de vida. El que venga a mí jamás tendrá hambre; el que cree en mí jamás tendrá sed” (Jn 6, 35). Y también: “El que come mi carne y bebe mi sangre permanece en mí y yo en él. ... El que coma este pan vivirá eternamente” (Jn 6, 56-58).

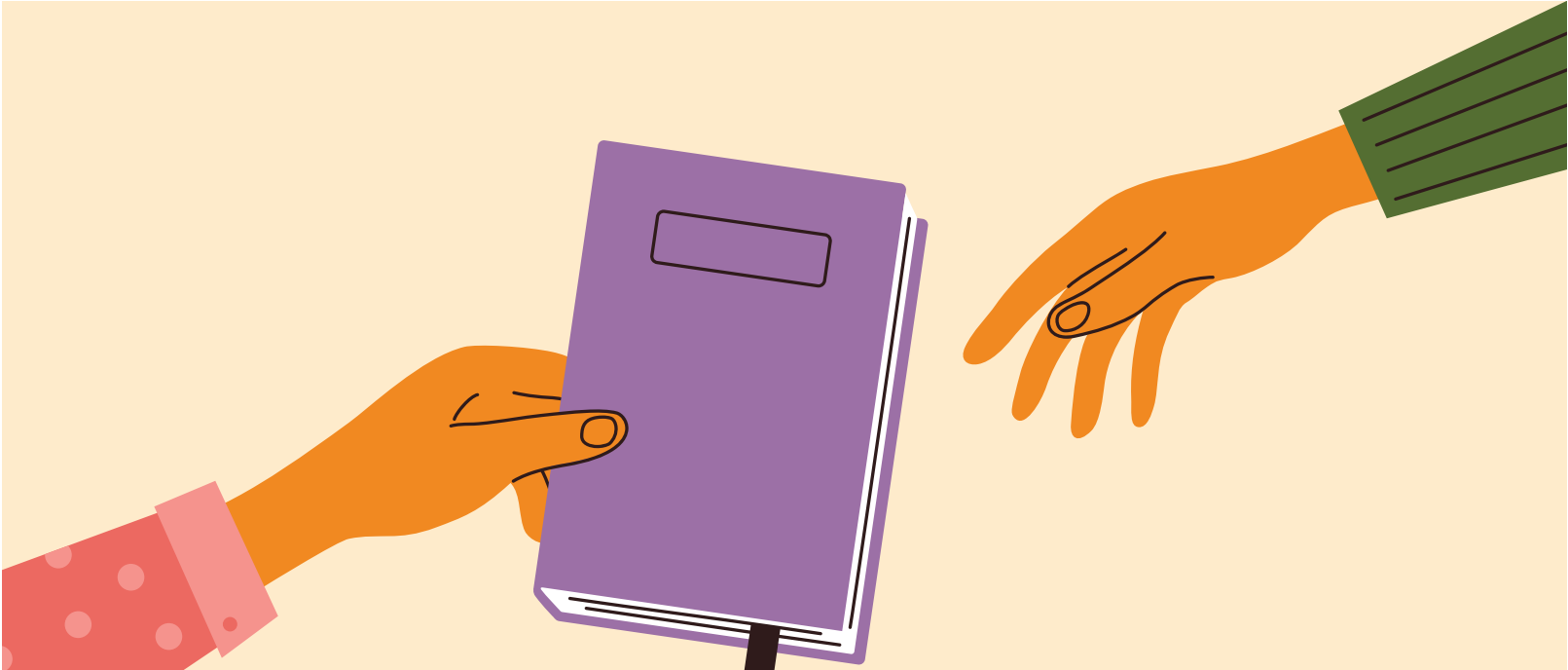
Tratar de entender qué es lo que ocurre en ese momento de la Eucaristía en su totalidad es muy complicado. Por lo tanto, nos ayudará a entender lo que nos dicen algunos santos. Por ejemplo, San Bernardo decía: “En ese momento, los ángeles rodeaban al sacerdote, haciéndole una guardia de honor. Los ángeles llenan la iglesia, rodean el altar y contemplan extasiados la sublimidad y grandeza del Señor”.

Otro de los santos, San Juan Vianney, el Cura de Ars, nos habla de cómo debemos acercarnos a la Eucaristía. En un sermón dijo: “Para acercarte a la comunión, te levantarás con gran modestia, te arrodillarás en presencia de Jesús sacramentado, pondrás todo tu esfuerzo en avivar tu fe. Tu mente y tu corazón deben estar centrados en Jesús. Cuida de no volver la cabeza a uno y otro lado. Si debes esperar algunos instantes, despierta en tu corazón un ferviente amor a Jesucristo. Suplícale que se digne venir a tu pobre corazón. Y después de haber tenido la inmensa dicha de comulgar, te levantarás con modestia, volverás a tu sitio y te pondrás de rodillas. Debes conversar unos momentos con Jesús, al que tienes la dicha de albergar en tu corazón donde durante un cuarto de hora, está en cuerpo y alma como en su vida mortal”.

Cada cristiano tiene que vivir lo que celebra en la Misa, es decir, hacer de la Eucaristía el centro de su vida, llevar una vida digna donde la Eucaristía sea el punto de partida a la misión y hacer que resuene lo que Jesús nos dijo: “Vayan, y hagan que todos los pueblos sean mis discípulos” (Mt 28, 19). †

POR HNA. GUADALUPE FLORES

La hermana Guadalupe Flores, OLVN, es la coordinadora de Formación de Fe de Adultos para la oficina del Ministerio Hispano. Envíele un correo electrónico a gflores@charlestandiocese.org.



La libertad de creer viene del amor de Dios

Negar la libertad religiosa es, además de un crimen, un total despropósito. ¿Cómo, o más bien, quién puede darle fe a alguien, o en su defecto, quitársela?

POR CRISTINA SULLIVAN

Cristina Umaña Sullivan es socióloga cultural que se ha dedicado a la evangelización por más de 10 años con especialidad en Teología del Cuerpo y creación de identidad desde la perspectiva cristiana. Envíele un correo electrónico a fitness.emotional@gmail.com.

Uno de los regalos más preciados que Dios le dio a cada ser humano es la libertad porque no quiso un ejército monocromático donde todos sean idénticos entre sí y en donde “es obligatorio” amarlo y seguirlo. ¡No! Dios quiere que cada persona quiera, anhele y desee amarlo, no que esté obligada a hacerlo. Sin libertad, no hay amor. ¿Cómo se llama el acto de obligar a alguien a amar? Abuso (ya sea emocional, psicológico o físico/sexual). Dios no es un abusador, tanto que se dejó crucificar a sí mismo en lugar de crucificar a los que no estaban de acuerdo con él.

Uno de los trabajos más desafiantes que he tenido fue ser una maestra de formación católica. Cuando acepté el cargo, tuve la ilusión de explicar la fe de una manera amena e interesante y

compartir las respuestas que han sido claves en mi camino de conversión. Pensé que si les transmitía esa valiosa información a mis estudiantes de manera novedosa y entretenida, seguramente no perderían la fe como a mí me pasó cuando era adolescente.

Sin embargo, me encontré con la

cruda realidad de que yo no soy el Espíritu Santo, y por eso no podía derramar el don de la fe de la manera en que ilusamente quería hacerlo. Sin contar con el terrible dilema de calificar esta materia, ¿Cómo se califica el grado de fe de una persona? Al fin y al cabo, no se trata de cuánto creen en Dios

“
**LA VERDADERA
CONVERSIÓN SUCEDE
CUANDO el alma
SE ENCUENTRA
CARA A CARA CON
SU CREADOR”.**



porque incluso el enemigo cree en él.

La conversión a la fe es una experiencia de amor, y no un amor cualquiera: Es el amor eterno, infinito, e inacabable que Dios tiene por mi, por ti, y por todos. La verdadera conversión sucede cuando el alma se encuentra cara a cara con su Creador, y en plena libertad dice: "Quiero recibir tu amor y amarte de vuelta". Ahí es cuando todo cambia, suceden los milagros y el corazón deja de ser de piedra.

La conversión no se trata de evitar el pecado sino de recibir el amor. No se trata de entender los dogmas y las verdades de fe, sino de dejarse moldear por el Espíritu Santo y abrazar la identidad de hija o hijo del Padre. Entonces, el compromiso se convierte en mandamiento: "Amarás a Yahveh, tu Dios, con todo tu corazón, con toda tu alma y con todas tus fuerzas" (Dt 6, 5). Dios quiere ocupar en nosotros el lugar que le corresponde: el primero. No puede dividirse entre otros amores y apegos porque nuestro corazón fue creado para él, y no por el bien de Dios, sino por el nuestro.

Obligar a alguien a renunciar a su fe después haber tenido un encuentro personal e intransferible con el amor de Dios es un despropósito porque ya no hay vuelta atrás. Si el corazón le pertenece a Dios, nadie puede arrebatarlo. Y lo mismo pasa en el sentido contrario: si un corazón no quiere recibir el amor divino, Dios respeta esa decisión porque no es un abusador y respeta la libertad que él mismo ha dado a esa criatura que no quiere ser amado.

Cuando se intenta suprimir la fe a las malas, muchas veces lo que ocurre es el efecto contrario: ¿Qué pasó con los romanos que quisieron evitar a toda costa que los cristianos de los primeros tiempos dieran testimonio de su fe? Comenzaron a martirizarlos, y la sangre de aquellos valientes hombres y mujeres fue la semilla que produjo una conversión tan fecunda que el mismo emperador se convirtió (ver la historia de Constantino el Grande). Esa semilla fue tan duradera que hasta el día de

“

LA CONVERSIÓN NO SE TRATA DE EVITAR EL PECADO SINO DE RECIBIR EL AMOR... SI EL CORAZÓN LE PERTENECE A DIOS, nadie puede arrebatarlo”.

hoy, Roma sigue siendo la sede de la Iglesia Católica de Occidente. Y hoy vemos que la sangre de los mártires en todo el Sudeste Asiático ha hecho de muchos de esos países los lugares donde está surgiendo el mayor número de vocaciones sacerdotales y religiosas.

No se puede forzar la fe, ya sea para creer o para no creer, y no podemos pretender que está en nuestras manos lograr algo así.

Lo que está en nuestras manos es dar testimonio de que el amor de Dios, libremente aceptado, es lo que mueve montañas, corazones, imperios y dictaduras. Y si Dios quiere que nuestro testimonio implique perder la vida por él, descansenos en la confianza de que el fruto de esta dedicación resonará en la eternidad e impactará en el mundo presente de maneras que nunca podríamos imaginar. †



Hearts illustration: Getty Images/CalvinDexter





*La belleza
de la Eucaristía*

Como hemos mencionado en varias ocasiones durante este proceso de Avivamiento Eucarístico en los Estados Unidos, se nos ha pedido no sólo vivificar nuestra fe personal en la Eucaristía, sino que compartamos esa fe con los demás. Uno de los desafíos más difíciles de esta tarea es movilizar a nuestra sociedad desde la apatía hacia la fe. La apatía es distinta a la falta de fe porque no es una cuestión intelectual. Dicho de otra forma: La conversión se trata de un movimiento del corazón en lugar de un movimiento de la mente (esto no significa que ambos estén desconectados). Entonces, ¿cómo podemos abordar esta tarea de la evangelización?

POR DR. MIKE MARTOCCHIO

Michael Martocchio, Ph.D., es el secretario de evangelización y director de la Oficina de Catequesis e Iniciación Cristiana. Envíele un correo electrónico a mmartocchio@charlestondiocese.org.

FOTO POR DOUG DEAS

Ya que esta cuestión no es sólo intelectual sino también afectiva, nuestra respuesta debe ser tanto intelectual como afectiva. En los apostolados y círculos ministeriales hablamos constantemente de la necesidad de “un encuentro con Cristo”. Lo anterior abarca varios aspectos, después de todo, hay muchas maneras en las que Nuestro Señor se hace presente en nuestras vidas. Pero cuando hablamos de enriquecer nuestra fe en la Eucaristía, debemos considerar el hecho de compartir esa fe por medio de buenas explicaciones intelectuales y de un profundo sentido de lo sagrado. Encontramos este significado en la belleza de la Misa y de diversas devociones eucarísticas a la Misa. Allí saboreamos lo trascendente, lo “algo más” que Dios siempre ofrece.

El Papa Francisco, en la exhortación apostólica *Evangelii Gaudium* (La alegría del Evangelio), el documento que podría decirse que ha definido su pontificado hasta el momento, analiza en profundidad la *via pulchritudinis*, o el camino de la belleza, que toca el corazón y lo abre para recibir la verdad y bondad de Dios (EG 167). Allí comprendemos que nuestro celo eucarístico empieza cuando permitimos que la belleza de la Eucaristía conmueve nuestros corazones: la belleza no se trata de una consideración del gusto ni tampoco de lo que está de moda, sino más bien, de esa belleza que es universal y eterna. Cualquiera que haya visitado un museo de arte puede comprender lo anterior. Hay una razón por la que las obras maestras son preservadas a lo largo del tiempo. Éstas logran capturar algo, y a menudo ese “algo” es difícil de articular en palabras. La razón por la que somos un pueblo sacramental es porque nos damos cuenta que la Palabra —la Palabra de Dios que es Dios mismo— se ha hecho carne precisamente porque esa Palabra tiene mucho más que decir que cualquier otra palabra pueda expresar.

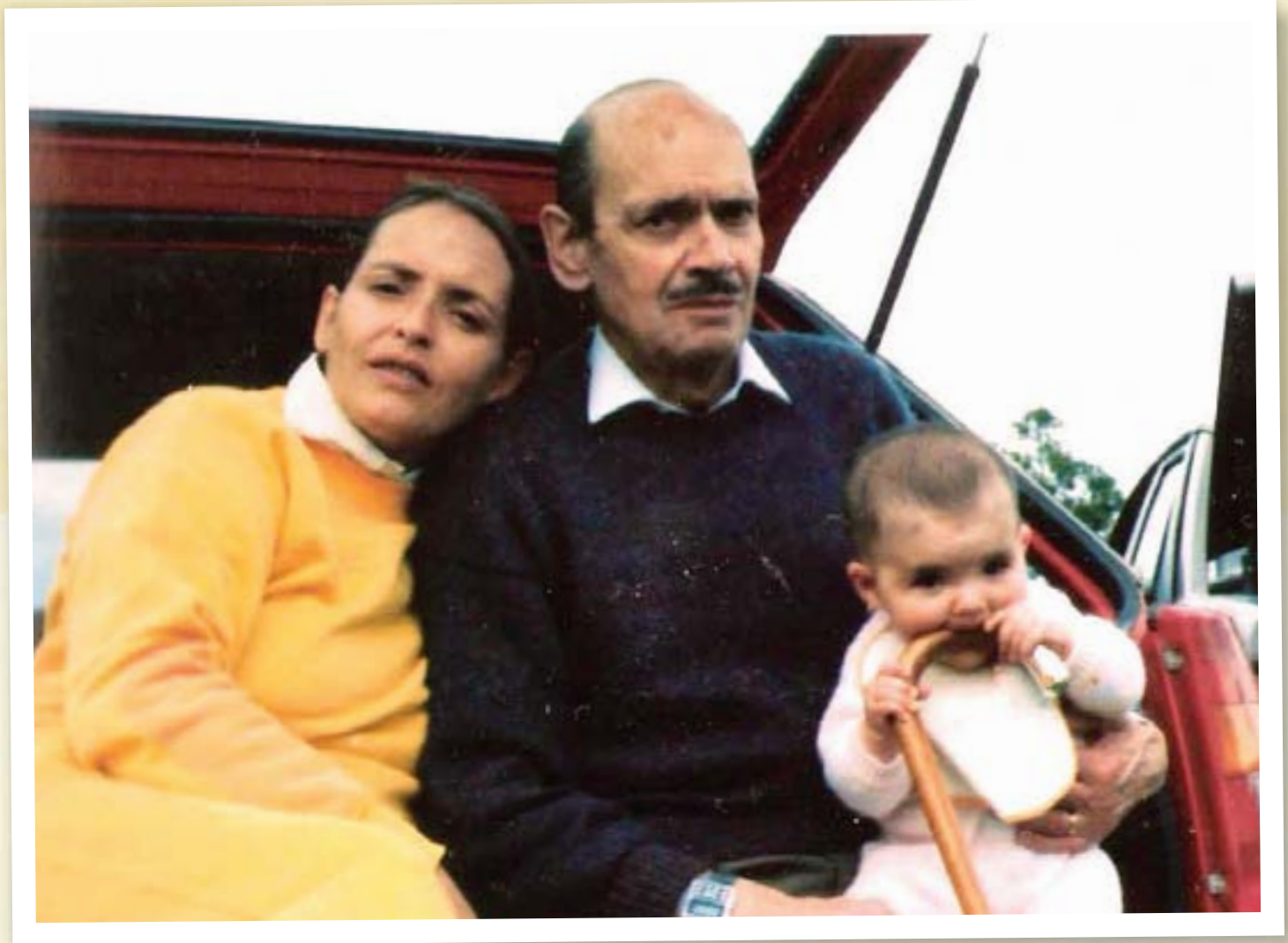
El cristianismo no es un conjunto de buenas ideas.

Siempre hay algo más que meras palabras e ideas: Hay un “más allá”. Cristo, y por extensión el cristianismo, es la expresión concreta del Dios trascendente que siempre está por encima de todo lo que conocemos y podemos describir y que además está íntimamente cerca de nosotros. La belleza de la Eucaristía se encuentra en la estética de la liturgia, en el silencio de la adoración, en la sencillez pero a la vez en la profundidad del don, en lo insondable del sacrificio, en la invitación a partir el Pan y en la añoranza de quienes la reciben.

Gracias a lo anterior, nos podemos conmovir con el testimonio de los demás: El amor de Cristo es hermoso. La belleza del testimonio de los demás nos guía más allá de los conceptos y nos introduce en una relación. La conversión no es simplemente la determinación de que la Iglesia tiene la verdad, más bien, es la experiencia de nuestros corazones siendo capturado por el misterioso y gran amor de nuestras vidas: Dios mismo. Cuando escuchamos acerca de este amor misterioso que captura el corazón de los demás, nuestros corazones también se abren a la experiencia. Por esto, nuestro deber como cristianos es compartir nuestra fe, especialmente nuestra fe en la Eucaristía. Necesitamos compartir la fe en la Presencia Real pero también la experiencia de la relación íntima que tenemos cuando nos encontramos con Cristo en la Eucaristía. Eso puede abrir los corazones de los demás, y es una invitación a vivir esta experiencia en primera persona: Podemos empezar de manera sencilla, pasando un breve momento en adoración. Al final, es una invitación a tener una intimidad divina, sublime. La belleza de esta intimidad tiene el poder de cambiar la vida y transformarla.

Como complemento a esta reflexión, me gustaría destacar algunas oportunidades concretas para practicar esta experiencia. En unos meses, la Diócesis de Charleston se reunirá para compartir nuestro testimonio de amor por Cristo en la Eucaristía en el primer Congreso Eucarístico Diocesano, el 6 de Abril de 2024, en el Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center. También estamos patrocinando un concurso de “testimonios”, donde las personas podrán compartir un breve video (30 segundos o menos) que muestre cómo la Eucaristía ha sido un regalo en sus vidas. Los videos ganadores serán publicados en las redes sociales de nuestra diócesis, en nuestra página web, y otros canales. Visite charlestondiocese.org/eucharistic-revival para obtener más información acerca de estas dos oportunidades.

Reunirnos para adorar a Cristo en la Eucaristía y profundizar en el conocimiento de nuestra fe es una manera de testimoniar nuestra fe eucarística, la cual podemos compartir como Iglesia. La belleza de la Iglesia reunida en torno a la Eucaristía puede conmovir los corazones, empezando por el nuestro. La belleza misma brota de la auténtica intimidad del testimonio individual. †



La autora es retratada de bebé con su tía Teresa y su abuelo Eduardo.

La fe de mi abuelo sembró las *semillas de la fe*

Cuando mi abuelo entraba a una capilla o iglesia y veía que el Santísimo Sacramento estaba presente, se arrodillaba con tal devoción y reverencia que era imposible no sentir la presencia, y en especial la divinidad, de Jesús. Su participación en la Eucaristía era a veces motivo de risa entre mis tíos porque se lo tomaba muy en serio. En algún momento mi tía Teresa, que también es mi madrina, me dijo: “Mi papá no nos enseñó catecismo ni nos dió lecciones de fe. Él nos evangelizó con su ejemplo. Esa fue mi catequesis”. Mis abuelos tuvieron seis hijos y hoy todos tienen una vida de fe activa.

Otra práctica que tenía era rezar el rosario todos los días a las seis de la tarde. Al principio obligaba a sus hijos a acompañarlo, pero la rebeldía de la adolescencia no se hizo esperar, y la primera en negarse fue mi tía Teresa. Poco después, los otros hermanos y hermanas la imitaron. Años después, cuando comenzó la pandemia, surgió la iniciativa de rezar el rosario en familia vía Zoom a las ocho de la noche. Hoy, la tía Teresa, junto con sus hermanos, algunos primos y varios sobrinos, se reúnen diariamente a rezar el rosario. Ya llevamos más de tres años reunidos en oración, y siendo testigos de muchísimas gracias derramadas por esta práctica. Este es fruto de la semilla que Dios plantó en nosotros, gracias al ejemplo de mi abuelo.

Mi abuelo es Eduardo Balen, y murió cuando yo tenía apenas cuatro años. Yo era su nieta adorada, la luz en sus ojos. Su amor por mí fue tan intenso que a pesar de que han pasado casi 30 años, todavía lo recuerdo como si fuera ayer. Cuando vivía la “edad dorada” —cuando se traspasan los límites y se cuestionan la autoridad y las enseñanzas— el recuerdo de mi abuelo me impidió cometer más errores de los que cometí. Cuando lo recordé e imaginé que me miraba desde el cielo, quise que se sintiera feliz y orgulloso de mí, y entonces traté de comportarme un poco mejor.

Eduardo fue malhumorado; le gustaba sentarse a tomar whisky con sus amigos. En pocas palabras y para no ahondar en detalles: tenía debilidades y no era perfecto, o un ángel cayó del cielo. Sin embargo, su fervor y su perseverancia final fueron la mejor herencia que nos dejó a toda la familia. La primera vez que escuché hablar de la “perseverancia final” fue en las misiones: Una de nuestras compañeras rezaba para que no perdiéramos esta gracia. Pero, ¿de qué se trata?

Cuando experimentamos el amor incondicional y eterno de Dios, momento que muchos llaman “la conversión del corazón”, es fácil de creer porque el alma se hincha de fe, esperanza y caridad. Es un momento de gracia acompañado de mucho entusiasmo y fecundidad apostólica. Luego, para purificar la fe de muchas personas (si no de todas), Dios nos concede vivir en lo que se conoce como el “desierto espiritual”. Es un momento en el que se experimenta una “ausencia de Dios” en la oración, en el apostolado, y se siente como si Dios se hubiera olvidado de nosotros. Las almas que no perseveran son aquellas que han puesto su confianza en las “caricias” o bendiciones de Dios en lugar de ponerla en Dios mismo. En cambio, las almas que perseveran a pesar de la sequedad espiritual, las pruebas y la “falta de caricias”, son aquellas que reciben gracias extraordinarias en el momento en que termina la prueba.

Muchos santos han pasado por noches oscuras, como Santa Madre Teresa de Calcuta, quien experimentó sequedad espiritual durante cuatro décadas. Sin embargo, ella perseveró, y esa fidelidad a su llamado y vocación tuvo un eco en la historia que todavía hoy resuena con fuerza. La perseverancia final es lo que nos permite cargar nuestra cruz a pesar de las muchas caídas que Dios nos permite experimentar. Por medio de esa purificación del alma, llegaremos a la resurrección.

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Como seres humanos, es normal que huyamos del sufrimiento, y hace poco escuché esta frase que me ayudó a entenderlo desde otra perspectiva: “La felicidad proviene de aceptar la realidad, no de intentar cambiarla, transformarla o huir de ella”. La perseverancia es aquella gracia que nos permite seguir caminando a pesar de experimentar el destierro por este valle de lágrimas. Nos enseña a abrazar la realidad tal como es y a mantener nuestra mirada y nuestro corazón en las manos de Dios.

La fe de mi abuelo era de perseverancia. Si hoy estás pasando por un desierto espiritual, o sientes que ya no puedes sembrar la fe en tus hijos, tu familia, o tus seres queridos, estar seguro de que tu ejemplo de fe y tu perseverancia diaria en la oración darán frutos. ¡El día que se siembra la semilla no es el mismo día que se recoge la flor, y el momento del desierto espiritual es el momento en que se siembran gracias que jamás podríamos imaginar! †

POR CRISTINA SULLIVAN

