It was a Saturday and I had no appointments for the day, and so I had the chance to experience a leisurely morning of prayer, breakfast, and catching up on my reading before heading off to the office. I walked from my house on Douglas Island to the Chancery (Diocesan offices); since didn’t have any meetings scheduled, I was very casual in my appearance. Hiking boots, blue jeans, t-shirt under my flannel shirt, Steelers ball cap, rain jacket, hood up, and a backpack with all my diocesan papers that I had taken home with me the previous day. So, I was looking like a typical Pittsburgh Steeler fan transplanted into Southeast Alaska.

Approaching our Cathedral, I saw a couple standing outside in the rain taking pictures. As I walked up I engaged them in conversation with the typical lines, “Welcome to the Cathedral, where are you from? What ship are you on? Are you enjoying our Juneau weather? You’re standing in front of the smallest Cathedral in the US...” and the woman said, “We are from the Archdiocese of Chicago, and my husband here is a deacon!” She was very proud of him and I could understand why. Well, I was feeling a little mischievous and I looked at him and I simply said “You’re not a deacon!” And he said, “Yes, I am. I’m a deacon in the Archdiocese of Chicago.” I responded, “Yeah right, and I’m the bishop of the Diocese here.” To which he said, “Seriously, I am a deacon.” And I replied, “And seriously, I am the bishop.” It proved for a great conversation.

While I never doubted his veracity, I had to prove my claim by taking them inside the Cathedral and showing them my official portrait hanging next to Pope Francis. I asked them to pray for me and I assured them of my prayers.

But I knew that had I worn my clerical attire instead of my casual Saturday apparel they would have believed me much sooner. The uniform and what we wear can tell others a lot about who we are and what we do.
This year, the Church will celebrate Catechetical Sunday on September 21, 2014, and will focus on the theme “Teaching About God’s Gift of Forgiveness.” Those whom the community has designated to serve as catechists will be called forth to be commissioned for their ministry. Catechetical Sunday is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the role that each person plays, by virtue of Baptism, in handing on the faith and being a witness to the Gospel. Catechetical Sunday is an opportunity for all to rededicate themselves to this mission as a community of faith.
Men and women in uniform:
Continued from page 1

waiting for a flight at the airport, we’re very pleased to see to see the crew of flight attendants and pilots arrive to the gate. They are easily identifiable in their uniforms. With football season upon us, our eyes are focused on the men in the black and white striped shirts. What are the referees going to call after each play? When we need assistance in a store, we look for anyone who has any semblance of a uniform that identifies the store’s name.

As for the men and women in uniform who serve our community, our state, and our nation – we look to them for assistance, for direction, for help with our own lives. We appreciate their service and we are proud to see them in uniform as they serve as military, law enforcement and first responders. We are grateful for our police officers, firefighters, EMTs, Coast Guard and other members of the armed forces for their service and we keep them in our prayers. There is a tradition in the Church of celebrating Mass for these special people – it’s called a Blue Mass. I had the opportunity to preside at these special people – it’s called a Blue Mass here in Juneau at St. Paul the Apostle Church on Sunday, August 24, 2014.

We pray for them as they help keep order, peace, and life flowing smoothly in our communities. We may not always agree with all the laws of our land, but we have seen pictures on the nightly news of some lawless societies and we should never take for granted the blessings of this country of ours. As the friends, neighbors, brothers and sisters of these men and women in uniform – we are proud of them. We are grateful for what they do for the larger community and for the way in which they have accepted the noble call to serve the common good.

When I think of all those in service to our communities who have lost their lives for the peace, truth and freedom which is this nation’s foundation, I offer prayers of thanksgiving for their dedication, commitment, and their sacrifices (and that of their families, too).

What we wear can tell a lot about ourselves, and what we do. It was my pleasure to lead a grateful community in prayer asking that God continue to bless our men and women in uniform for their work and that our Lord will keep them safe from all danger.

To those of you who serve us in this way – thank you for your service and may God continue to bless you in your good work.

Cathedral parish moves forward on renovation

BY CATHY PRICE

The Cathedral of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Renovation Steering Committee has been meeting for the last two years with the goal of making a decision on what to do about the physical condition of the deteriorating cathedral building. We have reviewed the work and documents of past Building Committees. A sub-group of the steering committee met twice to determine fundamental liturgical and pastoral requirements of a cathedral. This work was vital because our church was originally constructed as a parish church in 1910. In 1951 the church was designated a cathedral, but the physical requirements of being a cathedral were never addressed.

At the last steering committee meeting we reviewed the Request For Proposal (RFP) for Consultation, Architectural and Engineering Services for Renovation of the Cathedral. After final revisions and corrections were completed the decision was made to send it out. All the architectural firms in Juneau, in addition to a few outside of Alaska, received a copy of the RFP. Responses were to be submitted to the diocese by September 8, 2014. A copy of the RFP is on the diocesan web site for public review. www.dioceseofjuneau.org/news/267

A sub-group of the steering committee will review these submissions and decide on a final architectural firm to go forward with this project.

The estimated cost for the project as stated in the RFP, is one to three million dollars. The committee is exploring many options to help finance the renovation. One option that will continue is the Cathedral parish’s Sunday collection for the Building Fund. There will be grant requests developed and sent out, and also fundraising projects organized in the future.

A very important key to the success of this project is prayer. We need your help. The Steering Committee is requesting that you pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us as we make these important decisions.

Donations to the Cathedral Building Fund can be made online at www.juneaucatholic.org/about/donations

THANK YOU

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the wonderful people in the Diocese of Juneau for their support and prayers as we celebrated our ordination at St. Paul’s on August 8th. It was truly a blessed and memorable event.

Please keep us in your prayers as you will be in ours. May God continue to bless the Church with men and women willing to respond affirmatively to a call to vocational life.

Yours in Christ,
Deacon Ron Mathews
Deacon Mike Monagle
Innovative religious ed may cause ‘revolution,’ say catechists

Alaska training session inspires Catholic, Orthodox educators

BY RASHAE OPHUS JOHNSON, CATHOLICANCHOR.ORG

Sixty years ago a Hebrew and Scripture scholar in Italy reluctantly agreed to teach Bible lessons to schoolchildren. Observing a child’s joyful response to Christ so moved the professor, Dr. Sofia Cavalletti, that she was inspired to develop a fresh method of Catholic religious education. She collaborated for years with esteemed Montessori educator Gianna Gobbi to pioneer a hands-on, child-sized, Christ-centered program titled Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS).

Today this eminent Montessori approach is nurturing the faith of thousands of toddlers to tweens worldwide. Since its founding in 1954, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd has flourished in 37 countries and more than 1,250 locations in the U.S., including adapted versions in Episcopal and Orthodox settings.

Yet in the Archdiocese of Anchorage and in Alaska, CGS subsists only as a little known gem within St. Patrick Church and on a limited basis at Holy Family Cathedral, both in Anchorage. (Editors’s note: In Juneau, CGS is in its 5th year at the Cathedral of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.)

Shelley Finkler, an Orthodox CGS catechist at St. John Orthodox Cathedral in Eagle River, is working to promote and expand CGS among Catholics and Orthodox alike.

“It truly breaks my heart that this incredible Catholic resource isn’t more available to Catholic children,” she said.

KIDS SEE THINGS ‘DIFFERENTLY’

St. John’s recently sponsored renowned CGS formation leader Dr. Ann Garrido to present a nine-day catechist training session. Eight Catholics flew in from as far as Florida to attend. One of the three Alaskan Catholics among the 17 total participants was Catherine Bennett, a catechist for preschoolers at St. Patrick’s.

“I went to CCD classes when I was younger, but just teaching these classes, watching kids do the works or watching another catechist present a lesson, I learn so much more,” said Bennett, 19. “Kids just see things so differently than adults. It’s amazing the joy that these little kids have in catechesis.”

In designing CGS, Cavalletti and Gobbi — who apprenticed under Montessori founder Maria Montessori, a fellow Catholic — observed children during faith formation and classified three age levels. Between ages 3-6 in Level 1, preschoolers can simply relish the gift of God’s love with unabashed joy and learn the fundamentals of what happens during Mass.

The distinct CGS learning environment is called the atrium. Each atrium is stocked with custom crafted visual aids and small models of sacred vessels to stimulate the children’s exploration of Scripture and liturgy. The catechist presents the subject and invites children to use the props while contemplating and celebrating the lesson. Typical classroom materials like desks and textbooks are foregone in favor of unique handmade items, like a child-sized altar with a miniature chalice and paten, a 3D model of Jerusalem and peg dolls and sets for reenacting biblical events like the Last Supper.

Deirdre Darr, a friend and former classmate of Garrido’s at the Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, flew from Juneau for the July training. Garrido introduced Darr to CGS while they were graduate students studying divinity.

“I was astounded at how amazing it was for three-year-olds to be throwing out words like paten and chalice and understanding important doctrines of the faith,” Darr said. “It’s just incredible. Adults underestimate what children can grasp.”

INSTILLING GRATITUDE

Cavalletti and Gobbi determined that in Level 2, children ages six to nine have gained an awareness of right versus wrong and are honing their sense of morality. Thus CGS presents morality as an individual response to God’s incredible gifts rather than a set of rules.

“I originally looked for an alternative [religious education] due to a lack of fervor in my six-year-old,” said Brigitte Youngblood, who launched CGS at St. Patrick’s about 10 years ago before moving abroad. “I had a lot of wise women tell me how pleased they were with CGS, so I read and read and read. I could see that being Catholic was more about being grateful, and to elicit these feelings you first must feel gifted and have a healthy sense of how wonderful and various are the gifts.”

During Level 3, nine to 12-year-olds examine the liturgy, study faithful heroes like Saint Ignatius and Blessed Mother
Knowledge of scripture is knowledge of Christ

September 30th is feast day of St. Jerome, the fifth century Church Father and scripture scholar. A priest of Rome, it was Jerome who was asked by the Pope to translate the Old and New Testaments into Latin from the original Hebrew and Greek and it was his translation, the Vulgate, which was the official Roman Catholic translation of the Bible until the Second Vatican Council.

Jerome was a complicated, contradictory and oftentimes curmudgeonly figure in our tradition who frequently entered into oftentimes verbally intemperate polemics with his fellow Christians. His polemics are, I think, best set aside, but what he has to say about sacred scripture merits our attention. He boldly declared that, “Ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ,” which is at once challenging and compelling.

By ignorance, I mean that Jerome is not so much talking about a lack of academic formation in the scriptures—as necessary and indispensable as biblical scholarship is for our understanding of the sacred text. Rather, I think he is speaking primarily of how a failure on our part to enter personally and deeply into the word of God is an obstacle to truly knowing Jesus, the incarnate Word of God.

Despite the provision of a rich selection of the sacred scriptures in our liturgies since the Second Vatican Council and a truly remarkable flourishing of biblical scholarship in our Church during the last century, I think that as a community of disciples we continue to struggle with the ignorance of scripture that Jerome warns us about.

As I grow older as a disciple, I find that when I examine my own ignorance of God’s word I find that it is not because of a lack of intellectual formation on my part. Rather, the problem is spiritual. On the surface, I have simply become slack and am reluctant to move beyond my own spiritual mediocrity. But at a deeper level I know that my interior resistance to God’s word is because I desire to jealously guard my autonomy. There are areas in my life where I do not want the word of God to penetrate. What those areas are differ for each person but I think we all struggle with this to various degrees.

This is what Jesus is teaching us when he told the disciples:

“Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who build his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock” (Matthew 7:24-25)

When I hear the words of God and fail to act on the word, I am ignorant of Christ. Identifying and acknowledging those areas in my life in which I resist God’s word is a step forward, but I want to take the next step, which is to “hunger and thirst for righteousness” and surrender myself to the Master. This means to allow him to direct my thoughts, judgments, actions and outlook in everything by entering into the truth, goodness and beauty of his word and longing for the fulfillment of his word in the Kingdom of God.

In this personal entry into the word of God, I find that rephrasing Jerome’s dictum in more positive language is helpful: “Knowledge of scripture is knowledge of Christ.” In scripture the language of knowing and being known is utilized to speak of the intimate relationship between a husband and wife, in which spouses are indissolubly united and become “one flesh.” Marital life and love is, at its core, a lifelong school of mutual surrender and giving and receiving, of knowing and being known; it is a mystery so fruitful, blessed and life-giving that it brings forth new life.

So too with the word of God. As in married life, knowledge of God’s word is a transforming participation in the mystery of love, and communion of love, between Christ the Bridegroom and each of us who make up the Church—his Bride. And as in married life, knowledge of the word of God is the wellspring of life and of new life, for every disciple, for the Church and ultimately, for the entire world.

Understood in this nuptial way, the Word of God is at once deepening our intimate communion with the Lord while binding us more and more closely to him, as we allow his word to shape and transform our minds and hearts.

To know Christ in his word means to love Christ with both humility and joy in his holy word. We see this expressed in signs and symbols when we gather to read the holy Gospel, in which Christ speaks in the midst of his rejoicing people.

A Coptic Orthodox monk, Fr. Matta al Meskeen (Matthew the Poor, The Communion of Love) writing about how to read the Bible, concluded after noting the various signs of reverence with which the gospel is proclaimed in the ancient tradition of his Church:

“He who has tasted the power of the Gospel in his life does not consider this excessive, but does even more to show his veneration.

There are those who always fast to read the Gospel.

There are those who, when they read the Gospel alone, always kneel.

There are those who always read it with weeping and tears.

God’s directions to us are most often given through the reading and hearing of the Gospel, when we are in a state of humility and when we pray with an open heart.”

(p.37, The Communion of Love, Matthew the Poor, St.Vladimir’s Seminary Press 1984)
Innovative Catechesis:  Continued from page 4

Teresa and contemplate what God calls them to do individually.

CHILDLIKE DISCOVERY
Catechists learn to respect each child’s unique perspective and resist directing his experience.

“We (catechists) are on this journey with the children. We’re all yearning to know Christ more,” Darr said. “Catechists are just the instruments; the Holy Spirit does the work. We just get everything ready and create an environment where the children can meet and get to know the Good Shepherd.”

Father Leo Walsh, pastor of St. Benedict Catholic Church in Anchorage and ecumenical officer for the Anchorage Archdiocese, dropped by the recent CGS training at St. John’s Orthodox Cathedral.

“Catechesis of the Good Shepherd does an amazing job of engaging children in the basics of the faith at a very early age,” he said. “I also like the very deliberate and thorough training that catechists must undertake so that the program can be most effective.”

INTENSE TRAINING
The intensive catechist training that helps make CGS so successful also inadvertently hinders the spread of CGS. It is time-intensive and can be difficult to access and expensive for both the host and participants. Level 1 training is a prerequisite for Level 2, which is in turn a prerequisite for Level 3.

Unlike traditional Sunday school — in which a pastor feasibly could recruit a parishioner to fill an unexpected teaching vacancy by handing him a curriculum guide before class — CGS formation is a long slow process. No teaching manual exists. The formation leader presents each lesson orally as if she was presenting it to children in atrium, and also addresses the scriptural, theological, liturgical and pedagogical background for each. She also must instill Montessori principles regarding human development and education. Training for each level consumes 90-120 hours over 15-18 days. A single course typically is divided into multiple weekends over several months, or into two nine-day sessions a year apart.

The host pays travel costs, lodging and a stipend for one to two certified formation leaders. Finkler is finishing certification to become a CGS formation leader this year, as is a catechist at the Catholic cathedral in Juneau. Non-Catholic formation leaders, such as Finkler, must agree to present the training wholly Catholic. Finkler hopes to offer Level 1 training in time for prospective catechists to attend Level 2 training slated for next year.

FOSTERING ‘REVOLUTION’
Finkler estimates about five years are needed to firmly establish a new CGS atrium, which can be challenging in a community such as Anchorage with a largely transient population. CGS now is the exclusive religious education course at the Orthodox cathedral for ages three to nine years, with Level 3 to begin soon. Darr and Finkler share a dream of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd becoming the standard religious education in Catholic parishes.

“We are sister churches, and I want the best for my sister,” Finkler said. “Every child should have the opportunity to experience God in this way, like they do in the atrium.”

“Catechesis of the Good Shepherd teaches kids not just the nomenclature, not just the book knowledge, not just the moral teachings, but it develops them into disciples. It nurtures their love for Christ,” Darr said. “Since I first saw it, I’ve always said if this was our first model of catechesis in the church, there would be a revolution — a good one. The children would be raised up as disciples.”

Cathedral DRE shares her experiences of ‘Catechesis of the Good Shepherd’

Katy Beedle Rice is the Director of Religious Education at the Cathedral of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Juneau. She has been a CGS catechist since 2010, and responded in writing to the following questions regarding her personal experience with the CGS method of religious formation.

How did you first hear about CGS?
I was first introduced to Catechesis of the Good Shepherd by Deacon Charles Rohrbacher. When he served as DRE at the Cathedral he had looked into sending catechists away for training, but for various reasons it hadn’t worked out. Several of the catechists at the Cathedral had been able to attend a training for “Godly Play” (another form of religious education based on Montessori principles) the summer before I became DRE and were excited to try it at the Cathedral. Our Episcopal neighbors at Holy Trinity parish had hosted the “Godly Play” training and lent us some materials so our pre-school/kindergarten class could try it out. When their church burned down that spring, Holy Trinity began meeting in our Parish Hall for their Sunday morning services. After discernment with then Bishop Warfel, Fr. Thomas Weise (then Cathedral rector) and I offered to combine our religious education programs for ages 3 through 12 years old and to use “Godly Play.” For nearly four years we shared our space, catechists, and “Godly Play” materials to provide religious education for all of our children. It was a blessing to meet together, to get to know our neighbors and also to have their help in transitioning over to a Montessori-based approach to religious education.

When Holy Trinity was able to move into their newly built church, I was able to go to training for Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, and that coming school year, 2010, we began CGS at the Cathedral.

What drew you to this method?
This method of religious formation for children drew me for several reasons. Since its roots in Rome in 1954, CGS has spread throughout the world. I think it has spread so widely because of the ultimate respect given to the religious life of the child, the emphasis placed on catechist formation, and its ability to talk to the heart of our faith. Every presentation that is given to the child is rooted in scripture and/or the Liturgy and every presentation is centered on the person of Christ and proclaiming, Christ, the Good Shepherd to the child.

How is CGS different from other methods of religious education?
What I find unique in CGS is its commitment to the spiritual formation of children and adults. The Atrium (the place set aside and prepared for the children to gather with their catechists) is a place of religious life where children and catechists come to pray, read the Scripture and meditate on the beauty of the Word of God and the Liturgy.

Explain your own CGS certifications, and current post graduate work?
Since 2010, I’ve been trained as a Level 1 catechist (for ages 3 through 6); a Level 2 catechist (ages 6 to 9) and a Level 3 catechist (9 to 12). The training entailed 100+ hours of adult formation on Scripture and the Liturgy, and experiencing the presentations given to the children at the different levels. Each catechist takes what they have been
The Diocese of Juneau full-time ministers met in Juneau and via video-conference on September 3 - 4 for their fall biannual meeting, focusing primarily on laying the groundwork for a new Diocesan Pastoral Plan. Drawing on the work of the 2013 Diocese of Juneau Synod and Bishop Edward J. Burns’ recent Post-Synodal Pastoral Letter, *To Know, Love and Serve Jesus Christ through his Body — the Church*, the new Diocesan Pastoral Plan will set forth goals for the New Evangelization and faith formation in the diocese.

The last Pastoral Plan for the Diocese was adopted by past Diocese of Juneau Bishop Michael Warfel in 2002 following the Diocesan Synod held in the year 2000.

In preparation for this fall’s meeting, Bishop Edward Burns sought input from parish and diocesan full-time ministers by means of an evangelization and catechesis survey of current practices and through preparation questions addressing specific areas for improvement, including: catechesis for children and adults, welcoming back inactive Catholics, personal discipleship, liturgical celebrations, marriage preparation, and community service.

After reviewing the adopted resolutions and priorities of the 2013 Synod, Bishop Burns led a discussion focusing on improvements in the areas of: personal and external prayer; inviting seekers and inactive Catholics; Sunday celebration of the Eucharist; and Faith formation.

Work toward a comprehensive Pastoral Plan for the diocese will continue through the fall with assistance from the diocesan full-time ministers, diocesan staff and the Diocesan Pastoral Council.

Bishop Edward J. Burns’ Post-Synodal Pastoral Letter, *To Know, Love and Serve Jesus Christ through his Body — the Church*, and the resolutions of the 2013 Synod, are available online at the Diocesan website or through local parish offices. For more information, email: juneaudiocese@gci.net, or visit the diocesan website at www.dioceseofjuneau.org.
Parishioners and friends of St. Paul’s and the Cathedral of the Nativity celebrated the Annual Blue Mass on Sunday, August 24, 2014. Sponsored by the local Knights of Columbus, and celebrated annually in recent years, the Catholic community gathered to pray for those in law enforcement and fire safety, to remember those who have fallen, and support those who serve. Law enforcement officers and public safety officials gathered outside for the blessing of their service vehicles.

Inside the church, the principal celebrant and homilist for the 2014 Mass was Bishop Edward J. Burns, Bishop of Juneau. The Mass included an honor guard, bagpipers, and the blessing of service vehicles.
Icons for Iraq

Overwhelming support for ‘Icons for Iraq’ fundraiser gains over $7000 for aid agencies

“I got the idea as I was praying last week for Iraqi Christians,” explains Deacon Rohrbacher. “I was pondering what I might have to offer that could be of help to the Christians in Iraq who are in such dire need and it occurred to me that donating this artwork might be a way to help out.

“I continued to pray about doing this, talked it over with some of my colleagues in ministry and then asked for the blessing of my bishop, Edward J. Burns, which he enthusiastically gave, along with the sponsorship of the Diocese of Juneau for the event.”

On Friday, August 22nd in Juneau, Deacon Rohrbacher generously donated the original art from two books that he recently illustrated for Liturgical Press, “The Illuminated Easter Proclamation (Exsultet)” and the “The Passions of Holy Week,” for a fundraiser he named Icons for Iraq. 100% of the proceeds from the event were donated to Catholic Relief Services and the Catholic Near East Welfare Association on behalf of Christians and other persecuted minorities in northern Iraq.

All of the art on exhibit was available for a suggested minimum donation; at the end of the evening, over $7000 had been contributed toward the fundraiser, some even coming from outside of Alaska.

In an email interview with Greg Kandra (for One to One - the Blog of the CNEWA), Rohrbacher shared some of his history with icons:

“I just marked my seventh anniversary as a deacon and I regard creating icons as a part of my diaconal ministry. I’ve been creating icons for the past 34 years, and I’m grateful that I was able to study first with a Russian Orthodox iconographer and then with Fr. Egon Sendler SJ, a Byzantine Catholic iconographer in France. In Alaska and in other parts of the country, I’ve been fortunate to have painted (or written) icons for Orthodox, Eastern and Roman Catholic parishes. I’ve also done painted illustrations for Liturgical Press and Oregon Catholic Press.”

“What attracted me to the icon so many years ago was my discovery that the icon was, in the tradition of the undivided Church, a participation in the proclamation of the Word of God. The defense of the icon at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 was the last place of formal agreement between the Eastern and Western Churches. This suggested to me that the icon might be an occasion for unity between Christians, reaching across the various divisions and misunderstandings that separate us.”

To view icons still remaining in the Icons for Iraq fundraiser, email: charlesr@gci.net, or visit the New Jerusalem Workshop Facebook page.

(Top) A woman who fled the violence in the Iraqi town of Sinjar sits with a child inside a tent at a camp in Syria’s northern town of Qamishli Aug. 17. Returning from a visit to the Kurdish region of Iraq, Syriac Catholic Patriarch Ignace Joseph III Younan called the Islamic State invasion “pure and simple religious cleansing and attempted genocide.” (CNS photo/Rodi Said, Reuters) (At bottom) Deacon Charles Rohrbacher explains the imagery of one of the icons on display at the ‘Icons for Iraq’ fundraiser.
Catholic faith formation for Alaskans

BY EFFIE CALDAROLA, CATHOLICANCHOR.ORG

Alaskans have a new opportunity for adult faith formation via the internet as the state’s Catholic dioceses enter a partnership with The Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation (VLCFF) at the Univ. of Dayton.

Deacon Mick Fornelli, who oversees the deacon formation program for the Anchorage Archdiocese, has worked with the University of Dayton on the project, which offers adult religious education and faith formation online anytime and anywhere.

“I’m very excited about this,” Deacon Fornelli said. “We’ve had unbelievable levels of cooperation and support and ongoing dialogue with Dayton about making this thing work.”

Most courses last about 5-6 weeks, and there are no set meeting hours during the week. Students sit down to the computer on their own timeline. Participants are required to post on an online discussion board, moderated by a facilitator, to form an e-community with other students.

The program is coordinated and sponsored by the Institute for Pastoral Initiatives—a Marianist institution at the university.

Sister Angela Ann Zukowski, a member of the Mission Helpers of the Sacred Heart, directs the institute and founded the online program. She has also taught at the University of Dayton for 35 years.

Sister Zukowski said their programs are offered in partnership with 80 dioceses in 40 countries.

Catholics anywhere can sign up to take courses, but it costs $90 – soon to be $95 – to take a one credit course if your diocese is not a partner. If you belong to a partnering diocese, the cost per course drops by about half. Textbooks are additional.

Alaska is getting a special deal. Although partnership costs a diocese $3,000 a year currently, the three dioceses of Alaska will have this fee waived through a grant for two years. In the third year, all three will pay a total of $5,000 for the partnering agreement.

“We are very much committed to supporting missionary dioceses,” Sister Zukowski said. “And we need to adapt to different environments.”

Currently, the program offers about 175 online courses, and provides certificates in areas like catechesis, adult faith formation, youth ministry and social justice.

“Anyone with web access can participate,” Deacon Fornelli said. “I hope that many people in the archdiocese will take advantage of this.”

For informational videos and instructions on enrolling, visit the website at vlc.udayton.edu.

Katy Rice on CGS: Continued from pg. 6

presented and writes up their own “album pages” which are similar to lesson plans for each presentation. The albums are then read and corrected by the formation leader for the course. This past June I was recognized as a Formation Leader for Level 1 catechists by the National Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. As a Formation Leader I can lead Level 1 courses for catechists, sign certificates of attendance for these trainings and also correct and sign off on album pages for other catechists.

Currently I’m enrolled with Aquinas Institute in St. Louis in their Masters of Pastoral Studies with a concentration on Catechesis of the Good Shepherd—the only program of its kind in the country. Along with the core courses for a Masters in Pastoral Studies, this program also awards graduate credits for nationally recognized catechist training courses, and completed albums for each of the three levels.

Briefly describe the training that you provide for catechists locally.

A new Level 1 course for catechists began in June, 2014 at St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church in Juneau. About 1 dozen catechists are attending, both from St. Paul’s and from the Cathedral. We meet one Saturday a month from 9am to 3pm. If people are interested in joining this training, or would like to know when the next one begins they should contact Marilyn Monagle at 789-7303 or me at 586-1513.

What do you see as the future for CGS in the Diocese of Juneau?

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd throughout the world seeks to be a mustard seed that can begin very, very small, but then grow and take on life. This is certainly true in Juneau. From one catechist being formed four years ago, we now have more than 12 catechists who have been through the Level One training, with 12 more in the process of formation. This summer, two women from Juneau, Rhiannon Jensen and Deirdre Darr travelled to Anchorage to attend Level Two catechist formation.

Can you share an example of the fruits of the CGS program?

CGS takes seriously Jesus’ call for his disciples to “become like little children.” My own experience being in the Atrium with children ages 3 to 12 has taught me about joy, love, charity, and persistence in faith. One of the memories I hold most dear is from being in the Level 1 Atrium two years ago during the season of Lent. The night before this Atrium session I had learned that a friend of our family had passed away. In the Atrium one of the five year-olds asked me to work with him on the City of Jerusalem—a 3-D model of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus, on which we can trace with the children the events leading up to Jesus’ Passion, Death and Resurrection. When we came to the model of Caiaphas’ house I told the child, “This is where it was decided that Jesus would die.” The little boy put his hand on my shoulder, leaned in and whispered, “Don’t worry, Katy, he rose again.” Hearing the proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection and our Christian hope in life beyond death was so meaningful!
Middle East patriarchs meet diplomats, call for eradicating terrorists

BEIRUT (CNS) -- Catholic and Orthodox patriarchs of the Middle East denounced attacks on Christians and called upon the international community to work toward eradicating terrorist groups. The patriarchs met Aug. 27 at the Maronite Catholic patriarchate at Bkerke, north of Beirut, for a special summit to address the crisis in the region. They were later joined by the United Nations’ special coordinator in Lebanon and the ambassadors of the five permanent member-countries of the U.N. Security Council.

“The very existence of Christians is at stake in several Arab countries -- notably in Iraq, Syria and Egypt -- where they have been exposed to heinous crimes, forcing them to flee,” the patriarchs said in a statement after the summit and meeting with diplomats. They lamented the indifference of both Islamic authorities and the international community over attacks against Christians, who have been in the region for 2,000 years. “What is painful is the absence of a stance by Islamic authorities, and the international community has not adopted a strict stance either,” the patriarchs said. “We call for issuing a fatwa (Islamic religious ruling) that forbids attacks against others,” they said.

“The international community cannot keep silent about the existence of the so-called ISIS,” the patriarchs said, referring to the Islamic State. “They should put an end to all extremist terrorist groups and criminalize aggression against Christians and their properties.”

Undocumented students find refuge, support at Catholic colleges

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- Fifteen years ago, the president of Dominican University, just outside Chicago, thought comprehensive immigration reform was right around the corner. That’s when the university began financially supporting undocumented students simply because, as Donna Carroll put it: “It was the right thing to do. I assumed that by the time these students were juniors or seniors this would all be sorted out,” the university president said. But now, as the path to citizenship for these students remains unclear, she said she’s discouraged by how “protracted and prolonged the immigration process is.” It’s been frustrating to have it so politicized,” she told Catholic News Service Sept. 4.

Carroll, who advocates for immigration reform, is the first to acknowledge “it’s a complicated issue” and also admits that her perspective as a university president is different from that of a lawyer or politician, since academic leaders are focused on developing and promoting talent and also making sure potential talent isn’t wasted. She said she feels the strongest affirmation from students who see their university “making a strong statement” and providing a place where undocumented students feel safe and supported. She’s hardly alone in her efforts, either. Carroll has had the support of the school’s founding order, the Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters, and other Catholic university presidents who have made Catholic social teaching the impetus behind their support of undocumented students.

Catholic schools determine how to take part in ALS fundraising effort

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, a major fundraising effort that began this summer to raise money to research a cure for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis or Lou Gehrig’s disease, has left many people scratching their heads. The challenge involves dumping a bucket of ice water on someone’s head and nominating others to go through the same process within 24 hours or make a donation to the charity of one’s choice to support further research to treat and cure ALS.

The ALS Association, based in Washington, is the largest organization researching the disease. The challenge went viral on social media. As of Aug. 26, the ALS Association had received $88.5 million in donations from July 29-Aug. 26 compared to $2.6 million during the same time period a year ago. Friends have challenged friends on Facebook and celebrities have joined the fundraising fray. Now with schools starting their new year, Catholic schools across the country have also considered the challenge. But there has been some hesitation, particularly after reports that the ALS Association, which is researching for a cure for the disease, uses embryonic stem cells in some of its research. Some dioceses have issued statements urging schools that participate to send donations to other research organizations, such as the John Paul II Medical Research Institute in Iowa City, Iowa, which does not use embryonic stem cells in its research.

ST. CATHERINE’S MAKES BUILDING IMPROVEMENTS TO CUT HEATING COSTS

Fr. Thomas Weise assists parishioner Greg Kowalski in working on part of the ongoing insulation project at St. Catherine of Siena Church in Petersburg. The parish is in the process of making improvements and renovations on their church/hall structure that will ensure proper insulation and access. The work is being done primarily with volunteer labor from parishioners and pastor Fr. Thomas Weise. Improvements, when completed, will include: the insulation of the floor in the hall and church, including additional floor joists in the church; replacement of all doors; replacement of the oldest windows; exteriors insulation on the church (6”) and hall (4”); new siding; and, new ADA ramps. The project is expected to cost approximately $40,000, and is being partially funded through a diocesan grant with the balance coming from local parish fundraising and donations.

Thanks to the work of organizing parishioners, Don Koenigs, Tom Reinarts, Fr. Thomas Weise, and the ongoing work of a crew of parish volunteers: Ray Ochoa, Colleen Schwartz, Rich Jennings, Jen and Maddie Ray, Jim Whitehorn, Jerry Whitehorn, Greg Kowalski and Al Dwyer, and all those who have provided delicious meals for the work crews, and contributed their time, talent and treasure toward this project.
How do we share our faith without being awkward?

FR. MICHAEL SHIELDS, CATHOLIC ANCHOR

How do we share our faith? Honestly, the answer most Catholics give is, “I don’t know.”

There is a very clear and biblical model that is open for anyone who has friendships. I call it friendship evangelization.

Our three young missionaries from Ohio used this method this summer in Magadan. Christianity is first and foremost based on relationships — relationship with Christ and relationships with his body the Church. Therefore friendship is the most natural way we introduce others to our faith. So how do you practice this form of evangelization?

When you meet someone, be your most authentic self. As a friendship develops do these very simple things. Let people know you are a Catholic Christian (in a natural, unforced way). Ask friends about their faith — and just listen. Listen to your friend’s problems — maybe offer to pray for them. Share your problems with them — testify to how your faith helps you. Give them a book to read on the spiritual life. Share your story of faith in an authentic way. Answer objections to Christianity and questions that might come up.

Be a true apologist. Don’t apologize for Christianity but share your hope and if you don’t have an answer to a question, be honest and say, “I don’t know but I will find out.” Have the answer next time when you meet.

It is very natural to invite someone who is a friend to an enjoyable event, lunch or a movie, so why not invite them to the most amazing event on Sunday morning where they meet Christ and his body. Offer to take them to church and introduce them to others in the parish. What would a parish look like if 20 percent of the people practiced this form of evangelization? It would look alive and friendly.

This is not about manipulating or using your friendships, it is about sharing what is most important to you. How important is your relationship to Christ and his body, the Church?

The three young missionaries that came to Magadan witnessed that their relationship with Christ and his Church informed all other relationships. Now that they are gone, I am meeting with some young people who say something has changed for them. They witness to the fact that although the young women were religious and open about their faith, they were also normal and natural. This is attractive, and as one young man said, “Because of their friendship I have a spiritual hunger now.”

When a new friendship begins, it should begin with the hope that it will someday lead to a friendship with Jesus. Christianity is really about authentic friendships.

The writer is a pastor of the Church of the Nativity in Magadan, Russia.

Whose children are they?

BY CAROLYN Y. WOO, CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

In gatherings with Catholic Relief Services colleagues in Africa, I often inquire about their children. With beaming pride, they mention their biological children and other children raised as their own. The latter may be orphaned by the AIDS epidemic, the Rwanda genocide, civil wars and other calamities.

Sometimes they are blood relations, sometimes an orphan in the village. I am always touched by the love and generosity that have opened up homes, arms and hearts for the least and littlest among us.

While at CRS we do extensive work to reverse the root causes and effects of poverty, much less tractable are the traumas that children experience around the world because of war, abuse, displacement from home into hostile environments, loss of parents and siblings, brutal maiming and other trauma.

A 2009 estimate puts the number of children living in conflict areas at 1 billion, while a 2006 United Nations report projected 500 million to 1.5 billion children affected by violence each year. In addition to physical suffering, children in conflict areas are out of school and thus held back from preparation for the future even when conflicts come to an end. The civil war in Syria, for example, has affected 5.5 million children, says the U.N.

Even in stable societies, the abuse of children takes place at astounding rates. In the U.S., based on a report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, government agencies log over 3 million child maltreatment cases each year with about a quarter of that number treated in emergency rooms of hospitals.

What are called adverse childhood experiences (neglect, abandonment, emotional and sexual abuse, parental drug addiction, incarceration of at least one parent) define the daily existence for about 35 million children or one third of those between ages 12-17 in the United States, according to the 2011-2012 National Survey of Children’s Health.

After decades of research, we now know that childhood traumas can severely compromise the child’s long-term development on many dimensions: emotional, physical, intellectual, social.

The damage starts early and extends its grip into adulthood. It can lead to substance abuse, depression, promiscuity, poor job performance and chronic diseases, experts say.

In “The Drama of the Gifted Child,” Alice Miller reminds us that “the truth about childhood is stored up in our bodies and lives in the depths of our souls. Our intellect can be deceived, our feelings can be numbed and manipulated, our perceptions shamed and confused, our bodies tricked with medication, but our soul never forgets. And because we are one, whole soul in one body, someday our body will present its bill.”

When parents or society fail children, who will step up for them? Who should? Whose children are they?

Dr. Carolyn Y. Woo is President & CEO of Catholic Relief Services, the official international humanitarian agency of the Catholic community in the United States. She came to CRS in January 2012 after a distinguished academic career.
THE HUMAN SIDE

For every evil, there’s a lot of good

BY FATHER EUGENE HEMRICK, CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

Recently, as I walked to the first tee on the golf course, I heard a friend yell, “Father Gene, I desperately need to talk with you!” He wanted to know my take on the horrific events happening around the world recently.

My first thought was to tell him that we are experiencing the age-old problem of evil and the question of why a good God allows it. Why must innocent people die? Why do we experience the inhuman disrespect for life?

Since the beginning of time, great minds have tried to solve the problem of evil. Although they offer us valuable insights, they have never produced a satisfying answer. Why evil exists is a mystery, and as with so many mysteries, the best way to handle it is to accept the mystery and live with its puzzlement.

Not so mysterious is that evil makes us distraught. We must find the means for coping with our distress.

As human beings, we were born with a heart, not only to keep us alive physically but to enhance the life of others with its life-giving spirit. No matter where or what type of evil happens, it disturbs us because the very essence of our humanity is to care for one another.

Many people are looking for reasons to explain away evil, so as not to lose heart. There are also many people who have stopped questioning the unreasonable loss of life and are succumbing to depression, disillusionment and even suicide. How do we avoid becoming like this group?

One good means is to see life’s many dimensions and not be focused solely on evil. Although the hearts of millions of people are saddened by what’s happening in the world – wars, beheadings, persecution – their heart has not been hardened.

On the contrary, they are more caring and concerned about making the world better. They care about putting out an image of humanity at its best.

These people mirror Christ, who cared for the world to the point of dying for it and teaching us that God truly cares for us. He taught us that even suffering can bring out the best in humanity.

Another word for care is love. And love is the ultimate means for defeating evil. If we decide to look at the evils around us, we also must look for the good. We can find the good in the doctors and volunteers risking their lives in battles against diseases such as Ebola.

What we see on the news may be horrific. But stop and think: At the same time that evil things are happening, there is also humanitarian aid being flown to thousands of displaced people. Within refugee camps can be found those who are supporting one another, even though they themselves have nothing.

Such examples must be kept in mind. They contain the mystery of love conquering the mystery of evil.

Force alone cannot stop ‘religious cleansing’ in Mideast, custos says

BY CINDY WOODEN, CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- Although Christians, Muslims and Jews have struggled for hundreds of years to live peacefully alongside each other in the Middle East, “we have never seen the kind of ‘religious cleansing’ we are witnessing today,” said the head of the region’s Franciscans.

All religious communities must raise their voices

“All religious communities must raise their voices against this abomination” being carried out, particularly in Iraq and Syria, by terrorists calling themselves the Islamic State, said Franciscan Father Pierbattista Pizzaballa, custos of the Holy Land.

Speaking in Rimini, Italy, Aug. 24 at an international meeting sponsored by the Communion and Liberation movement, Father Pizzaballa said political, economic and probably military intervention will be needed to protect the Christian and other minority communities of the Middle East.

However, he added, their survival ultimately will depend on the courage and willingness of the region’s inhabitants to love and protect one another.

“Political solutions must be sought urgently, but they won’t save Christianity in the Middle East,” he said. “Their presence will be saved by the little ones, by those who courageously step up and challenge death, selflessly loving their brothers and sisters.”

Use of force without a plan for reconstruction will resolve nothing

Clearly, the Islamic State’s “fanaticism must be stopped, if necessary even with force,” the Franciscan said. “Nevertheless, the use of force without a plan for reconstruction on every level will resolve nothing. Force stops; it destroys. However, if there is no reconstruction then the void created by the use of force will give life to even greater extremism.”

Father Pizzaballa, who is based in Jerusalem, said the entire Middle East is undergoing a profound transformation. “The kind of stability that for 40 years characterized relations or non-relations in these countries has ended definitively,” but what will take its place still is not clear.

“The Middle East is in flames,” Father Pizzaballa said. And while the tolerance between some groups seems to have disappeared, new signs of caring for and protecting one another can be seen in almost every community.

The Arab Spring movement that began in 2011 “gave rise to great enthusiasm,” particularly among the region’s youths looking for greater freedom and opportunity, he said. “But this process was in a certain way hijacked by religious movements and parties that transformed it into a power struggle between the different religious and social components of the Middle East, especially between Shiite and Sunni Muslims.

The growing power of extremist Muslim groups, he said, threatens not only the Christian and Yazidi minorities, but also other Muslims who don’t think like they do.

The Franciscan said that throughout the region he has witnessed Christians and Muslims coming to each other’s rescue, sharing the little they have even in the most desperate situations. Such gestures, “present everywhere, constitute the secret and necessary power to move beyond and not stop in the darkness of the moment, in the power of Satan.”

While political, military and economic interventions must be considered, he said, evaluating everything only on those terms “has nothing to do with the Christian faith,” which is a commitment to follow Jesus whose triumph came from his sacrifice on the cross.

“Jesus became Lord of the world on the cross, not after the success of the multiplication of loaves,” Father Pizzaballa said. “Our actions must be accompanied by a profound and serene conviction that in order to bear fruit everything we do must be united to the action of Christ.”
LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Welcoming children at Mass

Recently, there was a family attending Mass who sat in the narthex. Their children ran about at will; they blew out prayer candles; they closed the door to the Sacristy (locking the door inconveniently while doing so); one child would run into church and grab “bread” from the offertory table! The parents were asked to “rein the children in a bit,” and we have not seen the family since.

Also recently, I witnessed a little girl at Mass whose father was trying to rein her in. He had his hand over her nose and mouth. She tried to scratch his hand away and yell, “Let go of my breath!” This process was repeated. I think she said it 3 times until I looked at him and said, “you are not to smother that child!” I don’t know if he heard me, but he did stop.

At a Confirmation Mass this year, there was mention of how special our young people are to the Church, how we need to look at them to be leaders in the future. In the meantime, the child behind me (not the same as the one mentioned above) was being silenced with a “binkie towel” held over his mouth and nose. After he clawed his mother’s hand away, he was repeatedly spanked in the face.

When Jesus said, “Let the children come,” I don’t think any of these examples are what he had in mind. For the LOVE OF GOD could we please agree to welcome children at Mass, and provide kind assistance and support to their parents... support that does not involve ‘smothering’?

I understand how hard it is to parent through that hour. I have been there; sometimes I am still there! Sometimes I don’t get anything out of the service. Homily? Barely heard it. But I survived and so did my children. Yup, she might have dropped a crayon at your feet, or spilled her water and it ran down the sloped floor. My son might have hanged on the back of your pew several times before I was able to stop him.

Yup, my kids are a disturbance in church. I am doing my best. But I understand. They are also a part of the service. They are a part of praying and experiencing the sacraments. If they are old enough to stand, sit, and kneel, I encourage them to do that as the rest of the assembly does. I encourage them to participate at a ‘developmentally appropriate’ level. That is my strategy. Sometimes it works. I made a promise to bring them up in the faith the day they were baptized, and I am doing my best to do so.

What can you do to help? Tell the parents when they sit down near you how very glad you are that they brought their kids to Mass. That always helps. It helps me to know that no matter how much it may feel like a 3 ring circus that I have the support of those directly around me. It helps me breathe and relax. We, as a Church community, need to be encouraging to parents who dare to brave that hour with their kids. We need to create an environment where “let the little children come” is more important than “a sense of reverence.” If you want reverence, sign up for an hour of adoration. I won’t bring my kids!

My children are children of God, baptized and being brought up in the faith, with the help of God, and with the support of the parish members. Help other parents see that you’ve ‘got their back’ too. Maybe we, as a community, can help these parents let their kids ‘breathe easy’ in church.

Kerri Godfrey, Juneau

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questions & answers

BY FATHER KENNETH DOYLE, CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

CAN PRAYERS CLINCH HEAVEN?

I was given a prayer folder that tells me that I will suffer no purgatory and be taken directly to heaven when I die, provided that I say these prayers daily for 12 years. (Missed days can be made up.) I am about ready to start the third year, but a dear Catholic friend has just told me that this promise is not true.

The prayers are called “The Seven Sorrows of Mary, as given to St. Bridget and The Twelve-Year Prayers of St. Bridget on the Passion of Jesus,” and I have read that these prayers were confirmed by Pope Clement XII and Pope Innocent X. I don’t really mind doing the prayers, but I would like to know if I can guarantee my salvation. (Fayetteville, Arkansas)

A

No prayer — not even one said every day for 12 years — can “guarantee salvation.” Even a plenary indulgence, which remits all of the temporal punishment due to sin, covers only those sins committed up until the time the indulgence is gained; it is not “prospective.”

The surest way to eternal happiness is to live out the teachings of Jesus Christ as learned from the Gospels. (I quote as my witness Jesus himself, who explained in Matthew 7:21 that “not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”)

It strikes me as a bit like magic to think that the mere recitation of certain words could by itself win joy that is eternal. After all, a plenary indulgence requires, in addition to the particular prayer or action, the reception of the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist (as well as prayers for the pope’s intentions).

Having said this, I would still encourage you to continue the recitation of the prayers you mentioned. Most often, the effect of prayer — as well as comforting the soul—is to bring one closer to Jesus in thought and action, which is the goal of our lives and the safest path to salvation.

WHY THE CHURCH DOESN’T ORDAIN WOMEN

As a practicing Catholic, what should be my answer when my Protestant friends ask me why my church does not ordain women to the priesthood? (City of origin withheld)

A

Catholics believe that the ordained ministry has its origin in Christ’s choice of the Twelve Apostles. Why Jesus selected only males for this sacramental and teaching ministry, no one can say with certainty, but the church feels bound by the decision of its founder and by its earliest and consistent tradition.

There were proponents of female priests in the first four centuries of the church’s history, but always the response from church leaders was the same: that’s not our call to make, not our prerogative; the action of Jesus is normative.

Even Eastern Orthodox churches, which split with Catholics on several theological issues, never questioned that the priesthood was reserved to males.

Some would argue that if Jesus were alive today when society has a greater appreciation of women’s dignity and gifts, he would have picked some women among his apostles.

But that forgets the fact that the historical Jesus had no problem being controversially countercultural: he chose Matthew — scorned by society as a tax collector — and welcomed several women, including Mary Magdalene, as close companions and friends.

So the church’s teaching has nothing to do with gender equality and everything to do with Jesus and the history of the church. St. John Paul II in a 1994 apostolic letter explained that since even the Virgin Mary was not given the ministry and mission proper to the apostles, the decision by Jesus was surely not a statement on the relative dignity and holiness of the sexes.

Pope Francis, in his 2013 exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium,” even while reaffirming the teaching on a male-only priesthood, added a critical nuance. He said that decision-making should not be linked to ordination and urged that women be given a greater voice in church deliberations.

Questions may be sent to Fr. Kenneth Doyle at askfatherdoyle@gmail.com, or, 40 Hopewell St., Albany, N.Y. 12208.
May your Kingdom come, but not yet

A friend of mine likes to humor about his struggles in growing up. When I was in my twenties, he quips, I felt that by the time I was forty I would have grown-up enough to let go of my bad habits. But, when I turned forty, I gave myself an extra ten years, promising myself that by age fifty, I’d have conquered these habits. Well, now I’m in my fifties and I’ve promised myself that by age sixty, I’ll be more mature and more serious about the deeper things in life.

Most of us, if we are honest, have a similar story. We’re well intentioned, but we keep pushing the things we need to change in our lives off into the future: Yes, I need to do this, but I’m not ready yet. I want more time. Sometime in the future I’ll do this.

That’s a near-universal sentiment, and for good reason. The tension we experience between our desire to grow up and our perennial procrastination and infinite stalling in doing that, reflects in fact a tension that lies at the heart of Jesus’ message, a tension between God’s promises as being already here and God’s promises as still coming. Simply put: Everything Jesus promised is already here and everything Jesus promised is still coming. We’re already living the new, resurrected life, even as we’re waiting for it to still come. What lies inside this paradox?

Biblical scholars and theologians tell us that everything Jesus came to bring us (the Reign of God, the Kingdom of God, the New Age, the Final Age, the reign of justice on this earth, new life, the resurrection, eternal life, heaven) is already here, except that it’s also still coming. It’s here now, but not fully; a present reality, but in tension. And it’s still coming, in its fullness; still to arrive, in ecstasy. It’s already here and it’s still to be realized. For instance, when Jesus says that he has come to bring us new life, he is not talking simply about our future our lives, as opposed to God simply being a reality that will one day become very real. For instance, when Jesus says that he has come to bring us new life, he is not talking simply about our future our lives, as opposed to God simply being a reality that will one day become very real. Because if God is “concrete” already now that means that our worlds have to change now and we have to stop pushing things into the indefinite future. This isn’t so much a fault in faith as it is a procrastination, a stalling, wanting of a little more time before we need to get serious. We’re like the guests in the Gospel parable who are invited to wedding banquet. We too want to go to the feast, intend to go to the feast; but, first, we need to attend to our marriages, our businesses, our ambitions. We can get serious later. There’s time. We fully intend to take Jesus seriously; it’s just that we want a little more time before we do that.

We are all, I suspect, familiar with St. Augustine’s infamous prayer. After converting to Christianity at age twenty-five, he struggled for another nine years to bring his sexuality into harmony with his faith. During those nine years, he prayed this way: Lord, make me a chaste Christian ... but not yet!

To his credit, unlike many of us, at least eventually he stopped pushing things into the indefinite future.

Oblate Father Ron Rolheiser, theologian, teacher, and award-winning author, is President of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, TX. He can be contacted through his website www.ronrolheiser.com. Follow Fr. Ron on Facebook: www.facebook.com/ronrolheiser

It’s very threatening to have God become “concrete” in our lives, as opposed to God simply being a reality that will one day become very real. Also, in the course of the church’s history, it has again and again been denied or rendered toothless. The reason was the same as in Nazareth: apparently it goes against the human grain for God to become concrete in our lives. Then people’s desires and favorite notions are in danger, and so are their ideas about time. It can’t be today, because that would mean that our lives have to change today already. Therefore it can lie, hygienically and snugly packed, at rest, inconsequential.

I suspect that all of us can relate to that: It’s very threatening to have God become “concrete” in our lives, as opposed to God simply being a reality that will one day become very real. Because if God is “concrete” already now that means that our worlds have to change now and we have to stop pushing things into the indefinite future. This isn’t so much a fault in faith as it is a procrastination, a stalling, wanting of a little more time before we need to get serious. We’re like the guests in the Gospel parable who are invited to wedding banquet. We too want to go to the feast, intend to go to the feast; but, first, we need to attend to our marriages, our businesses, our ambitions. We can get serious later. There’s time. We fully intend to take Jesus seriously; it’s just that we want a little more time before we do that.

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The first day of school on Tuesday, September 2nd was a beautiful day in Ketchikan and a wonderful day at Holy Name School. Many thanks for all the prayers and support that made our first day a great day.

Visit us at www.holynamektn.com/school