

God's Field

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My Thoughts Are Not Your Thoughts, Nor Are Your Ways, My Ways

Most Rev. Anthony Mikovsky, Prime Bishop

During this time in what is known as the Ordinary Time season, we spend a considerable amount of our time considering and reflecting on the teachings of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And especially over the past few weeks we have encountered a number of His parables. We remind ourselves that parables are designed to get us to consider in an ever deeper way what are the lessons that are being conveyed to us. If we were to receive a plain fact from Jesus, we would have to just accept that fact for what it is, but a parable allows us to consider the situation and the teaching from a number of angles and then find the way in which those teachings must be applied to our lives.

Although many of the parables of our Lord are certainly challenging to our daily living and our pre-conceived ways of thinking, one in particular often generates a lot of discussion when we encounter it during Sunday Mass. This is the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard from the Gospel of St. Matthew which is presented to us on the 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, this year on Sunday, September 24, 2023.

Jesus tells this parable to His disciples: "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went

out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' (Matthew 20:1-7)

As we begin to consider this parable, we can make some reflections on what is occurring and how it is applied to our own lives. First, we see that the call of the owner of the vineyard is continuing throughout the day. Not only does he make an agreement at the beginning of the workday, but throughout the entire day, even to the last moments, an hour before quitting time, he still calls laborers to the vineyard. This speaks to us in two ways. One is that the call of God is not just for the young at the beginning of their lives. God calls to people of all ages and at all times in their lives to come to faith. Some may not answer that call at a given time because of various circumstances, but God will continue to call and all we need to do is answer. Secondly, is that the call of God is a call to work. The vineyard owner is calling laborers. God desires that we work within His vineyard. St. Paul mentions this in his letter to the Philippians: "If

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I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; ... to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith.” (Philippians 1:22, 24b-25) As we work within the kingdom of God, we must then bear fruit for the kingdom.

The parable continues: “When those hired at five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’” (Matthew 20:9-12)

As we reflect on these points, this is often the place where most people are troubled by this parable. I have certainly heard many times, “but this is just unfair.” The thing is that it is only unfair if we believe that we have a transactional relationship with Almighty God, and unfortunately many individuals desire exactly that. Although, to some degree, I suppose that we all may have this attitude, even if we don’t exactly speak of it in those terms. If we ever have the feeling that we ‘deserve’ good things or blessings because we have been going to church for a while. Or we bargain with God saying something like, “If I get something I need or I desire, then I will spend more time in church or serving God,” then we are seeking to have a transactional relationship with the Almighty.

Now of course we know in our hearts that such a thing is not quite right. Love is never born of a transactional relationship. We know that it’s wrong to say to our young children that they can only eat if they get good grades. We certainly know that good parents know that good grades are important, and they will help their children as much as they possibly can, but this is not the measure of a parent’s love. The same is true of Almighty God, and even more so.

The Prophet Isaiah speaks to this in the Old Testament reading from this Sunday as well. “Return to the Lord, that He may have mercy on them, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher

than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:7b-9)

God certainly does not have a transactional relationship with us. We are all sinners and prove ourselves to be unworthy of God. None of us therefore can earn anything from God. As St. Paul says in the Letter to Romans, “Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:23-24)

Anything that we have from Almighty God, especially the precious gift of our salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross, is given to us as a pure gift of love. St. John tells us in his first letter, “God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent His only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 4:9-10)

This knowledge now allows us to see the workers in the parable in a different light. These laborers are called by the owner, Almighty God, to work in the kingdom. We should joyfully go to that work and work hard in the kingdom of God, as a measure of our thanksgiving. We can never truly repay God for the precious gift that He has given us. We should acknowledge this, but we should still then desire to serve Him and answer His call.

The gift of our salvation and the many blessings we have received are certainly beyond all measure. We must acknowledge this, but we must also acknowledge that the call of God to work in the kingdom is also real and we should seek to serve Him as He calls us. Again as St. John tells us. “No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and His love is perfected in us.” (1 John 12)

Let us answer the call of God to work in the vineyard. Let us love and serve God and our neighbor as the response to this call.



P.N.C.C. Future Direction

September 2023

The Pathway of Christian Discipleship

Introduction

As we continue with our reflections for the Future Direction Program of the Polish National Catholic Church, this month we continue to reflect on the actual resolution portion of the accepted document of the XXVI General Synod. Last month we reflected on how we are called to embrace the continuation of the sacrificial work of the Church given to us by our Lord. Now we seek to discern the pathway that we must follow as we live as disciples of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Scripture

John 14:3-6 – Jesus said: “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not where You are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way and the truth, and the life. No one come to the Father except through Me.”

2 Peter 2:20-21 – For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment that was passed on to them.”

Psalms 18:30 – This God, His way is perfect; the promise of the Lord proves true; He is a shield for all who take refuge in Him.

Reflection

Following all of the items which we acknowledge within the Resolution of the XXVI General Synod of the P.N.C.C., we come to the point where we state, “We hereby resolve.” After we had turned to the Holy Scriptures and the teachings of the Church to gain knowledge and understanding of the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ, we seek to discern the way of Christ in the world and then to resolve to follow this pathway of Christian discipleship. The resolution states: we resolve ... “to faithfully walk the pathway of Christian discipleship as marked out by the pristine faith of the Undivided Church of the first millennium.” We begin this reflection by considering what is this pathway and what it demands of us as followers of Jesus.

In the Scripture passage above from the Gospel of John, Jesus is speaking to His disciples concerning His sacrificial death upon the cross and especially the consequences for those who follow Him. It is within this context that He gives them the holy commandment. “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” As we consider this passage we remind ourselves that the word ‘love’ used throughout the quote are all derivatives of ‘agape’ which mean, ‘all self-sacrificing love.’

It is within this context that Jesus tells the disciples that they know the way and more specifically when questioned, that “He is the way, the truth, and the life.” The way or path of discipleship is the uniting of ourselves ever more closely with Jesus, building His kingdom and fulfilling this great commandment.

So we must than ask ourselves how exactly do we accomplish this. The resolution reminds us that we seek to do this in union with and guided by the pristine faith of the Undivided Church of the first millennium. While this may seem for us a difficult topic to understand, it does point the way for us to a very basic faith that was handed from Jesus to the apostles. How the early apostles and disciples of Jesus lived, thought and worshipped should be our guide to beginning to walk the pathway of discipleship. We do not need any sort of special or elevated knowledge to understand what Jesus demands of us, but rather we need to open the Scriptures, attend Holy Mass, hear the Word of God read and preached there and then also to receive the Holy Eucharist, the true presence of Christ, to strengthen us in living out these commands.

These things are the beginning of the pathway that Jesus Christ has laid out before us. But we are also called to progress along this way throughout our lives. It is here that we look to the holy commandment that Jesus had given in the thirteenth chapter of John's Gospel: “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples.” We begin by reflecting, what exactly is this

love that Jesus had for His followers. This love begins with the Incarnation as we remember that God so loved the world that His Son, Jesus, was made man for our salvation. It continues in His teaching and acts of power that reveal the divine intentions for our lives and this love culminates in His all self-sacrificing love that He showed in going to the Cross. In essence the entire life of Jesus is an expression of His love for us.

Therefore, if we are to love each other as Jesus loved us as the pathway of Christian discipleship, then our entire lives too, must be consumed by the life of Jesus. Of course, we might find this most easy when we come to Church and seek the forgiveness of our sins in the Sacrament of Penance and then receive Holy Communion as we join ourselves to Jesus. It become more difficult though as we go out into a hostile world where those who surround us may not have the same intentions. But it is here that we must persevere in the ways of Christ, redouble our efforts to live and think and act as Jesus did.

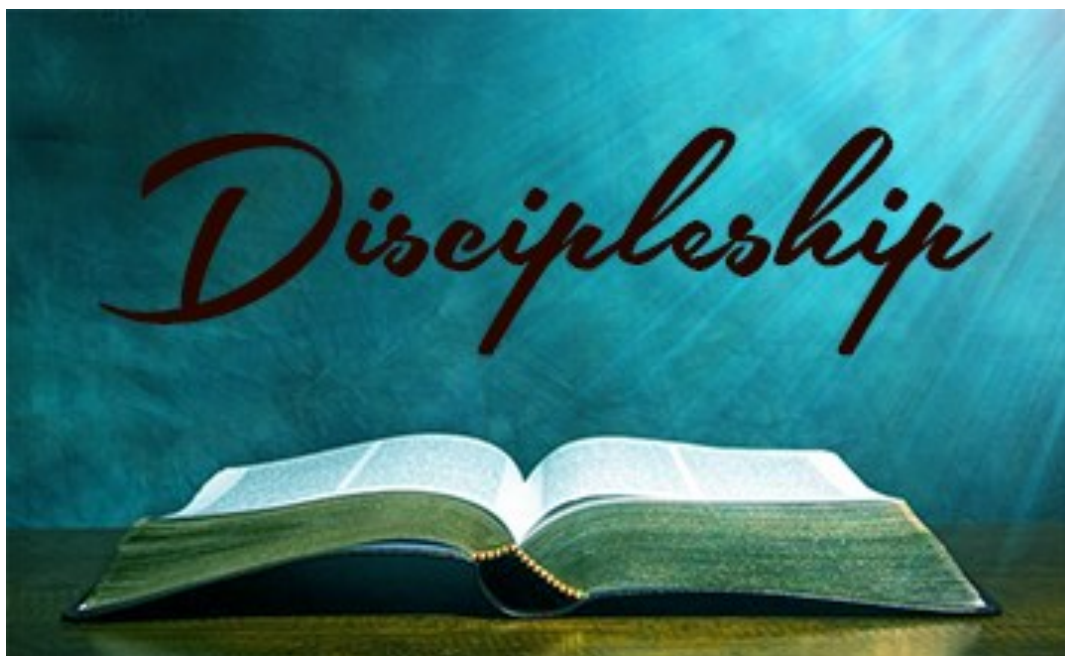
Action Item

As we spend time in prayer gathered before the celebration of Holy Mass on Sunday and also in our times of prayer in our daily lives, spend some time reflecting on the words written by Bishop Hodur as a preface to our Church Constitution. There he wrote: "By divine imperative the sacred mission of this Church is to carry the light of Jesus Christ before the people, constantly reminding them that their aim is to live in the spirit of God, in truth, love and righteousness, seeking the truth by reading and studying the Holy Scriptures with the aid of the accumulated wisdom of the ages." And also, "The most fervent desire and prayer of this Church is to emulate Jesus Christ in fulfilling obligations toward God, family, nation and society." The section entitled Tenants and Aims also contains the words: "The most important objective of the Polish National Catholic Church, as the Catholic Church of Christ, is to maintain, enrich and develop the life of God in the soul of man. To help man know God and His holy Being so that from this knowledge and understanding may flow blessing, light, love, strength and inner satisfaction which no person or thing can give, save God."

As we read and reflect upon these words, as we receive the forgiveness of our sins in the Sacrament of Penance and as we receive Jesus Christ truly present in the Holy Eucharist, let us each consider how we can put these into action within our daily lives. Pray that the work of the Church will become active and operative in each moment of your life. Let all of this allow our lives to be lived on the pathways of Christian discipleship.

We continue to implement the five themes the Synod determined for our Future Direction Committee:

- Growth and Membership
- Increase Spirituality
- Lifelong Learning
- Sacred Vocations
- Community Involvement and Presence



“Rise, Let Us Go From Here”

Gran Theological Conference of the Nordic Catholic Church

From August 3 to 5, 2023, Prime Bishop Anthony Mikovsky, together with the P.N.C.C. Ecumenical Officer, Very Rev. Robert Nemkovich, attended a theological conference in Gran, Norway hosted by the Nordic Catholic Church. The stated focus of the conference this year was, “to find ecumenical common ways out of the captivity of the secularized Western society and the implosion of the majority churches.”



During these three days in the beautiful countryside of Gran, Norway the participants had an opportunity to not only listen to a variety of lectures on the main topic, but also to join together in moments of prayer as well as spend time in casual discussion.

On Thursday evening the participants gathered for vespers and dinner, followed by an opening session which set the theme for days ahead. Friday saw the majority of the sessions entitled: “Crisis in the Church Reflecting Crisis in Society” by Bishop Roald Flemestad of the Nordic Catholic Church; “A Way Forward Out of the Neo-Gnostic Church and Culture” which was delivered, via Zoom, by Fr. Jeremy Boccabello of the Diocese of the Holy Cross ACC; and finally “A Common Way Forward – Joint Church Fellowship and a New Ecumenical Structure” given by Prime Bishop Anthony Mikovsky. During the breaks between sessions, the participants had ample opportunity to discuss the presentations and offer their reflections.

On the final day, Saturday, following Morning Mass, there was the final plenary session entitled: “Joint Strategy, Priorities and Next Steps?” with the moderators, Bishop Kevin Donlon of the Anglican Union and Bishop Ottar Myrseth of the Nordic Catholic Church. Within this discussion all participants had the opportunity to share their thoughts and concerns as the Church continues to deal with a hostile society as well as other churches which have capitulated to that society.

Following the conclusion of this conference, the members of the Nordic Catholic Church together with Prime Bishop Anthony and Fr. Sr. Rob, traveled to Fredrikstad, Norway to join with St. Michael’s Parish to celebrate their 20th anniversary with evening vespers and Sunday Mass on the Solemnity of the Transfiguration of Our Lord.

The papers and presentations from this Gran Theological Conference will soon appear, after they are collected, on the website of the Union of Scranton: theunionofscranton.org.

NUC Convention and Workshop

Dupont, PA

The 36th National United Choirs Convention and 28th Music Workshop were held on August 9 - 11, 2023 at Holy Mother of Sorrows Parish in Dupont, Pennsylvania. An opening Mass was held on the evening of August 9th, followed by a dinner and the opening of the convention. August 10th and 11th were filled with workshop sessions and rehearsals, and at the conclusion of the workshop a beautiful concert was presented by all the participants in the church. After the concert, fellowship and an auction to benefit music scholarships took place in the Parish Hall.



NUC 2023 Music Scholarship Awards Announcement

Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise Him. Praise the Lord with the harp, make music to Him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully and shout for joy! - Psalm33: 1-3 NIV

Make a joyful noise! The 2023 awards were announced during the National United Choirs Workshop Concert held at Holy Mother of Sorrows Parish in Dupont, Pennsylvania. Here are the recipients of the National United Choirs Music Scholarships for 2023:

Dylan Dionisio

Bishop Francis Bonczak Youth Award \$300
Blessed Trinity Parish
Fall River, MA
Percussion

Abigail Drezewski

Bishop Thomas Gnat Award \$1,000
Holy Trinity Parish
Washington, PA
Voice

Parker James Fitzgerald

Junior Incentive Award \$100
Blessed Virgin Mary of Czestochowa Parish
Latham, NY
Trombone

Kaitlyn Gingerlowski

Polish National Union of America Award \$800
Bishop Francis Bonczak Award \$500
St. Stanislaus Cathedral Parish
Scranton, PA
Violin

Everett Hoefler

Junior Incentive Award \$100
Blessed Virgin Mary of Czestochowa Parish
Latham, NY
Electric Guitar

Mikaela Hoefler

Bishop Francis Bonczak Youth Award \$300
Cecilia Shumlas Award \$200
Blessed Virgin Mary of Czestochowa Parish
Latham, NY
Piano

Devin Junko

Bishop Francis Bonczak Youth Award \$1,350
Holy Trinity Parish
Washington, PA
Piano

Jathan Kotulsky

Bishop Francis Bonczak Youth Award \$500
Holy Family Parish
McKeesport, PA
Trumpet

Joel Kotulsky

Bishop Francis Bonczak Youth Award \$500
Holy Family Parish
McKeesport, PA
Alto Saxophone

Connor Levinson

Junior Incentive Award \$100
Blessed Trinity Parish
Fall River, MA
Guitar

John Paletta

Bishop Francis Bonczak Youth Award \$400
Holy Trinity Parish
Washington, PA
Piano

Maria Paletta

Bishop Francis Bonczak Youth Award \$400
Holy Trinity Parish
Washington, PA
Piano, Violin

12 Awards, \$6,550; Since inception: 1136 Awards, \$353,085

Congratulations to these talented people! They have received a special gift from God, have acknowledged that gift, and have used it to glorify God in their parish and the PNCC.

Our scholarship program continues to be successful because of the generous donations we get from the faithful of the PNCC. Thank you for your support and we hope we continue to be so blessed with talented applicants and the funding to provide them financial help as they pursue their music education.

Information on the scholarship program can be found on our website: www.nucmusicsscholarship.weebly.com

Cathy A. Bilinski
Music Scholarship Administrator
nucscholarship@gmail.com



9th Annual United Y.M.S. of R. Golf Tournament

Broadview Heights, OH

Hours of preparation, set up, meeting, item collection, and deliberation culminated on the afternoon of Friday, August 25, as golfers and friends from across the Polish National Catholic Church descended upon the Parma Room Hospitality Suite in Independence, OH.

There, they were met with varied kielbasas, pizza, chips, pretzels, popcorn, drinks, and wonderful fellowship. The topper of it all was the putting game, where for a \$5 entry fee, participants took 3 practice shots followed by attempting to sink as many putts as possible. This brought a fun, yet competitive element to the evening. Some people were even “sponsored” to putt for the first time in decades, including Prime Bishop Mikovsky, his wife Carol, and our own Greg Hodor!

the evening, Bruce Bogzevitz, brought the house down with golf humor and welcomed all guests and dignitaries.



Fr. Sr. Charles Zawistowski, Administrator of the PNCC Western Diocese, passed on the large lantern that was a featured piece at the previous month's Diocesan Youth Gathering. He presented it to the youngest attendee of the Gathering, Brady Soltysiak, admonishing him to keep the light of Christ on behalf of the parish. Fr. Sr. Charles described that this lantern would stay in Parma for the time being and then travel to other parishes in the diocese. It has found a home upon Mary's Altar.



Rain from earlier in the week left much of Northeast Ohio pretty soaked, including the site of the 9th Annual Y.M.S. of R. Golf Tournament, Briarwood Golf Course. The day was dry, however, and golfers arrived around 8am, welcomed by our registration committee, dozens of donuts, and coffee. Golfers stretched and chowed down, enjoying the calm before the storm. And, although the pace was quite slow, everyone enjoyed their time on the course, with scores running a little higher due to the wet conditions. Thanks to Annette for the on-course pictures!



The banquet was held at St. Mary's in Parma, OH, with the upper Fellowship Hall serving as a respite for appetizers and cold drinks before the group was called to the downstairs hall for dinner. The MC for

A delicious Italian Dinner was served, with guests called up and served as much as they could eat. Stories of “almosts” and “it was so close” were told between bites.

Upon finishing the meal, awards were presented. The team from Lancaster, NY consisting of Gary Alexin, Tim Alexin, and Mark Stencel won the overall event. The Y.M.S. of R. top score went to the clergy team: Fr. Sr. Zawistowski, Fr. Jason Soltysiak, and Sub-Deacon Doug Scott. Top women’s team was local: Josephine Orlowski, Deb Wilson, Rosie Kirkpatrick, and Mimi Konopenski. Special awards were given to special golfers Paige McConlogue for “Golfer to Quit Be-fore 11am” and to Tom Putynski for “Golfing with Bruce”.

Ice cream sundaes were served after the awards were presented, with 3 different ice creams and many different toppings.

The Most Rev. Anthony Mikovsky, Prime Bishop of the P.N.C.C., spoke at the end of the event. The day was long and his words were short, but he made sure everyone knew how proud he was of the work of the National Y.M.S. of R. as well as the work of local parish Y.M.S. of R. Branches.



The 9 a.m. Holy Mass was celebrated Sunday by Prime Bishop Mikovsky and con-celebrated by Fr. Jason Soltysiak, Fr. Greg Gronn, and Fr. Jim Ploskonka. Prime Bishop was assisted by Sub-Deacon Doug Scott with Chuck Repede and Damion Alberino serving as acolytes. Mrs. Cathy Bilinski played the organ, as our organist was on a long-overdue vacation. Parish Chair Susan Boehnlein welcomed Prime Bishop with the traditional bread and salt before Mass began.



(Continued on Page 12.)



(9th Annual United Y.M.S. of R. Golf Tournament - Continued from Page 11.)

Holy Mass featured a Gospel Procession, with Fr. Jim proclaiming the Gospel from the center of the church. Prime Bishop followed with a homily that highlighted theology very important to the Polish National Catholic Church - that the rock that Christ would build his Church upon was the great faith of His followers. Prime Bishop spoke of the effects of that statement and how it still affects us today. His authoritative and compelling homily was very well-received by the congregation.

A final reception took place after Holy Mass in the Fellowship Hall. Cathy Avondet and Patty Bennett prepared a "going-away" meal for everyone, be they traveling 5 minutes home or 6 hours to another state. Clergy and out-of-towners were served first, with many hitting the road shortly thereafter. Others enjoyed lengthy time in the air-conditioned hall after a warm weekend.



Thank you to all who made this final August weekend a great success and memorable weekend. Branch #29 of the Y.M.S. of R. fulfilled its second of two tournaments over a two-year span. It is a wonderful blessing to have able and willing parishioners to run such an event.



Buffalo-Pittsburgh Diocese
Polish Harvest Festival doesn't leave visitors hungry
By Jordan Mansbe (WTAJ-TV, Altoona, PA)


HOUTZDALE, Pa. (WTAJ)— St. Barbara's Church in Houtzdale welcomed community members to take part in its 15th annual Polish Harvest Festival Sunday afternoon (August 20, 2023).

The parish was originally formed 50 years ago by a group of Polish immigrants. Father Andres Simental said that while they had left their home country, they didn't want to leave their customs behind.

"They wanted to celebrate their catholic faith, but also they wanted to celebrate the traditions, the values and the festivities they have," Simental said.

Simental worked alongside his fellow church members as it didn't take long for the food lines to form after the event started at noon. All of the food at the event is homemade by the church.

"We prepare food, polish homemade food like the traditional pierogies," Simental said. "We also prepare different dishes like hot sausages and we offer that to the community."

The event features several local vendors for visitors to browse while they listen to Polish music. Simental said they hope the festival introduces their guests to a different cultural atmosphere, as it did for him.

Simental is originally from Mexico and has been working at the parish for three years now. The blending of different cultures and the community it fosters never ceases to put a smile on his face.

"They're working people and they are devoted to their faith," Simental said. "We promote unity, we collaborate, we help each other and this is what I really enjoy the most."



Holy Trinity Parish Successfully Conducts First Ever Vacation Bible School

McKees Rocks, PA

July 22nd marked Holy Trinity Parish's very first Vacation Bible School, and it was a huge success! Today Participants learned about Moses and Miriam and music all while enjoying talks from Father Mike Selep, pastor, and Dave.

The children had the opportunity to play musical instruments, make beautiful rocks reminding them that God is everywhere, make fans, and also to participate in a scavenger hunt. The wonderful day ended with lunch and celebrating birthdays with cupcakes!

On this day we saw kindness, sharing, helping and friendships being made all while learning. The kids were really involved and most importantly took home many great lessons. Thank you to everyone who participated in and volunteered for this event



Lajkoniki Dancers Perform

Rostraver, PA

Holy Family Parish's Lajkoniki Dancers performed on August 6, 2023 at the Vinoski Winery Polish Festival in Rostraver, PA.



Central Diocese

Opening Mass of the 36th National United Choirs Convention & 28th Music Workshop

Holy Mother of Sorrows Parish, Dupont, PA

The Opening Mass of the 36th National United Choirs Convention & 29th Music Workshop was held on Wednesday, August 9, 2023 at Holy Mother of Sorrows Parish in Dupont, PA. The Most Rev. Anthony A. Mikovsky Prime Bishop of the P.N.C.C., was the celebrant. Concelebrants were: Rt. Rev. John E. Mack - NUC Chaplain and Bishop of the Buffalo- Pittsburgh Diocese; Rt. Rev. Paul Sobiechowski - Bishop of the Eastern Diocese; Rt. Rev. Bernard Nowicki - Bishop of the Central Diocese; The Very Rev. Zbigniew Dawid - Host Pastor.

Submitted by Very Rev. Zbigniew Dawid



Central Diocese Annual Clergy Retreat and Conference

Easton, PA

The clergy of the Central Diocese, along with Bishop Bernard Nowicki, held the Annual Retreat and Conference at Saint Francis Retreat House in Easton, PA from August 21-23, 2023. The retreat master was Very Rev. Timothy Cremeens, PhD, OCA, of Huntsville, AL.

Submitted by Very Rev. Zbigniew Dawid



Providence of God Parish Holds Annual Chicken BBQ

Scranton, PA

Providence of God Lithuanian Parish in Scranton, PA, held its annual Chicken BBQ on parish grounds. It was a very successful takeout and eat-in event. Many thanks to everyone who helped out and to everyone who enjoyed one of the best-tasting Chicken BBQs in Northeast PA!



Pit Boss Damien adds the secret sauce to the chicken.

Eastern Diocese

“Through the Years” 50th Eastern Diocese Youth Retreat at Camp Berea Hebron, NH

Through the Years was the focus of our 50th Annual Eastern Diocese Youth Retreat that was held at beautiful Camp Berea in Hebron, New Hampshire from Monday August 21st through Thursday August 24th. Youth, adults and three clergy gathered for this inspirational time of prayer, worship, learning, fellowship and fun. After dinner, Fr. Sr. Rob Nemkovich, diocesan Youth Chaplain, began the retreat in the lovely A Frame Chapel with our opening prayer service and the presentation of the flags and retreat banner.



Afterwards, Kathy Nemkovich and Joanne Oiveira led ice breakers; then a Penance Service with confession was led by Fr. Sr. Rob during which Bishop Paul and Fr. Sr. heard private confessions for our youth. Game night followed where the kids had lots of laughs with Scattergories. Subdeacon Justin concluded the evening by leading everyone with evening prayer.

Tuesday began with morning prayer led by Bishop Paul on the deck hanging over beautiful Newfound Lake in gorgeous central New Hampshire. It was so moving as we prayed and sang in the absolute beauty of God’s creation. Breakfast was like all the meals at Camp Berea “outstanding” – we were blessed with the food served by the amazing Camp Berea staff! The first session of the retreat was given by Fr. Sr. Rob on Living as Disciples. Many examples were given from Holy Scripture, from discipleship efforts across our diocese. We were excited to increase our discipleship going forward with the opportunities God gives us. We ended by singing “I Will Follow” by Chris Tomlin. A discipleship puzzle activity followed the session where our youth wrote various ways they can live as disciples on individual pieces and what a puzzle it made.

Prime Bishop Anthony Mikovsky gave our next session, via Zoom, on Bishop Francis Hodur. The youth learned about the life and impact Bishop Hodur had as he, with many faithful people, organized our Holy Church and brought people closer to Jesus in a lived discipleship. Our second activity followed where the youth had to compose stories using selected words that would be shared later in the retreat.

Holy Mass for Youth followed. During Mass we remembered + Bishop Thomas Gnat, Bishop Stanley Bilinski, Bishop Jarosław Rafalko, Jason Fairclough and Loretta Mikovsky in prayer.

Following Mass everyone enjoyed a delicious lunch. Since the weather was perfect, everyone spent some time swimming, balancing on huge rafts and then going tubing across Newfound Lake. Archery finished off the afternoon and Taco Tuesday dinner was enjoyed with beautiful lake views from the dining hall.

Bishop Paul Sobiechowski gave our third session on Know your Church: Grow in Christ. Bishop spoke about the P.N.C.C. Confession of Faith. The youth then made camp pillowcases. They were very creative in their design, and many signed each other’s. Fr. Sr. Rob showed his from 1999 that has been with him at every retreat and convo since then. Quite a tradition to continue on through the years.

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The campers hiked up quite the hill to the amphitheater for a campfire. Fun around the fire was enjoyed with snacks and stories; then it was back to the cabins for some much-needed rest.

God blessed us on Wednesday with yet another perfect weather day where we again began in prayer at the deck over Newfound Lake. The morning prayer service was led by Fr. Sr. Rob. After breakfast overlooking the lake, it was off to the A Frame Chapel and our next session. Kathy Nemkovich spoke about the importance of living God's Word in our post Christian secular world today and how hard it will be to live our faith in our culture today but we need to live it!

The youth then enjoyed the Minute to Win It Challenge. After the game, Holy Mass for Discipleship was celebrated by Fr. Sr. Rob as we prayed for the grace to be more faithful disciples of Jesus in our world today. After lunch we enjoyed some more quality time swimming in the crystal-clear lake, tubing, kayaking, gaga ball and it was topped off with Team Building on the challenge course.

After a delicious dinner, Sub-deacon Justin presented to the youth about "Why we Go to Church" and just how important that is as a part of the Body of Christ – The Church. He spoke about the importance of Holy Mass, hearing God's Word, receiving the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and how everyone can serve the Church in a variety of ministries from altar servers, lectors, choir members to even possibly some of our young men become future priests and deacons of the Church.

The youth then read some of the stories they wrote, and all enjoyed their creativity. Our annual Candlelight service was celebrated by Fr. Sr. Rob as darkness came over the camp and we focused on Christ as the Light of the world. Very moving to sing, pray, hear and reflect on God's Word with only the candlelight. Thanks to Tom Z who then lit our final campfire of the retreat. Again s'mores, snacks and many memories of the few days together were shared.

Our final day of Youth Retreat 2023 began with Bishop Paul Sobiechowski celebrating Holy Mass on the Feast of St. Bartholomew the Apostle. Bishop gave an excellent homily challenging the youth to share their story about our camp, about Jesus and to be a Philip to Nathaniel (AKA Bartholomew). After some delicious French toast and sausage, it was off to our closing session.

Fr. Sr. Rob reflected on our theme of Through the Years, and 50 years of youth retreats in our diocese as he has attended every single one (this was his 27th retreat serving as Youth Chaplain)! He thanked all for coming and making the time for Jesus, especially our Bishop and adult chaperones, presenters and activity leaders.

The 2023 Camp Spirit Award (this is given each year in memory of Jason Fairclough remembering his camp spirit and looking out for others) was awarded to Gaby Barker of Blessed Trinity Parish in Fall River. Her name will be added to the plaque and will be remembered at future diocesan Youth Retreats. Congratulations Gaby - well done!



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Western Diocese

2023 Youth Gathering of the Western Diocese Morgantown, IN



The 2023 Youth Gathering of the Western Diocese took place at Walnut Ridge Retreat Center in Morgantown, IN from Monday, July 31- Thursday, August 3. Fr. Jason, Marzena, and Brady loaded up the car and set off for southern Indiana first thing Monday morning. It was a lengthy trip – about 7 hours each way. It was the first time our diocese was attending this Christian-forward camp. The owners were incredibly nice to our adults and children. Brady enjoyed his trip as the youngest camper, along with his roommates Fr. Jason & Sub-Deacon Doug Scott. Marzena enjoyed seeing old friends, singing during Mass, and serving as a leader to younger children. Fr. Jason enjoyed presenting a session on “Connecting to God in the Mass,” celebrating Holy Mass for the children, and being with his brothers in the clergy.

Major focal points included the gigantic 60 foot slide, the in-ground swimming pool, dessert at every meal, Mr. Larry’s control of all-things technological, nearly-impossible all-white puzzles, colorful rocks, bonfires, an extremely active game room, and wet footballs.

We remembered Rt. Rev. Jerry Rafalko on our opening evening. He had already prepared the lanterns and laminated the accompanying cards we were presented before his untimely death just two weeks prior. Our lanterns were lit as if they were candles at a candlelight vigil. Fr. Jason’s and Brady’s lanterns for the Youth Gathering surround the place where we enthrone the Book of Gospels at St. Mary’s Parish on Sunday mornings. Many thanks to all who planned and participated in this Youth Gathering. The planning team did a wonderful job and our clergy supported it! Attending were National/Diocesan Youth Chaplain Very Rev. John Kowalczyk, Diocesan Administrator Very Rev. Charles Zawistowski, Very Rev. Jarosław Nowak, Rev. Jason Soltysiak, Rev. Carlos Aranda, Rev. David Rowinski, Rev. Nazario Salas, and Sub-Deacon Doug Scott.

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Thanks are given to District 3 of the Polish National Union for providing the beautiful t-shirts and stainless steel water bottles for all who attended the retreat.

The youth were appreciative of the diocesan clergy who made an effort to be with them for time in prayer, learning, fellowship and fun – Thanks Bishop Paul, Fr. Sr. Rob and Subdeacon Justin for making the time to be with our youth!

We are excited to announce our next diocesan youth event will be our Winter Youth Gathering that will begin on early afternoon, December 27 and end on Thursday morning December 28 at Blessed Trinity Parish in Fall River, MA. It should be a great time. Please see our Eastern Diocese Youth Facebook Page for many more pictures from the retreat! Praise God for His continued blessings that abounded at our retreat!

In Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior, Fr. Sr. Rob Nemkovich - Diocesan Youth Chaplain - EDPNCC

