



Ecclesia

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF PEMBROKE

Parish-based sacramental initiation process enriches family involvement



A parish-based confirmation initiation process recently started at St. Columbkille Cathedral parish in Pembroke. Below, Bob Ford, Mary Ford and Donna Biggs (standing) are catechists for St. Columbkille Cathedral Parish.



Under a new directive from Bishop Michael Mulhall, the responsibility for the sacramental initiation of children is to be placed in the parish, where parents will be assisted in their role as primary educator in faith for their child. This change will be a shift for many parish communities where the Catholic school has had a main role in preparing children for the sacraments.

Parishes such as Our Lady and Sorrows in Petawawa and St. Francis Xavier in Renfrew have been offering a parish-based sacramental initiation process for a number of years now.

A similar process has begun at St. Columbkille Cathedral in Pembroke this fall.

The practice has also been in place in some parishes in the Mattawa Zone of the Diocese for some time. A parish-based sacramental initiation process has also been practice in Quebec parishes since Catholic education funding ended there many years ago.

“We’re following in the footsteps of others,” says Fr. Ryan Holly of St. Columbkille. “It reconnects families with their home parish, and enriches the family experience of faith.”

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Parish-based sacramental initiation

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The new policy builds on the promise parents make at the baptism of their children to train them in the practice of the faith.

“The Church really wants to help parents take those promises seriously,” says Jason Dedo, director of faith formation and leadership development for the Pembroke diocese.

“Through each of these sacraments, the participants are being initiated into a faith community,” Dedo adds. “It is not something that should be taken lightly.”

“Before entering into sacramental preparation, parents and children must understand the level of commitment needed for this journey,” states the new policy for sacramental initiation of children.

Fr. Holly points out that the sacraments enrich the life of faith, and are not “stand-alone events” or rites of passage.

“People need to understand what is happening when they celebrate the sacraments,” he says. “We need to reclaim the importance of Sunday and our celebration of Sunday mass.”

Helen Heath says that is exactly what happened when her Petawawa family engaged in confirmation preparations last year. She expected her daughters to learn more about their Church and the Catholic faith.

What she didn’t expect was her own reconnection.

“It has definitely brought me back,” she says, admitting that while she was raised in the Catholic tradition, she had drifted away from the Church in her adult years.

“I hadn’t realized what I was missing,” Heath says. “It’s been a positive influence. We have to take care of ourselves emotionally, physically and spiritually.”

Parents at Our Lady of Sorrows in Petawawa have been expected to take an active role in the parish-based confirmation process for the past five years.

Parish Religious Education Coordinator Glenna Mackenzie says the decision to move the responsibility for sacramental initiation from the school to the parish was made for a number of reasons.

The provincial grade 7 curriculum does not include material related to confirmation preparation, so teachers had to provide the instruction as an add-on to their regular work. It was also felt that preparation in dedicated sessions at the church, with follow-up work at home, would provide more opportunity to focus in a less hectic environment.

The approach is used to prepare children for the sacraments of reconciliation, Eucharist and confirmation.

Mackenzie works closely with the grade 2 and

“People need to understand what is happening when they celebrate the sacraments.”

7 teachers in the school next door to the church, meeting with them in early September to set out their course of action for the year.

“It’s certainly a cooperative thing,” she says. “It is fortunate that they are just next door and we communicate often.”

The most important partner in the venture, though, is an active parent.

“Students have homework and parents are expected to be available to help and to check that it is completed,” Mackenzie explains. “At our parent meetings, we provide them with material to help the students and we discuss the content.”

Mackenzie has heard many positive remarks from Petawawa families who have participated in the process. For many, it has been an incentive to revisit busy schedules and set aside some spiritual time. For families facing the uncertainties and fears associated with military postings to Afghanistan, it has provided strength, reassurance and hope.

One mother talked of the peace she found in lighting a candle and saying a prayer before she and her daughter began each of their sessions leading up to first communion.

“It helped bring back things that I had

forgotten,” she said of the readings and information they shared.

It also provided opportunities they otherwise wouldn’t have had for one-on-one conversations about God and their role in the church.

“She understood what was going on,” the mother said of her daughter’s first experience of the Eucharist.

That level of understanding, and the family formation experience, is at the heart of a new directive.

“We’re living in a time where so many families are disconnected from parish life,” comments Jason Dedo, “If the only time they come to church is for their first communion or confirmation, we’ve all missed the whole point.”

Fr. Peter Proulx says the church and home-based Initiation process has had a profound effect at St. Francis Xavier Parish in Renfrew.

“It turned this parish around,” he says of the process that was introduced about eight years ago.

“The parish has become so much richer, because there is a new level of understanding and sharing that begins at the family level and builds.”



A parish-based sacramental initiation process was introduced in Petawawa’s Our Lady of Sorrows parish five years ago and is used to prepare children for the sacraments of reconciliation, Eucharist and confirmation.

A message from Bishop Mulhall: A time for Thanksgiving

My dear Faithful of the Diocese of Pembroke:

Though it is not a feast day on our Catholic liturgical calendar, Thanksgiving corresponds to many changes in our seasons as time passes by swiftly. Cottages are closed up for the year, university and college students return home for the first holiday since school began and the beauty of the autumn leaves comes and goes far too quickly.

This time of year brings a certain melancholy as well and for some it is a time of great emotional trial with uncontrolled feelings of uncertainty and restlessness. It is good for us to keep in our minds and prayers those who find this time of year particularly difficult.

The identification of a day on the calendar to give thanks can provide for us a wonderful

opportunity to reinforce our daily act of thanksgiving to God for His many blessings. I mention this because so often the most important and profound aspects of our faith run the risk of being trivialized and generalized and we lose something essential in our daily life of faith. This happens to all of us because of our weakness as human beings. Renewing a spirit of thanksgiving can bear much fruit, and it can be done so easily.

Let us think of those gifts that the Lord has bestowed upon us. I can offer to you a generic list, but it is far more rewarding to think of those gifts that have been uniquely given to each of us—the strength and consolation of our faith, the people in our lives, security, health and the abundance of material goods. Recognizing that these gifts have been given to us and that they are capable of being lost helps to direct our minds and hearts naturally to the God who provides us with such bounty.

A prayer or act of thanksgiving is a wonderful medicine against all kinds of inordinate thinking. When we realize God's goodness, we

automatically find a proper and peaceful perspective in life. The next time we feel that our thoughts are not ordered properly or that we are becoming upset too easily, use this medicine and see how quickly the Lord restores our peace.

"I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my supplication... What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me?"

This beautiful passage from Psalm 115 presents us with a wonderful question. We have experienced the Lord's goodness and bounty, we have given thanks to the Lord with all our heart and then this question always arrives in our thoughts – "What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me?"

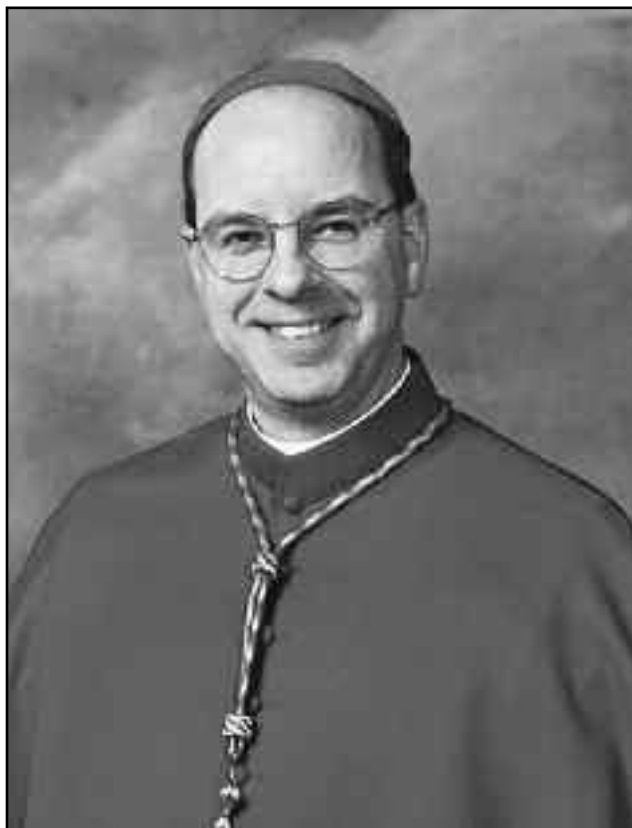
How can I give back to the Lord even a fraction of what He has given to me? What can I give to the Lord that would make Him happy and bring to Him delight. Why try to form an answer when the author of the psalm has already answered for us?

"O Lord I am your servant... I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving... I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of His people... I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord."

My fervent prayer in this Year of the Priest is that we might bring our own unique thanksgiving to the Eucharist and lift up the cup of salvation. Let us see in our living priests and in those who have served the people of the Diocese so well in the past years a precious gift of service, which allows us to give perfect thanks to the Lord. I am convinced more and more, even in the midst of our difficulties and challenges in the Diocese, that if we value the precious service of the priesthood, we will be instruments of the Lord who is calling forth vocations to the priesthood at this very moment.

In closing, I wish to thank so many of you who have made known to me your intentions and prayers. They mean a great deal and are bearing wonderful fruit.

† **Michael Mulhall**
Bishop of Pembroke



"Screening in Faith for Responsible Ministry"

The parish manual titled "Screening in Faith for Responsible Ministry" has been renewed and updated. The revised manual has been reprinted and circulated to parishes this past September.

The only significant policy change is related to "Police record checks". In addition to the initial police records check the new policy states that annually all volunteers and employees in high-risk positions must submit a signed Offence Declaration. It has been determined that this is the practice in other dioceses and school boards.

It is essential that this process, which has been ongoing since 2004, be kept current in order for it to be an effective means of protecting all the people of God in our diocese. Parishioners can expect to be contacted with this updated information from their parishes.

Bishop Mulhall is grateful to the many volunteers who give generously of their time and talents to the programs and ministries offered in their parishes.



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The Year for Priests

a reflection by Father Howard Chabot

It was a little prayer card. On it was written “Do only what can be offered to the good Lord”. Until recently I did not know the origin of the quotation, nor am I able to recall the name of the contemplative sister who gave it to me. I have held on to it though, because I consider it a little gem of wisdom to help me keep on track.

It was in reading the letter of His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, proclaiming a Year for Priests that I discovered these words were those of Saint John Marie Vianney. They inspired him to virtuously live the evangelical counsels and helped him to “serve God as He desires to be served”.

Saint John Marie Vianney was the parish priest of the village of Ars in France. He is most often remembered simply by this title ‘Curé d’Ars’ (The parish priest of Ars). On August 4, this year, we observed the 150th anniversary of his passage from this life and birth to eternal life. Because of his outstanding priestly zeal and concern for God’s People, the Curé of Ars had long been considered the patron of parish priests. Our Holy Father has recently proclaimed him the patron saint of all priests and a model of priestly virtue. His life is a point of focus for priests during this Year for Priests.

The intention of this year for priests according to the Pope’s letter is “to deepen the commitment of all priests to interior renewal for the sake of a stronger and more incisive witness to the Gospel in today’s world.” This special year began on the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, July 19 last, and will conclude on the same Solemnity in 2010. Reflecting on the touching words of the saintly priest of Ars that “the priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus”, the Holy Father invites us to meditate “with heartfelt gratitude on the immense gift which priests represent, not only for the Church, but also for humanity itself.”

In his homily for the inauguration of the year for priests, His Holiness referenced his earlier letter to priests saying “I hope that my Letter will prove a help and encouragement to you in making this Year a graced opportunity to grow ever closer to Jesus, who counts on us, his

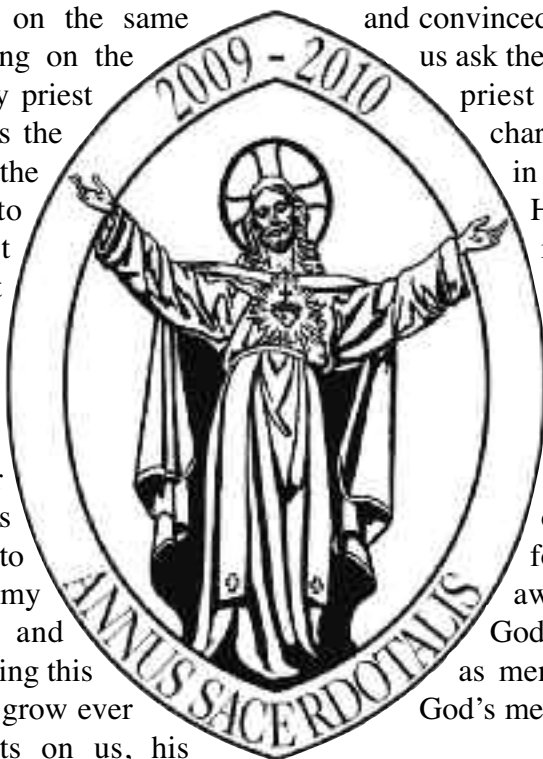
ministers, to spread and build up his Kingdom, and to radiate his love and his truth. As I invited you at the conclusion of my Letter: “in the footsteps of the Curé of Ars, let yourselves be enthralled by Christ. In this way you too will be, for the world in our time, heralds of hope, reconciliation and peace!”

The words of his homily were a challenging call to priests to conversion, holiness and faithfulness. “Dear priests, the summons to conversion and to trust in God’s mercy also applies to us; we too must humbly, sincerely and unceasingly implore the heart of Jesus to preserve us from the terrifying risk of endangering the very people we are obliged to save.” Recalling his opportunity to venerate the heart of the Curé of Ars, the Holy Father referred to it as “a heart that blazed with divine love, experienced amazement at the thought of the dignity of the priest, and spoke to the faithful in touching and sublime tones, telling them that “after God, the priest is everything! ...Only in heaven will he fully realize what he is”.

“Dear Brothers,” the Pope said in concluding his homily “let us cultivate this same amazement, in order to carry out our ministry with generosity and dedication, and to maintain the true “fear of God” in our hearts: the fear, that is, that we can deprive of so much good, by our negligence or fault, the souls entrusted to our care, or that – God forbid – we can do them harm. The Church needs holy priests; ministers capable of helping the faithful to experience the Lord’s merciful love, and convinced witnesses of that love. ...let

us ask the Lord to set the heart of every priest afire with that “pastoral charity” which can make him one in heart and mind with Jesus the High Priest, and thus to imitate Jesus in complete self-giving.”

Already this Year for Priests has given me an opportunity to reflect on the mystery and gift of having been “called by name, chosen and sent”. Please pray for me and for all priests as we await the full realization of God’s gift. Pray for our renewal as men of prayer and ministers of God’s mercy as was the Curé of Ars.



Litany for Priests

Jesus, you emptied yourself for our sake
fill our priests with your spirit of
selfless love.

Jesus, you became poor for our sake,
enrich our priests with your spirit of
generosity.

Jesus, you are the Word made flesh,
give our priests strength and
energy to preach your Good news.

Jesus, you sought out the sick and rejected,
touch our priests with your healing power.

Jesus, you always trusted in the Father,
help our priests to trust in your promises.

Jesus, you were strong in the face of
temptation and dejection,
support our priests in times of trial.

Jesus, you became the servant of all,
strengthen our priests for your service.

Jesus, you feed us with your body and blood,
nourish our priests with your compassionate
concern for all.

Jesus, you died for us so that we may be free,
grant our priests the ability to bring that
freedom to all people.

Jesus, you rose to glory and conquered death,
enliven our priests as messengers of
hope to all.

Jesus, you are the image of the unseen God,
show your face to our priests.
Bless and care for our priests,
give them joy and peace in their service,
love for you and all your people,
confidence in your loving kindness, and
an ability to recover from their mistakes.
May the Holy Spirit give them renewed
energy and a creative impulse to proclaim
the Good News to the ends of the earth.

Amen.

Mary, mother of us all, watch over all your
children, especially our priests.
St. John Marie Vianney, patron of priests,
protect our priests with your constant
intercession.

*The Franciscan Missionary Union
New York*

Family formation guides home-based faith development

Anna Sicoli-Nichol knows the time and effort she puts into the family formation program at St. Anthony Mission in Haliburton is worthwhile.

“We’re doing the job that the guy upstairs wants us to do,” she says.

Her reward comes when a small child automatically bows his head and folds his hands to pray, or when an older child asks a challenging question during the monthly class she shares with other family formation participants her age.

“That tells you that their religion is not foreign to them,” Sicoli-Nichol says. “They’re comfortable.”

The comfort comes through weekly guided discussions and activities at home with their parents and siblings.

As the coordinator of the local family formation program, Sicoli-Nichol organizes monthly meetings where the children and parents come together to prepare for the following three weeks of family formation at home. She works in cooperation with other program leaders and, most importantly, with the parents who have chosen to take part in the program.

This year, there are about eight families participating in the Haliburton area. Following

each monthly meeting, they are given home studies that the parents are invited to lead on a weekly basis. The program includes three levels of study: “Little Lambs” for pre-kindergarten children, a package for grades 1 to 3, and more advanced material for grades 4 to 6.

Families are given step-by-step lesson plans, craft materials, CDs and other teaching aids to support them in their one-hour sessions at home each week.

“It’s a very rich program,” says Sicoli-Nichol. “It’s people-friendly and kid-friendly.”

This is the third year for family formation to be offered at St. Anthony. This year, the monthly meetings will be offered after school on Fridays, complete with an opening snack time, the lessons for both children and parents, and a potluck dinner.

“It’s building relationships,” Sicoli-Nichol says, pointing to the practical elements like saying grace before the meal as well as the opportunity for children who may not mix at school to get together as a community.

“They have church as their focal point,” she says. “They can make connection through their Catholic knowledge.”

As religious education convenor at Our Lady of Sorrows parish in Petawawa, Glenna Mackenzie has been involved in family formation for seven years.

“Parents just love it,” she reports, explaining that the combination of a structured program with solid materials makes it simple, even for parents who may lack a bit of confidence about their own expertise in the Catholic teachings.

The materials provide all of the background information and practical tips parents need to be successful.

“It’s an opportunity for them to make the time, and to bring the messages from church home,” says Mackenzie. “It’s a chance for families to focus, for parents to get involved and pass on the Catholic faith to their children, and to make it a way of life.”



On June 6 Martine Perry of Haliburton, left, received First Communion. Father Richard Starks received a spiritual bouquet. With Martine and Father Starks are Michelle Perry and Shaina Hunter, right.



And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on your doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:6-9

Youth in the diocese

One Body, One Spirit in Christ

After 10 years, and still going strong, the Diocese of Alexandria-Cornwall finds hundreds of volunteers to put together an event for 500 high school-age youth in an effort to provide an opportunity for them to encounter Christ and the young Catholic Church.

In July, several young people from the Diocese of Pembroke took part in the tenth anniversary year of the “Journey to the Father” summer weekend youth conference held in the small town of St. Raphael. This town comes alive with song, prayer and activity as the weekend unfolds a new theme each year. “One Body, One Spirit in Christ” was the focus for the conference this summer and youth were asked to bring food

donations for the poor in “tin” in honour of the tenth anniversary. Among others, Bishop Durocher of Alexandria-Cornwall and Archbishop Prendergast of Ottawa were in attendance, enjoying the company of the young people.

The weekend is meant to provide time out of everyday life to pray, learn and witness what God has done in so many people’s lives. It is a time to experience the living Christ through His body, the Church. For the young people and chaperones who attended, it was an important step on their personal “journey to the

Father”. Anyone interested in attending next year’s conference with other young people from the diocese of Pembroke can contact the Family Life and Youth Ministry Office (FLYMO) at (613) 632-7933 x. 208.



Participants and chaperones at “Journey to the Father” held in St. Raphael, Ontario, in July.

CWL Report

The CWL members across the Diocese of Pembroke have elected a new slate of officers for 2009-2011. Under the guidance of spiritual advisor Fr. Pat Tait of St. Columbkille Cathedral, they are: President Bev Drouin, St. Anthony in Chalk River, Past-President Suzanne Mullins, St. John Chrysostom in Arnprior, President-Elect Donna Provost, St. Mary in Quyon, First Vice-President and Treasurer Joan Kelly, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Braeside, Second Vice-President and Spiritual Development Eleanor Foran, St. Mary in Quyon, Secretary Dianne Kelly, St. James the Less in Eganville, and as Standing Committee Chairpersons: Education and Health Ella Box, Our Lady of Fatima in Renfrew,

Legislation and Resolutions Joanna Nicholson, St. Francis Xavier in Renfrew, Communications June West, Our Lady of Good Counsel in Deep River, Community Life, Nina Sullivan, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Braeside, Christian Family Life Lynne Kelly, Our Lady of Good Counsel in Deep River and Life member Liaison Sheila Bielaskie, St. Michael in Douglas.

Upcoming events include the Fall meeting on November 7, at Our Lady of Good Counsel in Deep River, the Spring meeting, April 24, 2010 at St. John Chrysostom in Arnprior, and our 89th Annual Diocesan Convention, May 29, at Our Lady of Lourdes in Pembroke.



Above right: The Pembroke contingent at the 62nd Annual Provincial CWL Convention in Midland, Ontario. Front row: Marlene Kovalskie, Bev Drouin and Suzanne Mullins. Back row: left to right Andrea Dumouchel, Carmel Rumleskie, Joan Kelly, Joan Lemay, Donna Shaddick, Jackie Gaudreau. Right: Irene Perrault, Bev Drouin and Suzanne Mullins at the 89th Annual National CWL Convention in St. John’s, Nfld. One of us got screeched in, can you guess who?

The Holy Canadian Martyrs

By Jason Dedo

This feast honours St. Jean de Brébeuf, St. Isaac Jogues and companions who are often referred to as the Holy Canadian Martyrs or the North American Martyrs. They are considered the secondary patron saints of Canada, coming after St. Joseph, the primary patron saint. These eight men, who died between 1642 and 1649, came from Europe to minister as missionaries to the North American natives. Six of the Martyrs were Jesuit (Society of Jesus) priests – Isaac Jogues, Jean de Brébeuf, Antoine Daniel, Gabriel Lalemant, Charles Garnier and Noël Chabanel, and two were lay assistants – René Goupil and Jean de Lalande.

These zealous missionaries came to the land of the Huron to live among the natives and share with them the Christian faith. The region where they lived, known as Huronia, is in the Georgian Bay area of Ontario. From the beginning of their missionary activity, they faced danger as they found themselves in the midst of a war between the Iroquois and Huron nations. Some of them were captured and escaped only to return to their missionary activities. Some were tortured before they were martyred.

The first five martyrs (Brébeuf, Daniel, Lalemant, Garnier and Chabanel) were killed in a raid by the Iroquois in 1649 in Huronia. Goupil was killed in 1642 by Mohawk warriors near Auriesville, New York. Jogues and de Lalande were killed by disaffected Iroquois warriors in 1646 while on a peace embassy to the Iroquois.

Shrines erected in memory of the Martyrs can be found at Midland, Ontario and Auriesville, New York. Biographies on the Martyrs and information about Martyrs Shrine in Midland, Ontario can be found at www.martyrs-shrine.com/index.cfm.

In the Diocese of Pembroke, the name of the parish in Combermere honours the Martyrs who had been canonized in 1930 by Pope Pius XI. The universal Church recognizes their feast day to be October 19, but in Canada it is celebrated on September 26.



Obituary: Father Archibald Afelskie

Rev. Archibald Afelskie of the Diocese of Pembroke died at St. Francis Memorial Hospital in Barry's Bay on July 27, 2009 at the age of 72.

Born on July 15, 1937 to Roman and Mary Afelskie of Killaloe, he received his elementary and secondary education at St. Andrew's Catholic School there and attended the village church. After graduating from high school, he pursued philosophical and theological studies at St. Augustine Seminary in Scarborough.

He was ordained sub-deacon at St. Michael Cathedral in Toronto in 1962, received the diaconate in September of that year, and was ordained to the priesthood the following spring, on May 27, 1963. Officiating at the ordination ceremony in St. Andrew church in Killaloe was Bishop William J. Smith.

He was assigned to St. Martin of Tours parish in Whitney for his first summer placement, moving later in the year to St. John Chrysostom in Arnprior and Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Braeside where he served for the next six years. Fr. Afelskie then moved to the Quebec side of the parish, leading service at St. Alphonsus in Chapeau and its missions Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Waltham, Holy Spirit in Nichabeau and Notre-Dame-du-Lac in Desjardinsville until 1973 and The Most Holy Name of Jesus in Pembroke in 1971.

Fr. Afelskie returned to Whitney and also served St. Matthew in Madawaska from 1973 until 1985, and then moved to Our Lady of Mercy in Bancroft and St. Anthony Mission in Haliburton for the following two years. From 1988 to 1994 he was pastor of St. Casimir Church in Round Lake Centre, and his last parish was St. Mary in Wilno where he served until 1995 when he retired from full-time parish ministry for health reasons.

While at St. Casimir, Fr. Afelskie was also appointed pastoral counsellor at Madawaska Valley District High School in Barry's Bay. It was a unique program wherein the Catholic school board provided funding for a pastoral animator and religion teacher in a public high school.

Fr. Afelskie quickly won the hearts of both students and staff at the school, where he was recognized as an approachable, level-headed and wise counsellor.

In a letter to the editor following Fr. Afelskie's death, Teacher Robert Corrigan shared his thoughts:

"He had a tremendous understanding of human nature, and he was friends with Catholics and non-Catholics alike. He would say things that would make you want to be a better person... He was always found out in the halls where he could engage with everyone – office staff, custodians, teachers, visitors to the school and especially students."

"I am still amazed when I think of the easy, wonderful rapport he established, sometimes with students not interested in passing the time of day with any adult," Mr. Corrigan concludes. "Fr. Archie was exceedingly unique. He was an easy man to respect!"

Many who grew up in Chapeau also remember how Fr. Afelskie connected with the youth of the parish. He spent many winter nights flooding their rink, and on Sunday afternoons he would invite one and all into the parish hall for a movie and some treats.

In addition to his natural abilities with youth, Fr. Afelskie was a beloved chaplain for various Catholic organizations. For five years he served as diocesan chaplain of the Catholic Women's League, and he took up the same role for the Knights of Columbus Council 6894. Until just a few months before his death he was also chaplain of Valley Manor Nursing Home in Barry's Bay.

Fr. Afelskie was survived by his brother, Benny, and sister Anne Filatore, as well as many nieces, nephews, grand-nieces and grand-nephews. He was predeceased by his parents, his brothers, Frank and James, and his sister Teresa Swech.

The mass of Christian burial took place on Thursday, July 30 at St. Andrew Church in Killaloe, presided over by Bishop Michael Mulhall.



Reunion of the Flying Fathers marked by celebration and good memories



Penance the horse kneeling at centre ice to pray for a goal.

Sister Mary Shooter speeding the length of an arena – habit billowing in the breeze and skate blades flashing.

The goaltender playing with his yo-yo or standing facing the net as the opponents rushed in.

The cream pies that landed directly in a player's face.

There was no shortage of good memories when the Flying Fathers and their entourage got together for a reunion in Pembroke this summer.

"It did so much good," Fr. Grant Neville says of the hockey antics. "It just brought a lot of joy to people."

It was Fr. Neville's fortieth anniversary as a priest that provided an incentive for the reunion. He joined the Flying Fathers in 1968. At the time, the concept was just six years old and the opportunities it created for fun and outreach had caught his attention as a young seminarian.

Fr. Neville's active association with the team would last approximately 25 years. It took him coast-to-coast across Canada and the United States and on five treks to Europe where the puck-shooting priests shared their fun with members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

It developed a bond of camaraderie and support with the likes of Fr. Pat Blake, Fr. Vaughn Quinn, Fr. Bob Holmes, Fr. Basil Smith, Bishop Bernard Pappin and the founders of the Flying Fathers, Fr. Les Costello and Fr. Brian McKee.

In all, 55 Flying Fathers and their associates gathered for this summer's reunion. The oldest participant was 90. There were hockey players, assistants, equipment managers and other key supporters. They relaxed together, shared stories and meals, reviewed photo albums and old newspaper clippings, played a round of golf, and celebrated Sunday mass.

"It was a great time to remember," says Fr. Neville, who notes that tribute was paid during the weekend to members of the team who are no longer alive.

There were a lot of characters associated with this team. Fr. Costello, for example, had been a

professional hockey player with the Maple Leafs. The year after he helped his team win the Stanley Cup, he shocked the sports world with his announcement that he was going into the seminary.

Fr. Holmes has travelled the world, and been profiled on Vision TV for his work in the world's hot spots. Unfortunately, he was unable to attend the reunion because of his current commitments in Iraq.

Fr. Smith's brother was the owner of Penance the horse. He trained the animal to kneel reverently, and to withstand being dressed up in a halo or goalie pads to help entertain the crowd.

Fr. Quinn, the goaltender, was a recovered alcoholic who displayed messages on his stick that Alcoholic Anonymous participants would recognize.

"The game was doing more than just hockey and entertainment," explains Fr. Neville.

He points out that the Flying Fathers made it a point to visit schools, hospitals and sometimes prisons. Some of the team were always sure to wear their clerical collars wherever they were to let everyone know who they were.

"You met people in a different way," Fr. Neville notes.

That was confirmed through the conversations they had and the letters they received. Fr. Neville remembers a young woman who had been in conflict with her father. Reluctantly, she had agreed to go to the game with him, determined that it would be a hokey waste of time. At the end of the evening, she was moved enough to write to the Flying Fathers, telling them how that

one evening inspired father and daughter to laugh together once again and open up to each other.

"It began a whole new relationship for them," Fr. Neville fondly recalls.

The fate of the team that at one time played Maple Leaf Gardens and the Montreal Forum is currently up in the air. Last year, the Flying Fathers played just one game of hockey. No one knows if the tradition will continue at all at this point.

In its heyday, it required the solid commitment of everyone involved.

"You took all your holidays to play hockey," Fr. Neville admits.

The tours were physically demanding. A typical schedule could include 14 games in 16 days. Travel added its own complications. The Flying Fathers travelled through snow storms and on icy roads. They overcame the concerns of their bishops, who cringed at the perils of on-ice injuries or a travel accident sidelining so many key players in the church.

"You always had to have faith," Fr. Neville concludes, adding with a nod: "We never missed a game."



The Flying Fathers players, friends and family on the steps of St Jean Baptiste Church in Pembroke. As part of the reunion celebrations, the priests who played with the team conjointly celebrated Mass before joining in a dinner at Lorne Neville's house across the street from the church.

Parish Profile

St. Francis Xavier, Renfrew

With more than 1,200 registered families, St. Francis Xavier is one of the largest parishes in the Pembroke Diocese.

The introductory statement on the parish website is deceptively simple: “We are called and gifted to work together in witnessing and building the Kingdom of God.”

If those few words are seen to represent the main river of faith running through parish life, they have created a network of tributaries that flow in beautiful and creative new directions.

“It is very unique in the places it has gone and the things that it has done,” Fr. Peter Proulx says of the parish he has served since 1999.

“My challenge is to keep up with it all,” he adds.

He is thankful that his parishioners are as eager to take an active role in the ministry as they are to learn and deepen their faith.

St. Francis Xavier has no fewer than 356 members registered for the lay ministry – nearly one for every day of the year. At any given mass, as many as 10 lay people will be commissioned to leave the Eucharistic celebration with the Blessed Sacrament to take to the homebound.

“People don’t expect Father to do everything here,” Fr. Proulx says with some relief.

He has also been blessed with the support of Deacon Don Smith and Sister Sheila Whelan who until recently served as pastoral coordinator of the parish.

Adult education

The adult education program is one of the main currents in parish life at St. Francis Xavier. It is a powerful force that has taken participants into some very deep areas, including comparative religions, the role of women in the church, and native spirituality.

This year, the focus will be on various forms of prayer. Time will be spent researching, reflecting and sharing thoughts on meditation, contemplation, celebration and other means to talk to God.

In past series, members of the parish have spent time with a rabbi and visited an Ottawa synagogue, and attended an Islamic funeral at a mosque. They spent five full Saturdays studying Aboriginal spirituality, including one full day focused on residential schools.

“The neat thing is that they can tie it into our own faith,” notes Fr. Proulx, pointing to the inspiration parishioners found in native symbols.

“It helps us to claim our own symbols,” he says.

He adds that the members of St. Francis are not afraid to share their curiosity and their differing opinions.

“Somebody is going to suggest we burn sweetgrass in church,” he says, referring to an Aboriginal spiritual cleansing practice, “and someone else will prompt us to think that through.”

“Whatever the topic, people have a very deep respect.”

In addition to the education sessions, parishioners are invited to participate in a book club that meets twice each month. Current publications with a focus on issues of faith and Catholicism are selected and discussed.

Children and youth

Children and youth are also encouraged to be active members of the congregation.

Children from grades 3 to 6 take on liturgical roles on the first Sunday of each month, greeting parishioners at the doors, offering the readings, either reading or enacting the Gospel, and taking up collection. On the second Sunday of each month, the responsibilities are handed over to the high school students, who also do the musical elements of the service.

The practice gives children and youth opportunities to enrich their experience of Mass and take on leadership roles in the context of the full parish community. The concept grew from the work of St. Francis Xavier’s liturgy committee, which meets monthly.

Liturgical focus

“We do a lot of work in liturgy,” says Fr. Proulx, noting that workshops on various liturgical elements have been held over the years and the committee members read and study to deepen their understanding of the practices of the church.

As a result of their work, for example, the rich history of the church choir has been revisited to encourage more congregational singing during worship.

The liturgy committee has also developed a very meaningful Good Friday tradition at St. Francis Xavier, with parish members leading a three-hour homily focused on the seven last words of Jesus leading up to the 3:00 p.m. mass.

The reflections are offered with personal insights. For example, a critical care nurse has shared her thoughts on “Mother, mother, this is your son” and another lector incorporated “Brother can you spare a dime” and images of street people in his presentation on “You will be with me today in paradise”.

“It just makes the hair stand up on the back of my head,” comments Fr. Proulx.

Social justice

Social justice issues are another aspect of parish life at the church. The congregation has made a commitment to donate two per cent of the parish income to local or global charities each year, and a social justice committee advises Fr. Proulx on the disbursement of the funds. They also serve as the liaison for the parish with Development and Peace, the diocesan mission in Peru, and lead the St. Francis Xavier shoebox campaign. Last year, parishioners were also invited to provide Christmas gifts for street people through a shoebox program dedicated to the Shepherds of Good Hope.

Deacon Don Smith’s work with a community-based bereavement group and local addiction services complements the parish’s social justice initiatives.

Social fellowship

And finally, the members of St. Francis Xavier know how to have fun. This fall, they were busy hosting Stonefence Theatre’s “Country Sparkin’ At Sunnysdale Acres” as a bell tower fund-raiser.

Past winters have seen the parish hall opened on Friday evenings to share some time doing whatever strikes the visitors’ fancy. One week it might be a few games of cards, another night folks might feel more active and set up the volleyball nets.

“It’s nice to have that outreach,” Fr. Proulx concludes. “People work very hard, and it’s important to just get together and relax once in awhile.”



Marking 10 years of service in Guatemala

Richard and Susan Schmaltz always thought they would purchase a recreational vehicle and spend their retirement touring the backroads of North America.

Instead, they found themselves extending their separate careers in education and working together to create a positive future for children unfortunate enough to be born into poverty.

It's a long way from the comfort of an RV to the squalor of the Guatemala City dump, and a journey few might choose to make, but the choices made by the Schmaltzes seem to have been inevitable and clearly wouldn't be revised even if they had the chance to revisit the last few years.

"We felt called to do this," states Susan. "We've never questioned what we're doing."

"It's not the conversion of them. It's the conversion of us," adds Richard, as he describes the spiritual and personal richness of people who are stripped of possessions.

"Our gifts are so enormous," he says, listing clean air and water, reasonable trust in law enforcement and justice, and basic safety nets to ensure we have health care, food and shelter. "We take all of those things for granted."

"We have much to learn from them," Susan says of the Guatemalan people who may be poor in material things, but are rich in spirit.

But the cosmic balance tells the Schmaltzes that they also have lots to offer.

For a retired elementary school principal and early childhood education specialist, the importance of education is obvious. Their first experiences in the developing world reinforced their commitment to provide lasting hope by offering more than bags of grain, cooked meals or housing.

"The question is how do you provide opportunities for things not to repeat themselves," says Richard. "It has to be through education or opportunities for education."

So since 2000 the couple has been working with organizations like the God's Child Project and Safe Passage establishing daycares in Guatemala and particularly a centre to service the families who harvest garbage at the Guatemala City dump.

That facility has grown to six rooms – one for each year of a child's life up to the age of five. The rooms are equipped with specially-designed furniture, and plenty of playthings, and children are led through guided play sessions and activities such as movement and dance.

The Schmaltzes' work has captured the imagination of many, including the Sisters of St. Joseph in Pembroke who provide financial oversight for the donations made to support the Schmaltz's and the work they do through "Oneness", the volunteer community that has developed around them. That community has included several members of the Catholic Diocese of Pembroke.

"There is a connection with people from Deep River to Palmer Rapids to Cobden to Arnprior and Combermere," says Rose-Anne Boucher, who will be making her fourth trip to Guatemala in March.

She points out that she was accompanied on last year's trip to the Schmaltzes' community house by two local "rookies" last year, who made her promise they would all return.

"It's addictive," says Boucher, describing the meaning of the work volunteers do there as well as the spirit of the place.

"It's really something to see the wonderful devotion of the people there," she says, referring to both the volunteers and the residents.

As she talks, the appropriateness of the "Oneness" title becomes clear.

"What we're trying to do is just be one with one another," Susan says, explaining that a key element in their work is to get rid of barriers that



keep people from being kind to one another.

The Schmaltzes are residents of the Lapasse area for the six months they spend away from Guatemala each year. They have particular praise for their local parish, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, which has been an avid supporter of their work from the beginning.

But they also note that they have received donations and welcomed volunteers from all faiths.

"We're all in this together," they conclude.

"We can make a difference in individual lives," states Susan, who admits that the big picture of poverty can be overwhelming and explains that hope comes in focusing on "one".

"If you can stay focused on the children or the family you can help," she says. "It's such a privilege to be able to serve them and take that next step to help them have a better life."

To learn more about the many aspects of the Schmaltzes' work in Guatemala, visit www.oneness.ca.



Richard and Susan Schmaltz in Guatemala.

Caring for the poor in Medjugorje

In 1991, Patricia Duggan made her first pilgrimage to Medjugorje, a village in Bosnia Herzegovina, which is one of six republics in the former Yugoslavia.

War was still a daily reality there at the time, brother fighting against brother in a brutal ethnic battle that left a legacy of refugee camps and orphaned children.

When the van carrying Patricia arrived at its first refugee camp, she was frozen in horror, tears streaming down her face.

It was an Irish priest who shook her out of her initial paralysis.

"They've had enough tears here," he told Patricia. "What they need is your help."

His words have had a lasting effect. Patricia is now on her thirtieth pilgrimage to the village, accompanied this time by her husband, Jack, who is on his tenth trip to the region.

"I am just so proud of her," he says. "I help her out as much as I can."

There are 20 other people there to help on this trip, including pilgrims from Eganville, Ottawa and Alberta.

Patricia travels to various local parishes telling her story and enlisting help. Her primary role is to collect wool and crochet threads. Ladies in the village use the donated materials to make beautiful things that they can sell for medicine and food.

This particular action was inspired after Patricia prayed to the Blessed Mother for guidance. It also follows a particularly heart-wrenching episode Patricia witnessed first-hand at the second refugee camp she visited where a

lady was knitting a beautiful sweater. As Patricia approached her, the knitter looked up, made eye contact, and proceeded to rip her work off the knitting needles.

"I was so shocked and thought maybe I had offended her, but the camp director told me that she had knitted this sweater at least 100 times to keep her mind sane," Patricia recalls. "Her pain was so evident and I felt totally helpless."

It was just one horror story in a series. At one site, 700 refugees were herded into broken-down railway cars with nothing but a 50-pound bag of potatoes for food.

As she gained the courage to tell her stories, Patricia found new sources of help. Seminarians began to accompany her on subsequent trips, always toting hockey bags full of wool and crochet threads.

On each pilgrimage, the Duggans take donations for the facility. In May 2008, the entourage included five priests and 40 travelers.

Fr. Grant Neville was on that trip, and took along more than 300 pairs of socks and shoes he had collected from the parishioners of St. Andrew Church in Killaloe and Our Lady of the Angels Church in Brudenell. Also along were 12 students who were members of a choir at York University. They sang in a number of churches and at various functions in the Medjugorje region during their visit.

Patricia has developed a deep and lasting connection with Mothers' Village, an orphanage in Medjugorje. On her first visit there, she encountered a 15-year-old girl who had just delivered twin boys, the product of a rape during the ethnic cleansing attacks.

"My heart was in pain at seeing this beautiful young girl, but also my heart was full of joy at the fact that, because of Mother's Village, she had a safe haven to have her babies and all the medical care she needed for herself and her boys."

"The orphanage is divine providence," she concludes. "May God bless all the people who have helped with our efforts to clothe the poorest of the poor. We are very grateful to Jesus and his Holy Mother for allowing us to be involved in this work that we love doing."

Anyone interested in learning more can contact Jack and Patricia Duggan through their home parish of Holy Canadian Martyrs Church in Combermere.



Above, representatives from the Diocese of Pembroke in Medjugorje with donations from the diocese; back row from left: Father Terry Sirosky, Kevin O'Connor, Paul Neville, Father Grant Neville, Jack Duggan, Father Marc Syrenne. Front row from left: Joyce Reilander, Maureen O'Connor, Patricia Duggan, Teresa Baklinski and Ted Baklinski. Below, the refugees live in abandoned railway cars. Left, the children of Mothers' Village celebrate Harvest Day.



OLSWA President steps down due to ill health as the Academy enters tenth year

Our Lady Seat of Wisdom Academy (OLSWA) President Dr. David B. Warner has been forced by a relapse of multiple myeloma (bone marrow cancer) to take early retirement from full-time academic administration. Dr. Warner officially retired on July 31.

Recently installed Academic Dean, Dr. Keith Cassidy, will assume the additional role of Interim President. A vigorous international search for a new President is underway, details of which can be found on the OLSWA website, www.seatofwisdom.org.

Dr. Warner made the difficult decision to retire after much prayerful medical and spiritual consultation, and it was accepted with reluctance by the board. He has accepted the honorary title of President Emeritus, and will continue to act as an advisor and ambassador for the Academy. Dr. Warner will be returning to the United States by November, where he will be able to continue to advance the interests of the institution to which he has devoted so much love and labour.

The Acting Chair of the OLSWA Board of Directors, Richard Sauro, said "Over the course of two years with us, Dr. Warner will have made an enormous contribution to the life of our community. His tireless work, uncompromising vision, and skillful leadership pushed the Academy into a prominence never before achieved, and has earned it a high measure of respect and recognition. While his presence on campus will be sorely missed, we are grateful that he accepted our request to become President Emeritus."

On April 7, Dr. Warner had offered Dr. Cassidy the deanship, which he enthusiastically accepted. Dr. Cassidy has served as a university history professor for 40 years, the last 35 of them at the University of Guelph. While at Guelph he established a notable record of achievement in service to the faculty and became a recognized expert in the area of policy development. In 2004 he was the first recipient at Guelph of the Dedicated Service Award, presented by the Canadian Association of University Teachers.

As a scholar Dr. Cassidy has focused on the history of the pro-life movement and has presented numerous papers and published many

articles on this topic. In addition, he was a founder and the first president of the Catholic Civil Rights League. He has been an external member of the OLSWA's Academic Senate since its inception in May of 2006, and was Commencement speaker in 2007. He has also served for six years as an External Senator for Redeemer University College.

As Academic Dean he is expected to devote his time and energies primarily to the tasks of pursuing accreditation for the Academy and developing faculty and administrative policies in support of that goal. Having become Interim President he has many new tasks, most notably continuing Dr. Warner's strengthening of our administration, academics, support base, and overall institutional advancement.

Above, Dr. David Warner, right, President of Our Lady Seat of Wisdom Academy, will be taking early retirement to deal with health problems. Dr. Keith Cassidy will step in as Interim President. Below, Bishop Mulhall presides over the Academy's opening Mass.



These challenges come as OLSWA enters its tenth year. On August 31 His Excellency Bishop Michael Mulhall celebrated the opening Mass, always a beautiful and inspiring event, but especially so this year. The music, conducted by Maestro Uwe Lieflander, was glorious, filled out by OLSWA's largest group of freshmen to date.

Bishop Mulhall's thoughtful homily inspired us all to be humble before the truth, and especially the Truth, God Himself, Who is the only one who can reveal to us who we really are. This is a time for students (as well as staff and teachers) to discover their own identity, a lifelong process, but one that begins especially in this critical time of young adulthood.



The Diocese of Pembroke participates in Places of Faith Roundtable

The Diocese of Pembroke was invited to participate in a panel discussion at the Places of Faith Roundtable organized by the Ontario Heritage Trust. The conference was a lead-in to the national Heritage Canada Foundation annual conference and was held in Toronto on September 24. The Diocese was represented by Father Nil Guillemette, Episcopal Vicar for Quebec Parishes and a member of Quebec's Conseil du patrimoine religieux du Québec, and Bruce Pappin, a member of the Diocesan Property Advisory Committee.

The presentation by the Diocese revolved around our experience in dealing with the 10 churches closed in 2006. The Diocese of Pembroke is one of the first rural dioceses in Ontario to have dealt with this type of situation. The other Catholic dioceses where this situation has arisen have been large metropolitan centres. Although the closures may have occurred in small communities, archdioceses like London, Toronto and Ottawa have significant staff resources to support the process. In the Diocese of Pembroke the job was handled by a committee made up of lay volunteers and clergy advising the Bishop.

The conference was an opportunity for the Ontario Heritage Trust to roll out their ambitious "Places of Worship" website. (www.heritagetrust.on.ca/placesofworship) Although still under development, this website is intended to eventually include a complete inventory of all buildings over 25 years old designed as places of worship in Ontario. The website also includes images and a substantial amount of history on the buildings listed. It is designed to facilitate feedback and allow the public to contribute further information.

There is a great deal of concern within the heritage community over the future of sacred places in Canada.

As we have seen in our own diocese, changes in population and, in our case, recent closures and amalgama-

tions. Faith groups in Canada, particularly the established churches such as Roman Catholic, Anglican and United Churches, face the mixed blessing of a large inventory of landmark heritage buildings that require substantial ongoing commitments of time and money.

Father Guillemette outlined the Quebec experience where the provincial government has recognized the importance of sacred places to the broader community. The council Father Guillemette serves on administers government grants of over \$20 million per year to assist churches with maintenance and restoration.

In Ontario there is no such support. On the contrary, recent changes to the Ontario Heritage Act have led to concerns among the mainstream churches of unwarranted restrictions on the churches' ability to manage their properties to best meet the needs of the faithful.

A dominant theme of the conference was the need for all people interested in this issue to communicate with each other. The morning's principal speaker was Bob Jaeger, Executive Director of Partners for Sacred Spaces, a national, non-sectarian organization in the United States dedicated to helping congregations deal with the challenges of revitalizing and maintaining their heritage properties. He said, "we must

emphasize that these are shared spaces", citing the benefits that an operating church brings to entire neighbourhoods.

This message was reinforced by the experience of Msgr. Bradley Massman, who has recently overseen the restoration of the magnificent St. Paul's Basilica in downtown Toronto. Located in Toronto's poorest inner city neighbourhood, St. Paul's is the mother parish of Toronto, established in 1822. The multi-million-dollar restoration has revitalized a beautiful sacred space, but more importantly, it has injected new life into the faith community. Msgr. Massman emphasizes that St. Paul's welcomes all members of the surrounding community, largely made up of recent immigrants, regardless of faith. "We are a beacon", he said. The parish's social programs combine with a careful attention to the liturgy to provide a vibrant example of faith working in the community making the heritage building exactly what it was built to be – a sacred space.



A P O L O G E T I C S 1 0 1

Proofs for God: Part 2

In this series, the author lays out a common sense approach to understanding and defending the Catholic Faith.

By Andrew Baklinski

We began our journey into apologetics by seeing that truth does exist. We then proceeded to look at the truth about God and concluded that faith and reason do indeed work together. Recently, we looked at several arguments for God: Aquinas' ways to God (Everything in motion requires a mover. The universe is in motion. Therefore the universe has a mover) and the argument for design (Everything that has design needs a designer. The universe has design. Therefore the universe has a designer). This article continues looking at the evidence for God.

Does anyone have food? I'm hungry!

C.S. Lewis, perhaps the greatest modern Christian apologist, once commented on the relationship between food and God. He noted how the innate desires of the body correspond to real objects. For example, it is 4 p.m. and you are consumed with work on the latest project. All of a sudden you notice that you have a painful empty feeling in your stomach and that your mid-section is making noise! Of course, you realize that you forgot to eat breakfast and now it is way past lunch. You are hungry. You need food. Food must exist! If there was no such thing as food – and I am not talking about being in a situation of starvation – then why would you body hunger for it? You are hungry; therefore there must be food.

The great thinker St. Augustine wrote in his *Confessions* "Our heart is restless until it rests in God." If there were no God, we would not desire him, we would not be restless without Him. But we do desire God or for that matter, the attributes associated with God: perfect love, perfect justice, perfect beauty. Therefore these things must exist.

Life just isn't like that!

Have you ever met anybody who totally despaired of life? Someone who thought that life had no meaning, no purpose? Someone who honestly thought that there was no difference between good or evil, between right and wrong, between love and hatred? Even if it is possible to imagine a person in this situation, in reality, no one in their right mind really lives this way. Deep down we all somehow know that things matter and that the

line between good and evil for example, is a very real one.

If there were no God and no immortality then life would be meaningless. There would be no ultimate purpose, no motive to do the right thing, no reason to strive for goodness, truth and beauty. If we all die in the end and rot in the ground and that is the end of us, why try to be good? Why try to do the right thing? What difference does it make in the end? But, no one lives this way. Life just isn't like that! There must be a God.

Historical arguments

Historical arguments for God are not the type of argument that we have looked at thus far. They are based more in fact and less in logic, but they are powerful nonetheless, as people are convinced more with facts and less with logic. There are a number of different historical arguments that are worth examining.

In looking at history, one thing that becomes evident is that it is meaningful. A look at the past reveals a story line, a purpose. It is not just a random and meaningless sequence of events, but a story. Every story has a storyteller and in this case, a divine being tells the story. Even the very name "history" implies that we are in "His-story". Further, this story has a moral design. Good things tend to happen to good people and

They show the direct power of God at work in our human reality. They are unavoidable and uncomfortable as they shake us out of merely horizontal plane of existence. They add that vertical dimension, making a cross, the cross through which we are reunited to the miracle maker, the joy of all the saints. You cannot explain the historical fact of miracles or saints without the God that causes them.

Finally, the person of Christ himself is a historical argument. If Jesus is not who he claims to be, then there must be another explanation. There are only four other alternatives. In rationally looking at these, it is possible to come to a firm conclusion regarding him. If he is who he claims to be then God is real. (More on this in the next article)

Wagering with Pascal

The French thinker Pascal gives us what he sees as the "coup-de-grace" argument in his work *Pensées*. Living in a time of skepticism, he points out that even if one denies all the arguments for God, one still has to either live like there is a God, or live like there is no God. Either God is, or he is not. There is no middle ground and you have to choose one or the other. Pascal argues that it makes more sense to believe in God.

Imagine that you develop a severe pain in your head after reading this article. It may be the

"Our heart is restless until it rests in God"

St. Augustine

societies and bad things to bad people and societies. That this happens isn't by pure chance, for it is consistent throughout history. This points to a moral cause – God.

A look at the workings of providence in history – those events like the crossing of the Red Sea in the Exodus, or the feeding of the Jewish people on the manna and quail – no matter how people attempt to trivialize them or explain them away, point to something great at work. We are not just talking about "co-incidences", but "God-incidents".

Miracles and the lives of the saints are a powerful testimony towards the existence of God.

quality of writing or it may be something else. The pain continues to worsen and you go to see a doctor. The diagnosis is not good. You have a rare form of cancer to which there is apparently no treatment and you have a week to live. A day later a specialist from another country who has been working on just your type of cancer and tells you of an experimental new cure that has a 50% absolute cure rate. If it doesn't work, there are no harmful side effects. They will fly you out and pay for everything. What is your decision? Of course, you go! You have nothing to lose as you are already dying and everything to gain, as you may be cured.

Pascal argues that betting on God is very similar. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. If there is a God and you bet on him, you gain heaven. If you don't bet on him you get hell. If there is no God and you bet on him, Pascal argues you will end up a more happy person in the end. If there is no God and you don't bet on him, you lose nothing. So, wager with Pascal on God!

For the agnostic who argues that the better thing is not to wager at all until one is sure, Pascal argues that one must wager. Your life is like a ship out at sea moving over the waters of life. The wind is blowing (time) and at some point you need to turn into homeport (heaven). If you wait too long, you will be blown past and it will be too late (death). The agnostic response to stay at sea until one is sure doesn't work because you are already moving and you cannot stop that. The wager refutes agnosticism because of death, the one surety of life.

At the end, a rope

In short, when looking at all the arguments for God with a rational and open mind, it is very hard to remain a strict atheist. Each individual argument for God is like the strand of a rope. By itself, each strand may seem insignificant or even breakable, but when they are woven together they form an unbreakable rope. Each argument may seem inconsequential or even "breakable" (although they are not), but when they are all taken together they form that unbreakable rope that reaches from earth up into eternity and heaven, our true home. Or, perhaps better put, a rope reaching down from heaven with our Heavenly Father holding strong with both hands pulling us up back up to Him.

I am often as excited as my high school theology students when we talk about these proofs for God. These compelling arguments truly demonstrate in simple yet profound ways the truth of God's existence. Simplicity that a child grasps and yet depth, that the scholar of many years, still tries to probe. My students intuitively understand the powerful tools that they are being given to go out and make a difference in the lives of those who walk in confusion. The fact that I remind them that true conversion is wrought in the heart by prayer, fasting and the grace of God, and not by apologetics alone, does little to temper their newfound excitement of sharing their faith and the new ways of articulating it with others. May we be inspired by their example and by the examples of our beloved Saints of times past, to be courageous in living out our faith, always ready to give an explanation for the hope that lies within.

Next issue: "Jesus: The Real Deal"

Andrew Baklinski teaches Theology and is also a Pastoral Animator at Madawaska Valley District High School in Barry's Bay.

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