Our Lady of Prompt Succor
Parish News
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PASTOR'S MESSAGE

Mortalilty is reality we all must face

Dear Parishioners of OLPS Church and School:

In mid-September we commemorate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Not only do we look outward to the Cross of our Savior Jesus, but we gaze upward to it, as He is "lifted up" for our salvation. The beautifully restored original OLPS Church crucifix allows us to enter such worship, which is the core of the Eucharistic sacrifice and the reason our Lord gave us this sacrament at the Last Supper.

As you may know, my dear mother has been suffering from the illness of bronchiectasis coupled with COPD. This lung disease has caused her body to weaken and become emaciated, as she has experienced frequent labored breathing. Despite treatment during numerous hospital stays and rehab in the past months, she has declined in health. Her illness is a great challenge for her, as well as for my sister and me as we try to provide care for her. Our dear parents reared us with such love and devotion, and in countless ways provided for us during our upbringing. During their elder years, we try to aid them as best as we can, especially in their time of grave sickness.

The Wisdom literature of the Bible states: "My child, help your parent in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives; even if his mind fails, be patient with him; because you have all your faculties, do not despise him. For kindness to a parent will not be forgotten and will be credited to you against your sins" (Sir. 3: 12-14).

When we witness the later years of human life in its fragility, in a loved one's dependence upon others for basic needs, we are touched by the full reality of the human condition. Suffering is not just something "out there." It is up close and personal. I remember the suffering of my younger sister Claire, who, as a mother of three young children, died from complications with the West Nile virus in 2020. My father had passed a year before in 2019. Now, my mother is facing terminal illness.

Living in the world will bring each person eventually to be touched by the Cross. For some it is sooner, for others, later; but the mortality of our human condition is a reality we all must face. When in the Gospel Peter made his great profession of faith, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God," Jesus affirmed him.

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OLPS is adding the large newly concreted area between the DPC and the school. It will be enclosed and have a turf cushioning added to the surface where the Pre-K and Pre-School students can play.

Enrollment spike, improvements add luster to OLPS

By Susan Harrison

The new academic year is off to a great start at Our Lady of Prompt Succor School with enrollment up, a new permanent deacon assigned to the school and improvement projects continuing.

An additional 25 students have enrolled this year bringing total enrollment to 377. New students are from families moving into the area and some have transferred from public and other private schools in the area.

Deacon Mike Young, who has been assigned to OLPS parish in the past, now works at the school full time.

"He's everywhere," Principal Meredith Rhodes said of Young, who assists at all school Masses, works car duty, recess duty and he attended school open house.

Deacon Young also has blessed the playground, spoken to third grade classes about receiving Brown Scapulars and is instructing students about the Sacraments.

The new playground for pre-school and pre-K children is nearly completed. Mrs. Rhodes reports that the new equipment will be installed prior to the October 10 Fall Festival.

The annual Campus Countdown raffle is under way. This year and probably next year's proceeds will go toward renovating the school gym. New wood floors are desperately needed.

"They have been refinished so many times there is barely any wood left, Mrs. Rhodes joked.

The gym bathrooms need to be upgraded to be handicapped accessible and a ramp is needed at the entrance.

Campus Countdown tickets are on sale for $55 each. Drawings will be held each day in October with prizes ranging from $400 to $2,026. All tickets will be entered for all 31 drawings if purchased before October 1. Ticket sales will end October 15.

The plan is to sell 2,150 tickets to fund gym improvements.

Fr. Noel, St. John Vianney influence Fr. Kuzma's path to Central Louisiana

By Bob Tompkins

So how did a savvy high school catcher from Muncie, Ind., find himself joining the priesthood in Central Louisiana?

The answer's coming but know this first. Larry Donald "Donnie" Kuzma Jr., a graduate of Ball State in his hometown of Muncie, discerned a vocation to the priesthood while serving in the FOCUS ministry for two years at Central Michigan University. That led to him joining the Fathers of Mercy in Auburn, Ky., a short drive from Bowling Green.

That novitiate didn't last long. He realized soon enough that order of priests wasn't for him.

His parents drove down from Muncie to pick him up and brought him his cell phone, which he hadn't been able to use with the Fathers.

He checked his emails and one was from Father Marc Noel, then the pastor of Holy Cross Catholic Church in Natchitoches. Fr. Noel was starting a FOCUS ministry and needed someone immediately to be the campus minister since the fall semester was approaching at the local college, Northwestern State University.

He had sent out a bunch of job-seeking letters across the country, including to Fr. Noel, and Fr. Noel saw from his résumé that he was qualified.

"I phoned him to talk about the offer, and he offered me the job at the end of the phone call," said Fr. Kuzma, sitting at a desk in his new office at Our Lady of Prompt Succor Church in Alexandria. "I moved to Natchitoches the following Tuesday. This was in 2016 and I served there for two years. I knew then I was called to be a priest."

He looked at several orders of priests but there always was something holding him back.

"The semester after my first year in Natchitoches, I went on a pilgrimage to France with students," he said. "One of the stops was Ars, where St. John Vianney's shrine is."

While praying by the body of Vianney, the patron of diocesan priests, Kuzma said he discerned his calling to be a diocesan priest.

Growing up Catholic in Muncie as the son (and youngest of four siblings) of Larry and Mary Kuzma, Fr. Kuzma said he quit going to Mass after his Confirmation. His life centered around sports, especially baseball, initially as both a pitcher and catcher. He quit pitching after his sophomore year when he had Tommy John surgery, but he continued to be a cracker-jack catcher through high school.

"As a catcher in high school, I got to call (the pitches)," he said. "The catcher is in control of everything. You have to deal with pitchers and their mentalities. Some need to be coddled. You deal with umpires and talk to opposing batters."

He enrolled at Division III Defiance College in Defiance, Ohio to play baseball but quit after a semester being unsatisfied with his low position on the depth chart. He bounced around to a few different colleges and played for some college wood bat leagues but eventually quit the sport "because I wasn't getting any better." Yet, he still follows the sport and is a fan of the Chicago Cubs.

Praying by the body of St. John Vianney, he discerned his calling to be a diocesan priest.

He eventually got his college degree from Ball State in religious studies. With that major, he leaned into the Catholic faith his paternal grandmother, Lou Ann, got him interested in as a young adult. He joined NET, the youth evangelization ministry, which took him to Ireland for several months, and there he began to grasp the benefits of holy hours.

After finding his way to Natchitoches, where Father John O'Brien was an influential mentor, Kuzma spent six years at the Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans, achieving master's degrees in both philosophy and theology. After a year as a transitional deacon at St. Joseph's in Marksville, he was ordained a priest on May 25, 2024, at St. Francis Xavier Cathedral in Alexandria and spent his first two years as a priest at Sacred Heart in Pineville.

"There were a lot of firsts for me there – funerals, weddings," said Fr. Kuzma, "and I did a talk series that went fairly well on the Seven Sorrows of Mary. I realized there that a lot of the priesthood is being present, getting to know families, and it's impactful to be a part of their lives."

In June he became the parochial vicar of OLPS and the associate vocations director for the Diocese of Alexandria.

"I'm very happy here," the 38-year-old Kuzma said, noting he spends some leisure time collecting and working with scrap metals with his buddies, Fr. Joshua Burch in Vidalia and Fr. Daniel Hart in Fishville. With welders and torches, they turn some of the scrap into decorative pieces. He hopes to someday turn scrap into sacramentals.

He looks forward, too, to starting "some sort of discernment group for young single guys, 20-35, so they can have a better understanding of what the seminary looks like."

Finally, and maybe with the influence of St. John Vianney, he holds a special place in his heart for hearing confessions.

"It's a deeply emotional experience," he said. "Being able to bring Christ's healing ministry to that has been very impactful."



Father Donnie Kuzma

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Then, Jesus identified His Messiahship as being one of the suffering servant: "He must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly … and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Mt. 16: 16-21).

What has defined Christianity since the beginning is that our God completely empathizes with us. God does not ignore human suffering. He enters it. Jesus saves us up close by taking on our human nature, experiencing loss, betrayal, and the pain of both physical and mental suffering. For us, He gives himself completely on the cross.

The Christian question is not, "How can I avoid suffering?" The better question is, "What can I do with suffering that cannot be avoided (even when medical treatment has been provided)?" Jesus' answer is, "Unite your suffering to mine upon the cross." Then it will have meaning and purpose. It may be transformed into a love offering to God our Father, as the Son has made for us. And this act of love then allows the suffering to become redemptive. God will receive it and return it in some way at some time as a blessing, a help to us or some other person in need.

The cross carried and offered up becomes an act of truly heroic love!

"I urge you," St. Paul said, "to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God" (Rom. 12: 1).

"Apart from the cross," said St. Rose of Lima, " there is no other ladder by which we may get to Heaven."

There is the Latin motto, a long-time adage, "Stat crux dum volvitur orbis," which translates, "As the world turns, the cross stands firm." This is to say, one generation gives way to the next, cultures shift, technologies advance, and even entire civilizations rise and fall, but the spiritual truth of the cross remains permanent.

Please remember in prayer, and especially at the Mass, all those facing illness. May they be comforted by the peace that comes from Christ.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. Rusty Rabalais

Three Sunday Masses now have a nursery available

By Janet Tompkins

Getting the family ready for Sunday Mass is only half the battle. The other part begins when Mass starts if you have younger children! That's why we are happy to welcome Amanda Funk as our new nursery coordinator.

About six weeks ago, she began coordinating the nursery for the 9 and 10:30 a.m. Masses along with the 5:30 p.m. Sunday Mass. "It's been going well," she said. "I love the little kids and I'm glad I did this." Her daughter, Emory, who is 10 years old, also helps sometimes with her mom. Some of the Beta Club members from OLPS and a volunteer freshman in high school have also assisted. The older kids read books to the younger ones or engage them in play.

"I'm looking for some consistent volunteers especially for the 10:30 Mass," she said. The nursery is for infants to age 4, but occasionally an older sibling will stay to make a younger one feel more comfortable.

"I've relied on that nursery myself when Emory was younger," she said. "I know what it means to have a nursery."

The feedback from parents has also been positive.

Amanda replaces Tony Ihle, the coordinator for many years who established a good program for parents before she moved.



Coordinator Amanda Funk, seated in foreground, knows the value of nursery at Sunday Mass.

Amanda also works during the week for Alcon, training people to use the medical equipment for cataract surgery. Prior to that she worked at Louisiana Eye and Laser for 15 years assisting in the cataract surgeries. "During the week I'm on the road a lot," she said in a phone interview while driving back to Alexandria on a weekday.

A few parishioners have also donated some toys and books for the kids. For older students to volunteer to help at the nursery during Mass, just call Amanda at (318) 613-7019.

New youth minister Andries hopes to build future saints and open hearts

By Missy LaBorde

"Instead of praying for something, ask the Lord, 'How can I serve you?'"

These words from a speaker at a college religious conference hit home with Parker Andries and lit a fire in his heart. Now he is excited to share that fire with our OLPS youth.

Under his leadership, the Senior High youth group is off to a great start this fall. He plans to make youth group a sanctuary, a comfortable place for students. His plan is working with about 50 students attending each of the first weeks.

"I want it to be like a family so the kids will want to be there," Parker said. "I believe we have a bunch of future saints in our youth group, and we want to push them to achieve that goal…to help them open their hearts to what God wants for them."

Joining the OLPS staff is not his first venture into youth ministry. Parker attended youth group at OLPS and at St. Rita during high school. James Opdenhoff was the youth minister at St. Rita and had great influence on Parker's longing to serve the youth. While in Lafayette attending college and hoping to eventually work in physical therapy, Parker worked with the St. Pius Jr. High youth where James is the youth minister.

"I fell in love with youth ministry and knew I wanted to get back into it," Parker said. After a stint in the military and a transfer to LSUA, he is working with young people in the school system and in the church.

Parker's parents also played a role in his road to ministry.

"I was blessed to have amazing parents who have been consistent with their faith and that has been a big part of my formation," he said. His parents, Trey and Katy Andries, have been involved with youth ministry at church and within the school system. His dad helped with Junior high youth for several years, and his mom was the Fellowship of Christian Athletes sponsor at ASH for many years, holding daily prayer meetings with students and athletes on the campus.



Parker Andries

"We prayed together at school every day," Parker remembered. "That helped me learn how to involve the Lord in everything."

One favorite verse from that time in his spiritual development is 1Corinthians 10:31 which reads: "Whether then you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." He still looks to that verse in his daily activities as he now works as a PE teacher and soccer coach at Brame Middle School. He considers the school environment an ocean of possibilities for evangelizing youth through his work.

"The kids may not want what you have to offer, but you can help form their hearts and help plant the seeds," he said.

The position as Senior High Youth Minister at OLPS is giving Parker a direct role that will impact our parish youth to help them become the saints they are meant to be. After changing direction from physical therapy, he is strengthening spirits instead of bodies. And he is ready for the job.

All high school youth are invited to attend on Sunday evenings at 6:30 p.m. in the Divine Providence Center. "Students can just show up with an open heart, and all are welcome," Parker said.

Registration is open on the church website and youth can find updates by following olpsyouth on Instagram. Any young adults wishing to volunteer to assist with the program can contact Parker at 318-446-1277 or via email at pandries001@gmail.com.

The Elijah Cup refinished and ready to go around again

By Ashley Seeling

The OLPS Elijah Cup, a "Marian chalice" that dates to the 1950s, was recently professionally refinished and returned to our church, which resumed the Elijah Cup prayer ministry in early September.

In this ministry, the Elijah Cup is welcomed into the homes of parishioners, who pray in its presence for priestly and religious vocations.

The story of the Elijah Cup dates to the Old Testament (1 Kings 17:1-16) story of the prophet Elijah and a poor widow. Elijah asks her to bake him a cake to eat. The widow tells Elijah that she barely has enough flour and oil to make a cake of bread for herself and her son, much less a cake for Elijah. Regardless of her circumstances, the poor widow makes a cake for him. Because of her faith and love, God sees to it that the widow has enough flour and oil for the rest of her days.

Today's Elijah Cup is the symbolic vessel of God's promise to answer prayers for vocations with enough "flour and oil" of priests.

Father Luke LaFleur, the school chaplain at Holy Savior Menard Central High School, is the director of vocations for the Diocese of Alexandria. Father Luke recalls his own experience with the Elijah Cup in his childhood home. He remembers times when his family would "gather in the living room during the week to pray a rosary for an increase in priestly and religious vocations for our diocese. Additionally, each day of the week I would sneak into the living room while no one else was there, and I would privately pray the prayer [Serra Club Prayer for Vocations] myself." The proof of the power of prayer: LaFleur is not only a priest but serves as a spiritual leader for our junior high and high school at Menard.

"If you want (more) proof of [Elijah Cup's] fruitfulness," he said, "consider this: when OLPS had the Elijah Cup in the past, the parish was eventually blessed with three priests who were ordained in consecutive years: Fr. Brian Seiler (2016), Fr. Dutch Voltz (2017) and myself (2018)."

The Elijah Cup is a faith-based program in which parishioners volunteer to pray for vocations. People sign up and take home the Elijah Cup to pray daily for an increase in priests, deacons and religious life. The Elijah Cup rotates home visits each week and the cup is presented to families or individuals during Mass times. Each of the weekend Mass time slots will ask for volunteers for a particular month. For more information about having the Elijah Cup in your home, see the OLPS church bulletin to contact Sheri Semon.



Refinished Elijah Cup

OLPS Girl Scouts revamp, replenish Blessing Box on campus

By Wendy Malone

Several years ago, a Blessing Box was placed in front of the St. Timothy Center to provide a little help to people in the neighborhood. Over the years, our parish family has kept it stocked with jars of peanut butter, cans of soup, household supplies, and so many other items. As with all things, after many years, it needed a little tender loving care.

Matthew 25:35, 40 says, "For when I was hungry, you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome. Truly I tell you, when you did it to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to Me."

In the spirit of that scripture, Our Lady of Prompt Succor's Girl Scout Troop 1026 saw a need and decided to refurbish the Blessing Box. They reached out through social media, asking for help and donations. They repainted the box and repaired the doors. But they weren't satisfied with just making the Blessing Box look good again. They made another social media video asking for donations to fill the box.

How amazing is it when children live out what they learn about Jesus! Their willingness to see a need, respond with love, and serve others is a beautiful reminder that faith is more than something we learn — it is something we put into action. When we put our faith and love for Jesus into action, we become His hands and feet to those around us. What a wonderful example these girls have given us of what it means to love our neighbor and, in doing so, love Jesus.

May their example inspire all of us to look for ways, big and small, to put our faith into action and be a blessing to those around us.



Father Rusty poses with the Girl Scouts by their Blessing Box project in front of the St. Timothy Center.

Preservation Project

The new ramp at the St. Timothy Center was stained and painted to preserve it in late June. This is where the monthly charitable food distribution takes place.



Beginning the day in the presence of Jesus is absolute perfection

Lynn Brewer

Mission Statement

Our mission is to know Christ Jesus.
We are family, and this is my house.