# Our Lady of Prompt Succor Parish News

Summer 2026

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## PASTOR'S MESSAGE

### In anticipation of America's 250th Anniversary

Dear parishioners of OLPS Church and School:

On the coming July 4, 2026, our great nation will mark the 250th anniversary of its founding. This historic milestone prompts us to reflect not only on the political achievements of the United States, it is also important for us as a people of faith as a moment to remember and cherish our country's moral and spiritual foundations.

While the U.S. has ordinarily sought to uphold religious liberty, and has welcomed people of different faiths, we cannot deny that the Judeo-Christian tradition specifically has had the most profound influence from the beginning. This faith tradition, so cherished by Catholics, has from our nation's infancy, shaped its founding principles and laws and its public life.

The Declaration of Independence was adopted on July 4, 1776. It includes the now famous line: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." This conviction, that human dignity comes from God rather than government, stands at the heart of what has been called "the American experiment."

Our founding fathers drew heavily upon the biblical principles and moral teachings of the Jewish Old Testament and Christian New Testament. And what is so central to the Judeo-Christian heritage is that genuine liberty flourishes not by itself, automatically, but most of all when it is connected to striving for virtue and responsibility. In this heritage, we esteem not freedom "from" a moral compass, as some would propose, since this leads to freedom's opposite: slavery to sin. Rather, we esteem and seek freedom "to" live a good life in accordance with the will of God. For the Christian faithful, this means cultivating virtue as disciples of Christ, such as the saints did, embracing the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes.

As St. Paul said in his letter to the Galatians: For freedom Christ has set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the "yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5: 1). While this virtuous path can indeed be challenging, it seeks to live in the world, accepting and trying to abide by national government, without becoming enslaved or addicted to either the government or the world.

***Continued on page 2***



*Father Thomas Kennedy*



*Father Donnie Kuzma*

### See you later, Fr. Kennedy; welcome, Fr. Kuzma

**By Susan Harrison**

For the first time in five years parishioners at Our Lady of Prompt Succor will bid farewell to one parochial vicar and welcome a new one. Effective July 1, Father Thomas Kennedy will become pastoral administrator at three parishes in Avoyelles Parish and Father Donnie Kuzma will assume duties of parochial vicar at Our Lady of Prompt Succor as well as assistant director of vocations for the Diocese of Alexandria.

*" My first assignment will always be special to me."*
*-Fr. Kennedy*

Fr. Kuzma has spent the two years since his ordination as parochial vicar at Sacred Heart Church in Pineville. A native of Muncie, Indiana, Fr. Kuzma moved to Natchitoches to take a job as campus minister at Northwestern State University after completing his bachelor's degree in religious studies at Ball State University. He liked living in Central Louisiana, so when he felt called to study for the priesthood, he decided to train for the Diocese of Alexandria.

Fr. Kuzma collects coins and scrap metal. In case you wondered about his Polish name, he said he stands on the shoulders of great Polish saints such as St. Pope John Paul II and St. Maximillan Kolbe.

Fr. Kennedy's new duties will be at Christ the King Church in Simmesport, St. Peter Church in Bordelonville, and St. Michael Church in Rexmere.

"I am deeply grateful for my time here at OLPS," Fr. Kennedy said. "My first assignment will always be special to me." I made so many good friendships here and shared a lot of special moments with God's people.

"I never expected to be here for five years," he went on, "but God has his reasons, and I am thankful for these years. I won't be too far away, so hopefully this will simply be 'see you soon' and not 'goodbye.' Pray for me, and my new assignment, and I will continue to keep you all in my prayers.

"Pray for priests and religious to come from this parish and serve our local church. We need men and women to step forward to help lead the church, and for men and women to faithfully embrace the sacrament of matrimony so we can continue to build up the kingdom of Christ together."

# ‘Whole family conversion’ captures deNux family story

**By Bob Tompkins**

Michael and Stephanie deNux bring to the table a Catholic conversion story at a time when we’re reading and hearing more about such stories across America and even the globe.

Michael and Stephanie are both graduates of Tioga High School – Michael in 2009 and Stephanie in ’10. Michael was raised in a non-denominational family, and Stephanie was raised in a Southern Baptist family.

Michael, believing he was not suited to pursuing a college degree, joined the Army after high school. His father had been in the Army, and he decided he wanted to do what his dad did in the service -- fly helicopters. His parents, Peter and Kari deNux, supported him in that decision, and, as Michael said, “I have not looked back.”

His mom and dad, when they had encouraged him to decide about his future, told him, “It’s going to come faster than you want it to.”

And just like that, in 2010-11 he served 11 months as a private in his first tour of duty in Afghanistan.

“I saw some horrific things,” he said about his time with medivac operations during the American military surge in Afghanistan, providing transportation for the sick and wounded.

Michael and Stephanie started dating in the fall of 2012, while she was at Louisiana College (later LCU). Not long after Stephanie graduated, they got married on Aug. 9, 2014. Michael was soon off to flight school at Ft. Rucker in Alabama, and Stephanie to Baton Rouge to pursue a master’s degree at LSU.

Stephanie graduated from LSU in 2015 with her master’s in social work, and she is a licensed clinical social worker and board approved clinical supervisor. After Michael graduated from flight school, they moved from Ft. Rucker back to Louisiana, and Stephanie began as a social worker at Rapides Regional in 2015. She worked at the VA Medical Center for a few years before taking her current job in October of ’22 at the Louisiana Army National Guard at Camp Beauregard providing counseling services to National Guard service members and their families.

Michael did a 10-month tour in Iraq/Syria in 2017-18 with an air assault battalion. “I saw every part of Iraq you could possibly see by air,” he said. “By that time, it was more of a peacekeeping mission.” He also did a tour in Washington, D.C., in 2023-24.

He and Stephanie have two daughters, Amelia, 6, and Autumn, 5.

Michael said a good friend at flight school invited him to go to Sunday Mass with him, and “I fell in love with it.” However, a lot of deployments got in the way of attending Mass with any regularity. He started to yearn to become a Catholic, and talked to Stephanie about joining him, but she is from a family of staunch Southern Baptists.

Nonetheless, they started going to Mass on occasion at the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception while they lived in Natchitoches, and when they moved to Pineville, Michael’s friend from Our Lady of Prompt Succor, Casey Cole, began to challenge him about his faith.

He invited him to an ACTS retreat, and Michael declined. He invited him again in June of 2025, and Michael accepted and was chosen.

“What a life-changing event that was!” he said.

Stephanie made the women’s ACTS retreat this past January, and they both went to OCIA classes – the classes for mostly non-Catholic adults wishing to be initiated into the Catholic faith.

“It started off a little rough for me,” said Stephanie, “but by the third or fourth class, I was starting to get excited about going to class. My retreat in January was like a confirmation that I was doing the right thing. I recorded the classes that Michael couldn’t make because of his work, and we’d talk for 2-3 hours about them to have an understanding. It’s hard to comprehend but (husband-wife instructors) Steve and Robin (Gauthier) explain it in such a way that it is easy to understand.”

They finished the classes and were welcomed into the Catholic faith with their Confirmation and first Holy Eucharist, “and we’ve been on fire ever since,” said Michael, now a 35-year-old Chief Warrant Officer (CW3) and Blackhawk instructor pilot. “I think it’s changed our lives.”

What’s more, they arranged for their two daughters to be baptized by Father Rusty on May 24.

“The deNux family,” said Father Rusty Rabalais, OLPS pastor, “is a great example of conversion amid the news of increased converts to the Catholic faith at this time. In their circumstance, it is ‘whole family conversion.’”



*Fr. Rusty poses with Stephanie and Michael deNux after the baptism of their daughters Autumn (left) and Amelia.*

***(Pastor’s Message from page 1)***

Through our nation’s history, the Christian Faith has inspired so many citizens to build schools, hospitals and churches. Religious leaders and communities have played a huge role in movements for education, care for the less fortunate, and for individual and civil rights. Belief in God’s Providence, such as we recognized in the construction of our church parish’s own “Divine Providence Center,” has sustained the people of our land through war, economic hardship and different crises.

We may recall the example of St. Frances Cabrini who established so many schools, orphanages and social services, and cared for immigrants in late 19th & early 20th century America. Rev. M.L. King, a Christian minister who argued in his doctoral dissertation that God is a personal God, was influential in the securing of civil rights in the 1960s.

We witnessed the swell of people turning to God and church services after the tragic events of September 11, 2001. And while secularism has grown in the West in this 21st century, still, by God’s Providence and following the recent three-year National Eucharistic Revival, we are witnessing even now in the U.S. a renewed interest in the Catholic faith. Good news!

The Washington Monument, built in two main phases between 1848 and 1884, is a 555-foot white marble obelisk which stands at the center of the National Mall in Washington, D.C. It is the tallest structure in our Capitol City and the tallest obelisk in the world. The east face of the capstone at the heights of the monument is inscribed with the Latin words “LAUS DEO,” meaning “Praise be to God!” This inscription is positioned to capture the first rays of the morning sun and is a simple yet powerful reminder that recognition of and gratitude to God is an essential part of our nation’s founding and livelihood.

As we celebrate the U.S. Semiquincentennial this summer, may we as a people cherish and help to foster for future generations the goodness and timelessness of our Judeo-Christian heritage. Even the greatest of nations are temporal. Our true home is eternal, in Heaven!

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord!” (Ps. 33: 12 )

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. Rusty Rabalais

# Retired teacher Susan McNeal - She never left 2nd grade till now!

**By Janet Tompkins**

Susan McNeal planned to major in education when she registered for college, but her adviser said there were a lot of education majors and not a lot of pay in the field and so she hesitated and instead went into fashion merchandising. That was what she was doing when she signed up to teach CCD classes at Our Lady of Prompt Succor.

"Sister Viriginia Lee was in there," Susan remembers. "She said to me - you know you're a teacher. The Holy Spirit has called you to teach." Susan protested that she didn't have an education degree. Sister Virginia Lee was persuasive, and she signed up in 1990 to teach second grade and got started on that long-awaited teaching degree.

That first year she left at the end of March for the birth of one of her daughters. When she returned, she first took a Pre-K position at St. James Episcopal Day Say School where she stayed for eight years while also teaching CCD at Prompt Succor.

But in 2000 she returned to the OLPS 2A classroom that she would claim for the next 26 years! Second grade is an important year for students because they make two sacraments - Reconciliation and Holy Communion. Susan, who usually starts her day with 6:30 Mass, enjoyed that part of her teaching as well.

One of her favorite memories is a tradition passed down to her from a former teacher, the late Lou Jean Wasson.

"After recess, I loved when we came in from lunch. I'd leave the lights off and say a decade of the rosary and then I'd read to them for a while -- good literature for them." She said some of her past students come up to her now and recall those moments of her class. The practice offered a bit of peace and daily devotion to these second graders.

She also remembers so many First Communions when they would practice and practice until the special Mass where they finally received the Eucharist. She recalls seeing the students rushing after Mass from the church to Olinger Hall for the reception. "They are all running and skipping down the sidewalk so happy to have finally received the sacrament," she said.

Mrs. McNeal thanked her husband, Mike, who supported her to teach at a Catholic school for lesser pay than other schools, while he wasn't even Catholic at the time. (He later chose to join the Church as most of the parish knows of his help and participation.) "I could do what was my heart's desire," she said. She also praised Sister Virginia Lee, longtime principal. "She was my mentor and a prayerful leader."



*Retiring second-grade teacher Susan McNeal got a hug and a bouquet of flowers from Fr. Rusty at an end-of-the year OLPS awards ceremony, honoring her 26 years of service. Principal Meredith Rhoads looks on.*

Other memories include:

- Leading the Children's Holy Hour and bringing them to the altar and seeing their faces: "They are so innocent."
- Winning the dance-off contest in a blow-up leprechaun costume for Catholic Schools Week.
- Winning the Kick Ball Game at Field Day with the teacher's team.
- The year of Hurricane Katrina when she had 23 students and then they took six more from New Orleans. She was glad to help these families through a rough time. ("I've heard from some of these families since then," she said.)
- Planting a class garden with the astute help of Beth Chapman, who continued even after her grandchild went on to the next grade. One year they grew pumpkins.

She tallies that she had 150 Pre-K students, 600 second graders and countless CCD pupils. She praised the pastors, administrative staff and principals, noting that she worked the longest under Principal Jo Tassin, who was a great leader, she said.

No doubt her students remember her, but she also keeps up with them. By her count, she has lost eight former students and with their second-grade faces still in her mind, she prays for them.

"When you are doing God's will, there is so much joy in it," said Mrs. McNeal. "I loved my vocation."

# OLPS School social media videos growing in talent, popularity

**By Wendy Malone**

The fun videos occasionally posted on Our Lady of Prompt Succor School's Facebook are seemingly getting better with time and they serve several purposes.

They range from announcing registration for the upcoming school year to celebrating the beginning of summer vacation. Some posts feature students, some feature teachers, and some include both. No matter who is involved, they always make us laugh and smile.

One posted just before the end of school, to the music of "Hold On," by the popular vocal group Wilson Phillips, with several teachers dancing and lip-synching in the hall, had the looks of a Broadway production. Almost.

How do these videos come about?

Most of the ideas originate on social media. A teacher or parent may see a video online and then share the idea with Jessica Cole, the education technology coordinator.

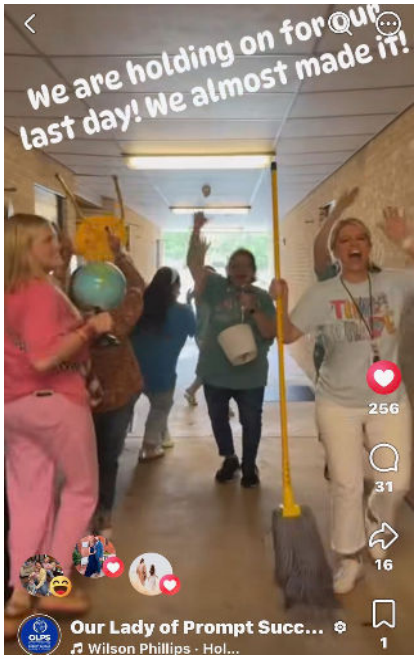
Next, a GroupMe message goes out, letting faculty and staff know they should be prepared to take part in the video.

The students are always eager to participate. Some adults are excited to take part, while others need a little persuading. Several takes are often needed to get things just right - sometimes because someone forgets what to do and sometimes because someone gets tickled and everyone else starts laughing.

While these videos may last only a few seconds, they capture the spirit of our Bulldog school community. They provide a glimpse into the relationships, laughter and sense of family that make Our Lady of Prompt Succor School such a special place.

Whether celebrating an important event or simply sharing a moment of fun, these videos remind us that learning and joy go hand in hand.




*The last OLPS School Facebook video of the school year was a grand finale of singing, dancing and smiles.*

# Father Antony leads Camino adventures in Spain with Joy

**By Kristine Antoon**

Father Joy Antony, who is in residence at OLPS, has become our area's Camino priest.

His homilies often reflect on his past Camino experiences.

For thousands of years, pilgrims have walked to Spain's Santiago de Compostela, which ends at the magnificent cathedral housing the remains of St. James. Father Joy became curious about "the Way" in 2023 and joined a trip with Anita and Tony Go, Dr. Joe Landreneau and Fr. Martin Laird. They walked the La Plata route, which was challenging, and stayed in various hostels along the route.

Although the terrain was grueling and he had not trained enough, this journey proved to be a dynamic experience, and Father Joy was eager to experience it again. In 2024, Fr. Joy led two groups on the Way. This is when he realized the blessing of leading Camino pilgrimages, and this has been a gift for so many.

What is it about this Camino that makes such a lasting impression on Father Joy and others? Why would anyone go on vacation to walk 15 miles a day and stay in modest hotels?

Father Joy calls it a "spiritual adventure" -- a big adventure every day with a family of pilgrims who share meals and Mass together. Between being in the great outdoors, walking through enchanted forests and villages, and the social interactions with all your fellow pilgrims, there is a tangible "JOY" you cannot put into words. As a group, you are part of a wonderful traveling church on the way to heaven, and there are no words to fully explain it.

Father Joy has led five Camino pilgrimages, and he will be walking with another group this fall. When asked "how many more," he will tell you there is no limit. For the health, spiritual and social benefits he and so many others have enjoyed, he will continue his ministry on the Way.

"There is a simplicity," he said, "to traveling light, enjoying nature at a slow speed, and depending on the kindness of strangers that translates into all parts of your life. The best kind of addiction."

Father Joy recently was among 19 pilgrims, which consisted of 3 married couples, 4 young adults, and 8 ladies on a two-week journey. We all loved his optimism.

"Today will be flat," he'd encourage when it got hard, or "around the next corner we will start going downhill."

He offered instruction on the finer points of blister management, making kefir milk, and walking properly: "chest up, eyes up, core engaged."

"Father Joy," said one of the pilgrims, "has eyes that seek God in nature but also in each person he encounters. He has a love of laughter and fellowship that he freely shares. What a treasure he is and how blessed are we for his beautiful vocation as a priest."

Buen Camino!



*Father Joy takes a break to take in the view on recent Camino hike.*

## VBS theme: Rainforest Falls - Trusting in God's Love

The halls and classrooms of Our Lady of Prompt Succor Catholic Church came alive June 15-19 as about 120 children from kindergarten through sixth grade embarked on a faith-filled adventure through the rainforest during our annual Vacation Bible School.

The young parishioners explored the beauty of God's creation while discovering an even greater truth: God's love is always with us. Through Bible stories, hands-on activities, and discussions, the children got tips on how to trust in God's love as they go through the joys and challenges of their lives.

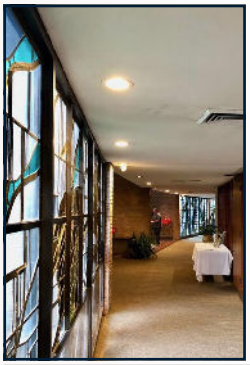
Each day the youngsters dabbled in arts and crafts, played games, sang songs, and learned Bible verses that we hope strengthened their relationship with Christ. Interactive lessons brought Scripture to life.

The children also had opportunities to deepen their understanding of our faith and traditions. They learned about the saints and important aspects of our Catholic identity, including the brown scapular, the tabernacle, the Act of Hope, the sacrament of Confirmation, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. These lessons were designed to help our young parishioners grow not only in knowledge but also in their love for Jesus and His Church.

VBS was a wonderful opportunity for children to make new friends, strengthen their faith, and create lasting memories in a fun, Christ-centered environment.



*Children at play during Vacation Bible School pose (some of them) for picture.*



## Lighting the way

*New and brighter lights were added in May to the church's entrance corridor.*

### Mission Statement

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

## Farewell, Connie Fiorenza, oldest parishoner

A Memorial Mass was celebrated on May 15 for Connie Fiorenza, the oldest parishioner of Our Lady of Prompt Succor Church, who died March 11. She was 101 years old.

She and her late husband, Tony, who died 15 years ago, were married for 63 years. They had four sons, all married: Ron (Patrice), David (Kathleen), Alan (Tricia) and Jim (Sharon), 10 grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren.

She loved to cook family meals, especially Sunday dinners. She was a devout Catholic and involved with several church ministries.

She spent the last several years of her life at Brookdale Assisted Living, where she was the ringleader for the resident Catholics who attended weekly Eucharistic services.

