VOCATIONS SPECIAL SECTION OUR SUNDAY VISITOR

PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS LAUNCH NEW INITIATIVES TO LIVE AND SPREAD THE GOSPEL

Behold, I MAKE all things new



Two Franciscans begin Holy Family Farm to give men a space to immerse themselves in God and nature.

> PAGE 12



Carmelite Sisters in Milwaukee shift their focus to serving women in the community with special needs.

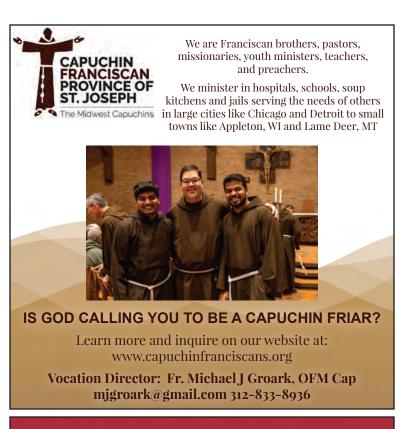
> PAGE 14



A priest of the Diocese of Raleigh looks to evangelize Catholics and non-Catholics in the metaverse.

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BROTHERS OF THE SACRED HEART



A brother enjoys a meal with youths. Courtesy photos

Praying for marginalized youths

Brothers unlock new ways to raise awareness for vulnerable children

By Maryann Gogniat Eidemiller

n a recent Sunday, Brother Joseph Holthaus posted a photo of a child on a trash heap. He captioned it with a prayer for "those who dig through garbage dumps in search of recyclables and food." The prayer intention was that caring adults might help them to find a healthy and wholesome life.

Other weekly postings on the Facebook and website pages of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart offer prayers for children who are snatched from their families and forced to join an army, children who have no spiritual center, those in institutions or with serious illnesses. There are prayers, too, for children who are unloved and unwanted, and those who have been bullied, exploited and sexually assaulted.

They are the at-risk children that the province holds up in prayer in their Youth on the Margins series of postings.

"We were founded to work with young people with whom no one else was concerned," said Brother Ronald Hingle. "Our founder, Father Andre Coindre, took young people out of prison and young people who were living on the streets of Lyon, France. They were in the margins of society."

History

The Brothers of the Sacred Heart, whose province is in New Orleans, came to Mobile, Alabama, in 1847. Those first five missionaries were the foundation of a community that eventually founded schools in North America, Australia, England, Africa and the Philippines.

They are an apostolic order, now numbering 102, of religious educators called to live in chastity, poverty and obedience, with a focus on educating and serving youth. "Our founder said that the first thing you do when you reach out to young people is to offer them hope, love and faith, and en-

gage them in a relationship," Brother Ronald said. "That's how we evangelize."

He got the idea for the Youth on the Margins series when he became provincial in 2018.

"As a community, we could reach only a certain number of people in our mission and ministry," he said. "We are only a few people, and there's a great need and a great number of youth on the margins. We wanted to keep the needs of those we serve, and those we did not serve, in the uppermost minds and thoughts and in the prayers of the brothers as well as our partners in mission. They are lay colleagues in our schools and those who work shoulder to shoulder with us."

Brother Ronald writes the prayers and reflections that



Kids on the margins need care and attention.



Joy can be found even in difficult situations.

were initially just in the community's monthly newsletter. Then Brother Joseph, dean of St. Columba School in England, started posting them on their Facebook and website.

The prayers come from the experiences of the brothers who have seen youth marginalized and at risk around the

"In the Philippines, we have a home for street children, so we take them in and give them world," Brother Ronald said.

shelter, food, "I think we get so clothing and love," Brother Ronald busy and wrapped said. "I just reup in our own little turned from Zambia in Africa and worlds and schedules we are in touch that we don't often with young people ... bring them to there who literally have nothing. prayer." Some of them have Brother Ronald only the clothes

on their backs and shoes. They struggle for survival."

Closer to home

The need is not just in Third World countries.

"We have a pre-novice living with us, and he commutes to London," Brother Joseph said. "He works with young people who are in gangs, and a lot of them are in gangs for their own safety. There are adults getting young people to carry drugs for them. He counsels them and takes care of them if they run into legal and medical problems. We have kids in our own school, too, who come from broken families or abuse

at home."

Students have opportunities for service projects working in the states with the poor and marginalized and victims of natural disasters. The brothers, students and staff can spend breaks serving the Navajo people at St. Anne's Mission in Klagetoh, Arizona, where some have no running water, electricity or indoor plumbing.

"It's almost like another

Adults are invited to join the brothers on their mission trips to Africa, the Philippines and Arizona.

The weekly postings of Youth on the Margins, he noted, are a way to make peo-

ple aware of what some children are facing globally. And that includes vulnerable children in America who are being abused and trafficked.

"I think we get so busy and wrapped up in our own little worlds and schedules that we don't often think of them, or bring them to prayer on a regular basis," Brother Ronald said. "Hopefully with prayers, you will put a face on some of those realities and bring them a little closer to home. Prayers are a way of carrying the youth in our hearts all through the day."

Maryann Gogniat Eidemiller writes from Pennsylvania.



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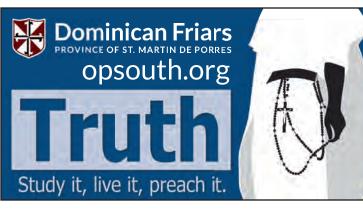
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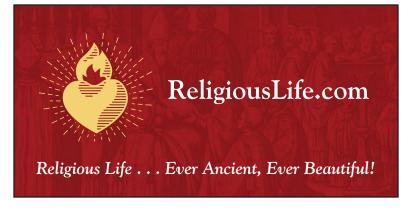
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HOLY FAMILY FARM



Father Glenn Sudano, CFR, is pictured with friends at Holy Family Farm. Courtesy photos

Two brave friars' risky dream of founding a farm

Franciscans establish a quiet place for men to find God in nature

By Paul Senz

An important and indispensable part of the life of every Catholic is vocational discernment. What is God calling me to do? How is God calling me to live as his disciple? It can be difficult to listen to God's voice when surrounded by the noise of everyday life. Holy Family Farm in Monticello, New York, is one place where young men can go to quietly, prayerfully discern their vocation.

Deacon Andy Zucaro has been involved with Holy Family Farm since its inception on Nov. 19, 2019. The world would consider him the chief executive officer and president, but he prefers the title "servant of servants." This fits in well with the farm's connection to the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, whose community superior eschews any moniker of power, and instead bears the title "general servant."

The purpose of Holy Family Farm, according to Deacon Zucaro, is "forming men for a greater future." "Men have a chance to leave the noise of the

world to find the presence of God," he said. "They have the time and opportunity to live a simple prayerful life." More than finding the presence of God or living a prayerful life, the farm is a place where men can prayerfully discern just what God is calling them to do and to be.

"What God is calling them to do becomes evident over time," he said. "We are all created for a purpose. When they find their true purpose, they will live a life that will make a difference to many."

"The men who have lived at Holy Family Farm will change the world for generations," Deacon Zucaro said.

So what does life at Holy Family Farm entail? It is not simply living in a rural setting, praying and discerning, and soaking up a quiet atmosphere. The program at Holy Family Farm consists of prayer, manual work and learning, all while living in community. It is "a way of life which helps prepare a man to move forward," according to the farm's website. The organizers coined the term "farmation," meaning a process of becoming a faith-filled man with a plan and a purpose for his life, a kind of healthy formation that combines human and spiritual formation



Father Glenn and Christopher Monti, a core member of the farm community, tend a small but fruitful garden.

through prayer, manual work and learning.

Beginnings

This humble, rural Catholic community has its origins back in the fall of 2019, when two members of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal wanted to found a farm where young men could go through human and spiritual formation. There was a recognition of the challenges faced by men in today's society, the numerous distractions pre-

sented by so-Every morning, the cial media and other technolcommunity gathers ogy. Everyone for Mass, and there is surrounded noise and is a period of silence needs silence in for personal prayer, order to listen spiritual reading and for God's voice. They also noted reflection. The day is an aversion to then filled with work manual labor, a hesitation or fear and more prayer. to face the chal-

eryday life. So what can be done?
The friars and laypeople who had these conversations quickly developed the idea that would

become Holy Family Farm.

Two years later, a suitable prop-

lenges and responsibilities of ev-

erty (with a suitable residence) was found and purchased. Sullivan County, New York, is the home of Holy Family Farm, on a property that directly borders the Saint Francis Retreat Center, run by the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal.

A day in the life

What does life look like at Holy Family Farm, practically speaking? It is a life of prayer, work and discernment. The community is directed by Fa-

ther Glenn Sudano, CFR. He provides the sacraments, as well as spiritual direction and pastoral counseling, to the community. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the Sacrament of Confession form the foundation of the community's life, as well as communal prayer of the

Divine Office.

The day begins at 6 a.m. with the Office of Readings from the Liturgy of the Hours. Every morning, the community gathers for Mass, and there is a period of silence for personal prayer,



Brian Wuong assists Jeremy Kuhn in preparing the newly cleared pasture now ready to be fertilized and seeded for the following spring.

spiritual reading and reflection. The day is then filled with work and more prayer. There are also ample opportunities for healthy recreation, including hiking, hunting, skiing, ice-skating and kayaking, among others. The day comes to an end with adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and then night prayer at 9 p.m.

Why a farm?

The farming at Holy Family is not on an industrial scale, nor is it intended to be. According to Father Glenn Sudano, it is more like the family farms

that dotted America a century ago, meant to sustain the family rather than the whole world. "While Holy Family Farm will indeed market organic food and durable goods, its real purpose is to produce real men," he wrote on the Holy Family Farm website. "The traditional family farm not only produced healthy food - but, often enough, healthy people!" He continued, "It has been said often, and it is true: farm families work hard, eat well, laugh often and sleep better than the rest of us!"

It sits on a 60-acre prop-

erty, only fairly recently purchased, so only a small portion has been cleared and is being farmed. The needs of the community will be met by a large organic garden, fruit orchard and free-range poultry, and the community's abundance will be shared with others. The many wooded acres provide abundant resources for heating in the winter, as well as building materials. Eventually, as more of the acreage is cleared, there will be cattle and perhaps other livestock on the property.

In his 1981 encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, Pope St. John Paul II wrote that "work is a fundamental dimension of our life on earth." Working with the land, running a farm, and manual labor in general can bring us closer to God.

"Men learn to live a simple prayerful life," Deacon Zucaro said. "God is at the center of everything. Everything we do matters, and should be done to the best of our ability. It can be splitting wood or cooking a meal. In doing simple things well, we can do many things well."

Paul Senz writes from Oklahoma.

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CARMELITE MINISTRY OF ST. TERESA



Women from Carmelite Ministry enjoy an outing. Courtesy photos

Serving women with special needs

Carmelites in Milwaukee recently pivoted from one need in the community to another

By Maryann Gogniat Eidemiller

Blessed Maria Teresa of St. Joseph in 1912 brought to Milwaukee the charism of the Carmelite Sisters of the Divine Heart of Jesus, a community that she founded in 1891 in Germany.

They are rooted in contemplative prayer with apostolic work, a union of monasticism blended with the spirit of service.

In 1916, those sisters founded the Carmelite Home to house orphan boys in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. It became a residential treatment center for adjudicated boys in the late 1960s, then closed in 2017.

"We thought that we could

The women can

attend daily Mass

in the convent, and

the Rosary is prayed

every day. A deacon

comes in twice a

week to go over the

Sunday Scripture

readings.

no longer offer services to meet those needs," said Sister M. Rose Therese Castro. "That's when we talked to neighbors and the community to find out what specifically was needed. Our former superior (the late Sister Immaculata Osterhaus) said, 'How

about a place for women with special needs?"

Because the existing building did not meet code for new use and renovations would be too costly, a new building was constructed to include 16 fully furnished apartments. Each has a bedroom, living room, bathroom and kitchenette where residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) can live independently under supervision.

The blessing and dedication was held on Oct. 15, 2019, the feast day of St. Teresa of Ávila, founder of the Discalced Carmelites. The place is called the Carmelite Ministry of St. Teresa, an apostolate of the USA North Province of St. Joseph.

Faith in everyday life

Four women moved in under private pay arrangements. The sisters have since applied for state licensure that will make funding available for more individuals.

Current residents are from 34 to 67 years old. They keep busy with outside jobs and with activities in the formation and

enrichment center that's open to other women and men with IDD. The six Carmelites in the community and volunteers lead classes in faith formation, cooking, arts and crafts, team building, fitness and Zumba. Participation promotes per-

sonal growth and independence and helps individuals to develop their intellectual, physical, social, emotional and spiritual lives.

Sister Miriam Teresa Alvarado teaches faith formation.

"I have to simplify things for

them so that they understand," she said. "We also try to personalize things, for example, what God means to them, their prayer lives, and the examples of saints and how they can model some of the aspects of their lives."

The women can attend daily Mass in the convent, and the Rosary is prayed every day. A deacon comes in twice a week to go over the Sunday Scripture readings.

"They live their Christian Catholic lives, and we strive to give them good examples by teaching them the virtues of being kind and helpful," Sister Miriam Teresa said. "We try to live the motto of our founder to seek, serve and love God in all."

Participants serve others by making cards, rosaries, cookies and more for hospitalized children, people in nursing homes,

the homebound and homeless veterans. There are outings to museums, sports events and fairs, and once a month there's dancing, singing, Zumba and dinner for men and women with IDD. Their parents may also attend.

Experiencing joy

Linda Kenney's daughter Joy, 38, came to see the apartments when they were still under construction and was one of the first to move in.

"Joy likes the feeling that she's living somewhere on her own and it just feels homey," Kenney said. "We don't have to worry about her safety because the building is secure and someone is there all night."

Her daughter works stocking shelves at Walgreens, and faith is a big part of her life, too.

"Joy called today to tell me that she got up at 5:30 a.m. to go to Mass, and that she was going to take part in holy hour during Lent," Kenney said.

Having the ministry is a faith experience for the sisters, too.

We take life so seriously, but their lives are more simple," Sister Rose Therese said. "Every day I have new stories about what happened in my class to take back to the sisters."

Sister Miriam Teresa noted that the women's simplicity and innocence enrich the sisters' ministry.

'You can wake up one day and not have any joy, and just seeing the women brings you joy and a newness in life," she said. "It's like a little spark."

Maryann Gogniat Eidemiller writes from Pennsylvania.



Community at the ministry enjoy Halloween festivities.

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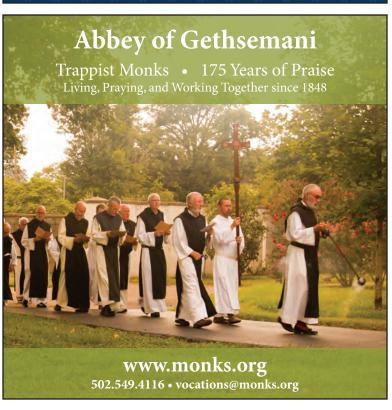


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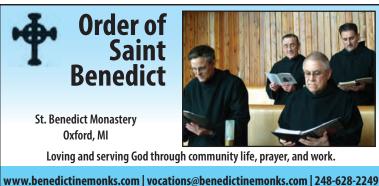


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EUCHARISTIC MINISTRY



Sister Mary Grace holds a baby as she and others participate in the 2023 March for Life.

Encountering 'The Source' in Eucharistic adoration

The Sisters of Life's new Holy Hours introduce Catholics as well as non-believers to Christ

By Katie Yoder

After a rough day, Kyle dragged himself to Holy Hour at a religious sister's invitation. Remaining just inside the door, he looked up and — seeing the Eucharist — stood motionless. He wasn't alone; Sister Mary Grace of the Sisters of Life stood beside him.

He stayed in that position until the end of the night, when he finally sat down. As Sister Mary Grace saw the tears pouring

from his eyes, she reassured him, saying, "I don't know what you're going through, but I know God loves you infinitely."

"I know," he responded, struggling to speak more. "Now I know."

Kyle's story is one of several that Sister Mary Grace shared with Our Sunday Visitor. His encounter with God came during a new Holy Hour organized by her order — a community of Catholic religious women dedicated to promoting the inherent dignity and worth of every human person — called "The Source."

The sisters welcome Catholics and non-Catholics alike to be with Jesus in the holy Eucharist, whom they recognize as

"the source and summit of our faith," during their Holy Hour with music. It's an event, as Sister Mary Grace described, "open to every human heart that is willing to come and see."

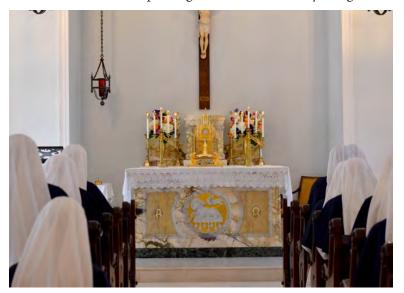
These Holy Hours take place in the cities where the sisters are located: Denver, New York, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Washington, D.C., Toronto and Catskill, New York.. The Holy Hour began in New York City, where the late Cardinal John O'Connor founded the Sisters of Life in 1991. Together, the sisters profess four vows: poverty, chastity, obedience and "to protect and enhance the sacredness of human life."

Among other things, this means that the sisters dedicate their lives to God by serving women vulnerable to abortion, providing life-affirming support to pregnant and parenting women in need, hosting retreats, evangelizing, performing college-student outreach and offering help to women who suffer after abortion.

And, now, they also host Holy Hours.

Encounter with God

The event, Sister Mary Grace said, has only grown since it started in New York a few years ago. In October 2022, the sisters even began hosting it "on one of



Eucharistic adoration is crucial for the Sisters of Life.

the busiest streets in the world"
— at St. Patrick's Cathedral in
Midtown Manhattan.

"The Source is a chance for people to allow the presence of Christ in the Eucharist [to] intervene in their lives," Sister Mary Grace described. "When we open our hearts to Christ, he moves in mighty ways, sometimes obviously, other times hidden, but he always comes."

This opportunity draws an assortment of people who pack the pews: devout Catholics, lapsed Catholics, first-timers, and even non-believers, she said.

"We've witnessed Christ's eagerness to encounter every human heart no matter what state we find ourselves in!" Sister Mary Grace said. "There is no expectation or requirement to join us, only a willingness to enter a beautiful church, and as we pray, we see God bless each heart in a particular and personal way."

Along the way, she has seen firsthand how it changes people. She met one young man who was on his way to a strip club when he received an invitation to stop and pray.

"Surprised he was welcomed having just admitted his addiction, he asked, 'Do you still see

good in me?" Sister Mary Grace remembered. She told him in response: "Yes, Rodney — I still see the good in you, and so does God." He stayed.

She also told the story of a girl from China who arrived and sat in front of the Eucharist before asking, "Who is God?" Sister Mary Grace explained that he was present — right there, in the Eucharist — and handed her the Litany of Trust to pray. When the girl asked if she should pray it out



People partake in "The Source" Holy Hour.



Sisters of Life share their joy in public.

loud, Mary Grace encouraged, "Yes, but also in your heart."

The girl read it quietly, closed her eyes, and, after a brief moment, turned to Sister Mary Grace in tears. "I can hear my heart speaking!" she exclaimed.

God's idea

"Every human

person is made for

a unique love and

communion with

God and others."

These Holy Hours, Sister Mary Grace said, coincide with the National Eucharistic Revival, a movement to inspire others to encounter and know Jesus in the Eucharist.

"It's been amazing to see the Holy Spirit inspire this event and move through it by revealing to

individual hearts his unconditional love and infinite mercy to them," she said.

"We could never have planned this to coincide with the National [Eucharistic] Revival, and the

timing was all his idea," she said.
"He's always about a revival, and it has been evident to us that he wanted this more and has been preparing it way before we got involved!"

On their website, the Sisters of Life, who spend four hours each day in common prayer centered around the Eucharist, remind the faithful that "prayer is not about doing something. It's about being with Someone — God Himself."

"Every human person is made for a unique love and communion with God and others," they teach. "Jesus wants you to be with him, but not for anything you can do — just because you are you, and he loves you."

The sisters infuse this truth into their Holy Hours, where, Sister Mary Grace said, the sisters sing Eucharistic hymns and original pieces that they have written "that help lead hearts into prayer and adoration."

Originally from Sydney, Australia, Sister Mary Grace now lives at the St. Frances de Chantal Convent in Bronx, New York. Eucharistic adoration, she revealed, changed her own life — and impacted her vocation.

"This was not my bright idea, and I never thought my life would look like this!" she stressed. "But when I encountered sisters alive and in love with Jesus, it awoke the desire in me I never knew was there."

"After many years of hesitation, I finally visited the sisters in New York, and that's when God planned a moment in Eucharist adoration when he revealed to me my own desire to belong to him and his desire for me to belong to him as a Sister of Life," she remembered. "I never felt more free in my life than in that moment and I took one small step after another toward his voice."

His love, she said, still continues to astound her.

"After 10 years since entering the convent," she concluded, "he continues to draw me deeper into his love and I feel more alive every day.

Katie Yoder is a contributing editor for Our Sunday Visitor.



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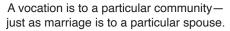


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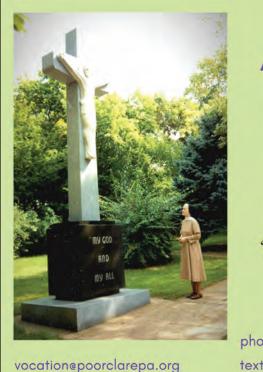
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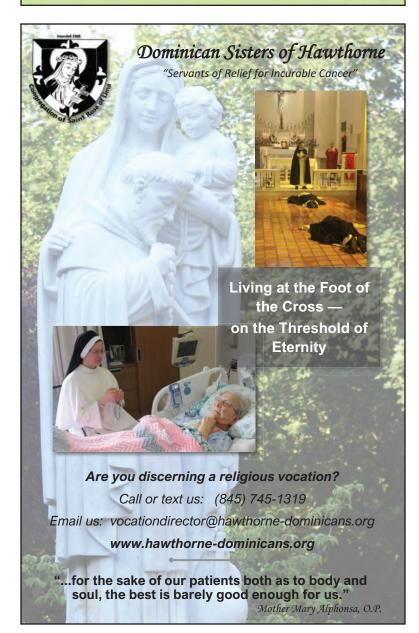
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METACATHOLIC



Virtual reality chapels offer people a sense of the sacred from their homes. Courtesy photos

Spotlight on a Catholic priest evangelizing in the metaverse

How one priest is determined to lead souls to Christ in Web 3.0

By Paul Senz

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So in what ways is this metaverse "beyond"? What sort of unconceived places will it be taking us? And will the Church have a presence there? Father Ian VanHeusen and MetaCatholic are answering those questions.

The front lines of evangelization

Father Ian VanHeusen is president of MetaCatholic, and the chaplain of the Newman Center at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina. A priest of the Diocese of Raleigh, his ministry sees him working with a wide array of people in a wide array of contexts, including on the front lines of technological development. MetaCatholic is engaged in the development of virtual and augmented reality



Father Ian VanHeusen

games and experiences in the metaverse.

"Basically, in the next two to three years, video-game technology is going to be used in every part of your life, with augmented reality, virtual reality and Web 3.0," Father Van-Heusen said. This technology is in its nascent stages, so it is not clear exactly how things will develop over time. Right now people can use virtual reality headsets, for example, and there are a number of apps available through which users can engage in these immersive experiences; but according to Father VanHeusen, it's not clear how "these different experiences will be delivered." But one thing is certain, he says: the Church must be a part of it.

Web 3.0 and the Church

Technology is not something

that the Church can ignore, according to Father VanHeusen. The internet has revolutionized the world in ways no one could possibly have predicted, and the way in which the internet (and access to the internet) has changed over the years has been similarly unpredictable. The earliest days of the internet, commonly known as Web 1.0, went through about 2005, and featured mostly static websites, without much opportunity for interaction; Web 2.0 would be the current state of the internet, characterized by user-generated sites like social media and social networking, blogs, sharing sites like YouTube and Flickr, apps, and more; Web 3.0 can be thought of as an immersive experience, where the individual is much more in control. The so-called metaverse is part of this Web 3.0.

"I talk a lot about divine providence," Father VanHeusen said. "God knew from all eternity that this technology would be here. We believe in a God who is in charge of all things, who is the ruler of history. So how should we use this technology?" Web 3.0 is a tremendous opportunity for the Church, he said. "The big thing is that with Web 3.0, the Church needs to be there. We need to be there to evangelize, to create beauty. We can't make the mistakes we did with Web 2.0."

Using social media?

The Church was slow to adapt to the ways in which Web 2.0 could be leveraged evangelization. There was debate about whether or not priests and seminarians should be allowed to be on social media, for example. The question was essentially resolved when Pope Benedict XVI himself promoted the use of social media, including opening a Twitter account. "But that was already 10 years behind the curve," Father VanHeusen said.

This is not about the public perception of the Church. The important thing is not that the Church be seen as being "with the times," but rather that the Church be there to evangelize, and to bring the Gospel to this facet of our lives. Figuring out how to do that effectively may take time, but for now, groups like MetaCatholic are on the front lines in the drive to bring Christ into the metaverse.

Faith Games, Inc.

MetaCatholic is now part of Faith Games, Inc. Their goal is to use virtual reality, gaming, and other multimedia content for Catholic education, exciting experiences and evangelization.

One of their first forays into the development of virtual reality experiences was a virtual reality Rosary, first with the Sorrowful Mysteries. The user could be "present" at each mystery, watching Our Lord as he suffered through his passion. Father VanHeusen said that there are countless opportunities for other immersive virtual reality experiences.

A game in honor of **Blessed Carlo Acutis**

MetaCatholic is currently developing the Acutis Game, in honor of Blessed Carlo Acutis, a young Italian computer programmer who died in 2006 at the age of 15 and was beatified in 2020. Blessed Carlo created a website that documented Eucharistic miracles from around the world, leading many to consider him a patron for programmers. In the game, the player joins Blessed Carlo on adventures to explore the lives of the saints, holy pilgrimage sites and Bible stories.

In the Acutis Game, Meta-Catholic and Faith Games, Inc., are attempting to improve upon the early and simplistic things that have been done by others. "There are

some people who have built these kinds of simplistic chapels, but we're doing all custom technology would be stuff," Father Van-Heusen said. It is important to bring beauty into this realm, and not simply have things be utilitarian or overly childish or simplis-

tic. The way of beauty is an important means of evangelization, and this is no less true in the digital realm.

Where sin abounds

"I absolutely see this as an opportunity for evangelization," Father VanHeusen said. "One of the phrases I use a lot for this is from Paul's Letter to the Romans: 'Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more' [Rom 5:20]."



Blessed Carlo Acutis has inspired a video game. CNS

photo/courtesy Sainthood Cause of Carlo Acutis

People often ask him whether or not this new technology of virtual or augmented reality will make things worse, leading to new and even un-

"God knew from all

eternity that this

here. We believe in a

God who is in charge

of all things, who is

the ruler of history."

— Father VanHeusen

foreseen occasions for sin. "The answer is ves, for some people," said. In recent decades, we have seen the dangers and vice that the internet makes more readily available: por-

nography, human trafficking, and more. But there is also a great deal of good made possible by this technology.

"For a lot of us, though, it will actually make things better," Father VanHeusen said. And for those who believe all things work to the good for those who believe [cf. Romans 8:28]. This is going to be a great opportunity."

Paul Senz writes from Oklahoma.

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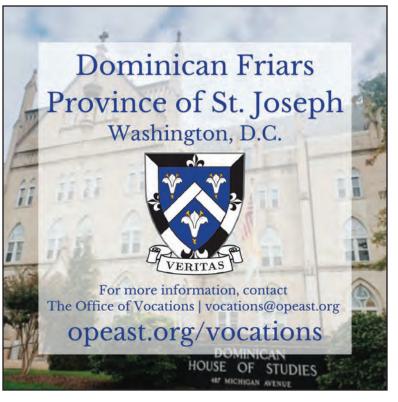
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The virtual reality Rosary allows users to immerse themselves in the Passion.



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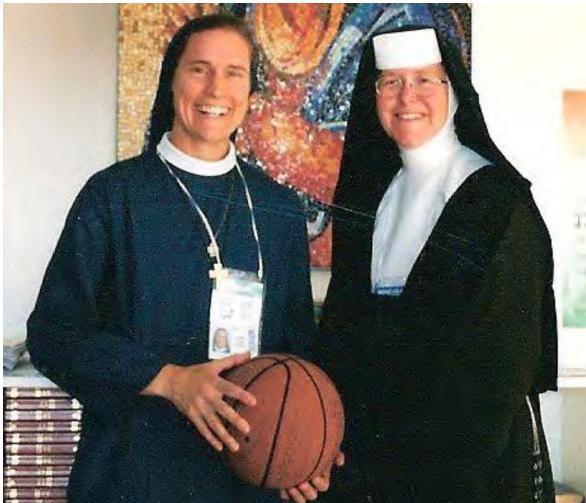




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WOMEN RELIGIOUS



Sister Irene Regina of the Daughters of St. Paul, left, and Sister Margaret Ann Laechelin of the Carmelites of the Most Sacred Heart of Los Angeles are seen in this undated photo.

OSV News photo/courtesy Sisters Irene Regina and Margaret Ann Laechelin

Basketball sisters now play for God

College teammates head out on different paths, wind up on same journey 40 years later

By Linda Reeves, OSV News

Divine intervention may be the only explanation for how two college teammates graduated, ventured off on different career paths miles apart and then, 40 years later, ended up on the same journey in Miami, both wearing habits.

"I think we met at the first practice on the basketball court," said Pauline Sister Irene Regina, reflecting back to college days at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, where she first met Carmelite Sister Margaret Ann Laechelin.

The two are rekindling their friendship after Sister Irene was assigned to the Pauline Book and Media Store in Miami. Sister Margaret Ann is the principal of Miami's Archbishop Coleman Carroll High School. Sister Irene's move to Miami marks the first time the two women have lived in the same town and in visiting distance

since college days.

"We were freshmen and both looking forward to playing college basketball," said Sister Irene about that fall semester back in 1979 when Mary Hoernschemeyer from St. Louis and Brenda Laechelin from San Antonio, met.

They both had landed basketball scholarships. Sister Irene came from an all-girls high school, Ursuline Academy in St. Louis, where she played softball, basketball and volleyball. She took photos for the yearbook and wrote for the newspaper.

Sister Margaret Ann attended East Central High School, a large public school in San Antonio, where she was involved in basketball and track. She made high marks, took honors classes and was a sports editor for the school paper.

Both were from Catholic families, tall, athletic and loved the game of basketball. They hit it off right from the start.

"We could talk about anything," said Sister Irene in an interview with Florida Catholic Media. "We were dedicated Catholics and would go to daily

Mass together on campus. Even on road trips, the two of us would go to Sunday Mass. Our coach was Catholic, and he always found a nearby Catholic church for us."

Both were excited to be part of the school's class of 1983 and the Lady Rattlers.

"We easily became friends," said Sister Margaret Ann. "We shared almost everything. She shared her meal card with me, and I gave her a set of keys to my car. We did not talk a lot about God or our faith. We just lived it together."

Sister Irene initially majored in engineering but switched to physical education, thinking it was a better fit but not aiming at a specific career. Upon graduation, she returned home to look for a job.

"I remember being interviewed for a job at a Catholic high school," she said. "The religious sister interviewing me took me over to the convent. I thought that was funny because I was interviewing for a job, not a convent."

Sister Margaret Ann initially majored in math but switched several times before settling on English. "I decided to be a basketball coach and teacher. I had done some coaching with young children and really enjoyed it."

After graduating, she landed a job at Troy State University in Troy, Alabama. "I was able to coach college basketball and get a master's degree in 11 months. I then returned to San Antonio and coached high school basketball and taught English for four years in large public high schools."

Sister Irene continued her

search. She found out the Archdiocese of St. Louis was holding its first vocation retreat for young women. That's where she met the Daughters of St. Paul — also known as the Media Nuns.

"I felt like the congregation was a perfect fit. I didn't find a job, I found a community," she said.

She entered Nov. 1, 1983, in Boston and took her first vows in 1987, with her good friend cheering her on.

"She may have had an inkling that I would enter religious life," said Sister Irene about her teammate. "Near the time we graduated, she told me that our coach wasn't worried about my future. He told her that I would probably be a pilot or a sister, and that either way I'd be close to God."

Sister Margaret Ann con-

tinued coaching and teaching — her dream jobs — at public schools but felt something missing. She continued to discern God's will. "I wanted to do and be whatever he had created me to do and be."

When some of the students in her school asked her to start a Bible class, she knew God was answering her prayers and working in her life.

"My principal was willing to permit it as long as it was lowkey," she said.

"I felt like the con-

gregation was a

perfect fit. I didn't

find a job, I found a

community."

- Sister Irene Regina

Her Bible class was packed, the students engaged and interested. "It was the hunger for truth, goodness and beauty that I saw in their eyes that brought me to ask God what I needed to do

to best help them. I knew that God had created me to be a religious sister."

She visited the Carmelites of the Most Sacred Heart of Los Angeles, and after discerning, made her first vows in 1993, with her good friend there lending support.

Sister Margaret Ann has served at Archbishop Carroll High for seven years, and during her tenure, her dedication to her students and the school community has not gone unnoticed. The former Lady Rattler gained fame in 2017 when a video of her cutting down trees in the aftermath of Hurri-

cane Irma went viral, amassing more than 7 million views on Facebook. Her followers nicknamed her "the chainsaw nun."

Her popularity continued after another video surfaced of her and her religious sisters showing off their basketball skills in support of the Miami Heat. The Globetrotters spotted the video and made her and her team players honorary picks during their draft.

As one of the Media Nuns, Sister Irene's ministry has taken her to Anchorage, Philadelphia, San Diego, San Francisco, Cleveland, Toronto, New York City, Chicago, Honolulu, Los Angeles and now Miami.

Both women remain active and go on the courts from time to time to shoot a few hoops.

"A good friend is a gift from God," said Sister Irene. "Even though we didn't see each other for long stretches of time, just knowing that someone is out there praying for you and hoping for your good is a boost. As religious sisters, we spur each other on to holiness."

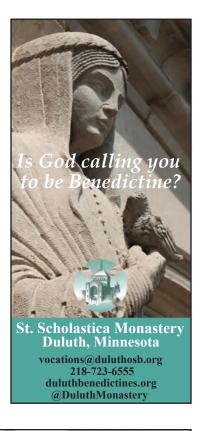
"We started as teammates on the basketball court and now we are religious sisters — truly sisters — helping each other on the road to heaven," said Sister Margaret Ann. "Now our goal is much more than a basketball trophy. Someday we will spend eternity together in God's heavenly court."

Linda Reeves is a correspondent for Florida Catholic Media.



Sister Margaret Ann Laechelin, principal of Archbishop Coleman F. Carroll High School in Miami, holds the chainsaw she used to help clean up debris following Hurricane Irma in 2017. CNS photo/courtesy Sister Margaret Ann







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UKRAINE

Bringing the whole world together

Tireless Philadelphia sisters are making a remarkable impact in Ukraine

By Maryann Gogniat Eidemiller

Last year, the Sisters of St. Basil the Great, Jesus Lover of Humanity Province, in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, shipped a cargo container to sisters in Ukraine after the Russian invasion. It was filled with medical supplies, toiletries and clothes donated by churches, community groups,

businesses and individuals.

Now they're collecting money for the Sisters of St. Basil the Great in Ukraine to be used for whatever the people need. According to John Kurey, development director and provincial adviser, the donations have already surpassed \$250,000.

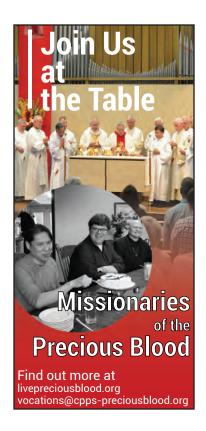
"Financial donations are more effective now than material goods," he said. "They know better what they need, and the banking system in Ukraine is fully functional except in parts of the country taken by the Russians. And sending money is very easy. The sisters can have it the next day in their bank account, so they can buy what they need. That also supports the local economy."

The money is being used for medical supplies, food and to assist the displaced, and in one town it helped to purchase an ambulance.

"They'll be needing money when they begin to restore what was damaged," said Sister Dorothy Ann Busowski, house coordinator for the convent in Pennsylvania. "Our provincial, Sister Joann Sosler, is going to Roma-



Sister Lucia Murashko, OSBM, and the Sisters of the Order of St. Basil the Great bring assistance to the military in the city of Zaporizhzhia and other frontline villages. Courtesy photos



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nia for a meeting of all our major superiors, and she'll be able to hand the money directly to the sisters in Ukraine. They can take the money right back with them."

At the monastery in Zaporizhzhia, the sisters have assisted the military, the local maternity hospital and poor single people in the city and other frontline villages.

Sisters from the monastery in Zhytomyr help refugees from Bakhmut, people in Zhytomyr whose houses were damaged by shelling, and the poor who have many needs. The sisters help about 60 people every month. In another part of Ukraine, sisters take care of displaced persons who live in their monastery in Verkhne Sinyvidne.

Settling in America

The mission of the Sisters of St. Basil the Great worldwide is to engage in service that glorifies God while serving God's people. Living the charism of their founder, St. Basil the Great, they are called to express God's eternal love through deeds focused on making the world a better place.

That's what led Mother Helena Langevych and a group of sisters to sail to America in 1911 to administer to Ukrainian Catholics in the Philadelphia area where many were poor, illiterate or orphaned. The sisters' responses included opening an academy, a boarding school and, much later, Manor College in Jenkintown. In re-



Sisters take care of displaced persons who live in the Sisters' monastery in Verkhne Sinyvidne.

cent years, they established the Basilian Spirituality Center for retreats and other programs.

The sisters have been involved in education from the beginning of their presence in the United States.

"They played one of the most important roles in the Ukrainian Catholic Church in America," Kurey said. "They educated so many children in schools throughout the country. They taught the children the Faith and gave them the building blocks for lives full of faith. ... Many of those children have gone on to become priests and bishops."



Sisters in Zhytomyr help refugees from Bakhmut, people in Zhytomyr whose houses were damaged by shelling, and poor people who need help.

Supporting community abroad

Decades ago, many sisters in the province were born in Ukraine. Now most of the 30 members have Ukrainian heritage and some have families there. With such close ties, they were quickly called to action to help when Ukraine was invaded. The community was generous in donating goods and now with providing monetary sup-

"We get phone calls every day from people asking if we are accepting money," Sister Dorothy Ann said. "I was at a meeting and someone gave me a check for \$30,000."

Help is also being extended to Ukrainians who seek refuge in the United States. The Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Philadelphia has a food pantry in their Good Samaritan Ministry.

At the province, Sister Dorothy Ann noted, "Sister Teodora Kopyn is doing humanitarian work here, giving out food and clothing to the ones who are coming to this area. She is working with the Basilian Support Ministry in collaboration with the Archeparchy of Philadelphia."

The response to help the suffering people in Ukraine, she added, is unbelievable. "It's brought the whole world together," she said. "People realize what's important, and we are grateful, very grateful."

Maryann Gogniat Eidemiller writes from Pennsylvania.

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