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## Running the Race — Convo 2024

Most Rev. Anthony Mikovsky, Prime Bishop

Just about two weeks ago I returned from Erie, Pennsylvania and the wonderful week of Convo 2024, which had the theme, “Running the Race” taken from St. Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians. At Convo I had the opportunity to give the closing lecture and presentation during a week filled with learning more about our Lord, spending time in worship and prayer and having five days of fun with the youth, adults and clergy of the Church. I would like to share with all that presentation to our P.N.C.C. youth. It is a reminder that while we could not all come to Convo, we certainly are all called to learn the lessons that were shared with the gathered youth.

Although the Convo examined a number of different scriptural citations during the week, the primary theme was based on St. Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians: “Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one.” (1 Corinthians 9:24-25)

We begin by taking a look at some of the items within this verse. “Run in such a way to win.” This is really the point of our Christian life. No one runs any sort of race so that they can come in second place. And in fact, it’s not just true for sporting events, but we think like that for most everything in life. We seek to be the best we can, if we are going to do something. But somehow things end up being a little different when it comes to our religious life. So many have a view where we just coast along in

our life of worship and prayer. Maybe we do not realize what exactly is involved here. We are speaking about uniting ourselves to Jesus, in moments of prayer, in hearing His word in Scripture and preaching, in receiving Him truly present in Holy Communion. It really should be one of the most important things in all of our life and we should be striving to participate ever more fully in this important part of our daily living. But we can ask, what exactly do we need to fulfill this role?

If we are going to run so that we may win, then surely we are going to have to train. No athlete thinks that they will be able to win a race without some practice and perseverance. And together with that we need to have our eyes fixed on a goal. Here comes the second of the verses of Scripture that we examined, from the Letter to the Hebrews: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin that clings to closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, Who for the sake of the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Again, if we are to look at some of the important items here, we see that we do all of this running “the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus.” Racing to be united with Jesus is the point of all that we do in the religious life. But of course, if we are seeking to do this we must also train in the right way. And

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our training must be the **Truth**. If our athletic training is going to involve a dozen donuts and several pots of coffee each day, then we will not get very far. It must be wholesome and truthful. This is what it means to be fixing our eyes on Jesus, Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. (John 14:6)

A second matter is that within this training and racing we must be applying a force. Sitting back and hoping for good things and good outcomes will not do with athletics, or for much else in life either. Effort must be put in. This, in fact, is what training is all about. This force, or effort, must also be applied in all areas of our life. We must come weekly to Holy Mass, when we are feeling great about going and also when we are not. We must listen to the homily when it is difficult to understand or enjoyable. This effort must be applied for our whole lives, each day, each week, each year. It must be applied across a distance. And it means setting aside these days and times to spend in worship, finding times and places where we can perform acts of mercy and loving kindness toward others. Some may know that I had obtained a math and physics degree as an undergraduate before I came to seminary, so when someone says: Force times a distance, I immediately think, that's what **Work** is. This work is applying the effort of our religious training through the totality of our entire lives.

Lastly, in the Hebrews quote we also see that we are called to "run with perseverance." We strive to emulate our "Lord Jesus, Who endured the cross." When we hear words like persevere or endure we remind ourselves that all of this is a **Struggle**. But it is not a struggle that wears us down or wears us out, but rather it is one in which we find hope and joy. We know that there is a joyous goal to this struggle that that is following Jesus. It is hope and joy because we have our "eyes fixed on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." And this is striving for "the joy that was set before Him." It is set before Him, which means that it is set before us as well, because we are following Jesus.

So, we see here that in fact what is needed to run the race so that we can win is to follow the motto of our Holy Church: **Truth, Work and Struggle**. But of course we must realize that these concepts are not really the totality of the motto of the Polish National

Catholic Church. In Polish the motto is: **Prawdą, Pracą, Walką**. This is really, **through truth, through work and through struggle**. So we can then ask, what will we accomplish, through truth, through work and through struggle? The motto of the Church is extended with the word: **Zwyciężymy**. Through the years in the P.N.C.C., this word has been variously translated as, "we will overcome", "we will triumph", or even most simple as "we will win."

So my brothers and sisters, we have had the lesson of what is needed to win the race of life and receive the crown of righteousness all along. It is found within the motto of our Holy Church. So, I encourage each and every one of you, to notice the symbol of our Church, and I'm sure that you see it when you come to Church on Sunday or when you receive some paper or electronic communication from the Church or even on this edition of God's Field. Remember what this symbol is saying to us as we seek to make our way along the road of life. We must embrace the Truth of Jesus that is found within the Holy Scriptures and within the Tradition of our Catholic faith. We must Work as we train ourselves to follow our Lord, especially in our lives of prayer, worship and Holy Communion. We must Struggle as we continue to put this training into practice in our lives, not just for a week or for a season, but for our whole lives long. And then through truth, through work and through struggle, we will win the race of life which is to be united with our Lord and receive the crown of righteousness.

St. Paul tells us this is the last quote from Scripture that we examined at Convo from the Second Letter to Timothy: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for His appearing." (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

Let us seek to run the race of life and faith so that we may win. Long to see Jesus in others, long to follow Jesus in how you live, long to be like Jesus in your acts of love and mercy. Long to be with Jesus in moments of prayer, worship and in receiving Him in Holy Communion. Long for the appearing of Jesus that you may receive the crown of righteousness.

## P.N.C.C. Future Direction

### August 2024

### Life in Jesus – The Way

#### Introduction

As we continue in this year of 2024, the Future Direction writings will focus some of our reflections on the various aspects of our Catholic Christianity, especially as it concerns our daily living, life of prayer and liturgical worship. We will reflect on the catechism and various spiritual and liturgical aspects of the Church, to see how we can enter more deeply into our Catholic faith, strengthen our own spiritual lives and begin to change ourselves as we grow ever closer to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

#### Scripture

John 14:3-6 – “If I go to 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 know 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 comes to the Father except through Me.”

Psalms 139:23-24 – Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Psalms 119:28-30 – My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to Your word. Put false ways far from me; and graciously teach me Your law. I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I set Your ordinances before me.

Proverbs 10:29 – The way of the Lord is a stronghold for the upright, but destruction for evildoers.

Psalms 25:8-10 – Good and upright is the Lord; therefore He instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble His way. All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep His covenant and His decrees.

Isaiah 35:8 – A highway shall be there and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go stray.

Jeremiah 6:16 – Thus the Lord says: Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.

Matthew 7:13-14 – Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

1 Peter 1:18-21 – You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. Through Him you have come to trust in God, Who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are set in God.

Ephesians 5:2 – God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us. And gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

#### Reflection

As the month of August begins, we have all just concluded the 2024 Youth Convocation. This year, since the Olympics are presently going on, the Convo theme was “Running the Race.” The image that our lives are a race is a theme that is found throughout much of Scripture, and of course, there are several aspects to it which we can consider.

While the Convo was focused on running a race to win it as an image of our striving to fully unite ourselves to Christ and then be with Him, not only in the next life but also within our earthly existence, there are also other ways in which we can look at running.

When I was in high school, I would often run for exercise with the athletes on the cross-county team. I certainly was not a great runner, but they offered to have others run with them. These cross-country courses were often times confusing, as they would usually go through the woods and neighborhoods for an area. This was es-

pecially true when we would travel to another school and have to run in a place we never did before. When looking for where we had to run there were several ways in which you knew where to go. Sometimes there would be some signs. You would see an arrow which would show you the way to go. Other times you had to rely on seeing where others had run before you. You had to try to follow the path that had already been trodden.

These ways really are the ways in which we can approach the spiritual life as well and our seeking to follow Jesus on the way of life. There are certainly signs. The two most important ones are the Holy Scripture and the Tradition of the Church. And these two ways are not really separate but are, in fact, one combined sign which helps point the way to Jesus. Holy Scripture allows us to delve into the life of faith which all has Jesus at its center. Then likewise the tradition of the Church, both in what it teaches and what it does, allows us to live out this seeking and striving for Jesus in our daily lives and worship.

The second way, in seeing where others have trodden, reminds us that we also have the lives of others on the road of life to help show us the way. We look first and foremost to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints as guides for the journey. Their example of faith and dedication to our Lord serves as models for us. Secondly, we also look to those who share the journey with us today, the parishes and communities of faith in which we are involved. This allows us to run with others in this life of faith and together we will help each other know the course.

### **Action Item**

As we reflect on our lives as not a sprint but rather a long run, we must in every season evaluate where we are on the journey and how and where we are running at the moment. Spend some time in an honest evaluation of your spiritual and liturgical life at the present. Consider ways in which it can be made more concretely active, in increased prayer, increased worship and increased charity.

Pray the prayer below to help guide you in bringing these things to reality in your life. Realize that not every day or everything will be a great success. There will be setbacks in your striving to lead a more spiritual life. But steady progress will certainly be made if you always keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and allow the example of others, the saints and those around you to help on the way.

### **Prayer to Follow the Way of Christ**

Lord Jesus Christ, I bring to mind Your call to bring people into Your Kingdom. I want to live out Your teachings in my daily life, but sometimes I am afraid or distracted. Forgive me for not listening to Your Spirit nudging me to turn to You and follow.

Help me to put You first in my life and to follow You with all my heart, just as Your disciples did when they left everything behind to follow You. Help me to surrender my own desires and plans to accomplish Your will, and to walk in the paths that You have set before me.

Lord, I know that following You will not be easy. There are times when I am tempted to turn away from Your ways and to follow the ways of the world. But I pray that You would help me to resist those temptations and to stay committed to You and Your truth.

Give me the courage to follow You always, even if it means sacrificing my own comforts and desires. Help me to be obedient to Your commandments, to live a life of love, and to serve others with humility. Help me to remember that a life following You is not one of rules but one of grace: grace for others and grace for myself.

Give me a heart for those who are lost or in need, just as You gave to Your disciples. Help me to be a fisher of men, sharing Your love and truth with those around me. May my life be a testimony to Your grace and may others come to know You through my words and deeds. Help me to follow You with all my heart and to live out Your teachings in my daily life. For You live and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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

## **Digital Engagement and Its Effects on Children's Emotional Regulation**

**Rev. Dr. Stan Jasiurkowski**

### **Introduction**

This article responds to inquiries from God's Field readers about nurturing resilient children in today's digital era. It addresses concerns from parents, pastors, and researchers about the impacts of digital devices on young users. With children's increasing exposure to screens, this article explores the implications for their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Emotional regulation, a critical developmental aspect, is significantly affected by digital interactions and is vital for psychological well-being (Sanders, Stevenson, & King, 2020). This article reviews current research and offers an evidence-based approach to responsible digital parenting, highlighting both the benefits and risks associated with children's digital engagement. It also provides practical strategies for parents to manage and optimize digital interactions in their children's lives.

### **Understanding Emotional Regulation**

Emotional regulation involves the extrinsic and intrinsic processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modulating the emotional reactions of any individual (Gross, 2014). The literature describes the extended model of emotion regulation as follows: Elaborations, applications, and future directions. Effective emotional regulation is associated with positive social functioning, academic success, and mental health. Conversely, poor emotional regulation can lead to behavioral issues and emotional distress.

### **Disrupted Attention and Hyperarousal**

Many children have problems with staying focused even for a short period, paying attention to their tasks, or communicating with their parents, teachers, or peers. These children are easily referred for psychological evaluation due to perceived or real behavioral issues and are often stigmatized by the diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) (I will address this issue in more depth in a future article). However, when we review current research literature focused on this problem, we discover a stunning revelation that these issues might be correlated to excessive and uncontrolled digital involvement from a young age. Literature shows that children's exposure to rapid-fire stimuli and fast-paced media can lead to a state of hyperarousal, which may compromise their ability to focus and process emotions effectively (Lissak, 2018). Excessive screen time has been associated with attention problems in children. Twenge and Campbell (2018) found that higher screen time correlates with increased attention-deficit symptoms. The rapid shifts in content and constant stimulation provided by digital media can lead to shorter attention spans and difficulty focusing on tasks requiring sustained effort. This effect is particularly pronounced in younger children, whose brains are still developing and are more susceptible to environmental influences. Moreover, prolonged exposure to fast-paced media content can condition the brain to expect high levels of stimulation, making everyday activities, including participation in classroom learning or Sunday Mass, seem dull and challenging to focus on.

### **Anxiety and Depression**

The relationship between screen time and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression is complex and multifaceted. Twenge and Campbell (2018) reported a significant association between excessive screen time and lower psychological well-being, including higher levels of anxiety and depression. One of the contributing factors is the displacement of time that could be spent on physical activities, face-to-face social interactions, and sleep—all of which are crucial for mental health, especially, for young children. Furthermore, the content consumed during screen time, especially on social media, can exacerbate feelings of anxiety and depression. The curated and often unrealistic portrayals of life on social media can lead to social comparison, where children measure their self-worth against the seemingly artificially created and presented as perfect lives of others. This can result in feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, increased anxiety, hopelessness, and helplessness leading to depression and suicidal thoughts or even behaviors (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015).

### **Cyberbullying and Social Comparison**

Cyberbullying is a significant risk associated with children's use of social media. The anonymity and reach of digital platforms can facilitate bullying behaviors, leading to severe emotional distress for victims. Research indicates that victims of cyberbullying are at a higher risk of developing anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation (Kowalski et al., 2014). Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying can occur 24/7 and can be difficult to

escape, magnifying its psychological impact. Many children out of fear or lack of trust, refuse to speak about their cyberbullying encounters or report them to their parents or school counselors-which, in return, exacerbates their emotional distress and increases vulnerability. Additionally, social comparison on social media platforms further compounds these issues. Adolescents, in particular, are vulnerable to comparing themselves to their peers, and the often idealized images and lifestyles portrayed online can distort their self-perception, self-esteem, and self-worth. Nesi and Prinstein (2015) found that frequent social comparison and feedback-seeking behaviors on social media were associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms. This constant comparison can lead to a cycle of negative self-evaluation, mental health decline, and potential suicidal behavior.

### **Exposure to Sexual Content**

Exposure to sexual content on social media is a significant concern for Christian parents and researchers. Studies have found that children and adolescents are increasingly encountering sexual material online, which can shape their attitudes and behaviors toward sex and morality. This exposure can lead to early sexual activity, acceptance of extramarital sex, and engagement in risky behaviors. Teens who frequently view sexual content on social media are more likely to initiate sexual activity at a young age, often without understanding the potential risks and consequences, including spiritual and moral decay. Furthermore, the unrestricted use of digital media has been linked to an increase in sexual abuse among teenagers, as online platforms provide an easy way for predators to exploit and groom young individuals. This worrisome trend underlines the importance for parents to be vigilant in monitoring their children's online activities, implementing safety measures, and educating them about the potential risks online.

### **Interference with Sleep**

Numerous studies have established a correlation between screen time and disrupted sleep patterns, which can impact mood regulation and cognitive performance of our children and youth (Carter et al, 2016). Oftentimes, children spend long hours at night interacting on social media or browsing morally questionable content which results in destroying their moral and spiritual development. It also leads to sleep deprivation impacting negatively their school performance proved by low grades and teachers' concern for a student's performance. Additionally, sleep-deprived children are also often irritable, extremely tired during the day, cannot concentrate, have memory lapses, and display symptoms of apathy.

### **Reduced Face-to-Face Interaction**

Children and teenagers consumed by their digital devices are often deprived of opportunities for direct social interactions, which are integral for developing emotion recognition, empathy, and regulatory skills (Uhls, & Greenfield, 2019). Many researchers find a correlation between the time spent on digital media and children's decline in social skills. Many of these children or teenagers feel very awkward in initiating or holding a meaningful face-to-face conversation or social interaction. Many times, young people sitting at home, restaurant, or school cafeteria text each other, even though they sit nearby, instead of carrying on a real conversation.

### **Practical applications and guidance for parents**

Setting boundaries is a fundamental aspect of responsible parenting, both from scientific and Christian parenting perspectives. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends creating a family media plan that outlines acceptable screen time limits and ensures a balance with other healthy activities (AAP, 2016). Based on the scientific evidence, many therapists and other behavioral health professionals argue that children and teenagers under the age of 16 should not have social media accounts and use these platforms for their proper emotional, moral, spiritual, and physical development. This aligns with the Christian principle of stewardship, which, generally speaking, calls for wise and responsible management of time and resources. Proverbs 22:6 advises, "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it." By setting clear and consistent limits and boundaries on screen time, parents can help their children develop self-discipline and prioritize activities that contribute to their overall well-being, such as physical exercise, reading, prayer, church worship, and family interaction.

### **Modeling Healthy Digital Behavior**

Parents play a crucial role in modeling healthy behavior in their children in all aspects of their development. Children are more likely to adopt positive habits when they see their parents practicing them. Hiniker,

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Schoenebeck, and Kientz (2016) emphasize the importance of parents demonstrating mindful technology use, such as prioritizing face-to-face interactions, restricting screens or TV use during meals, and designating tech-free times for family interactions, and physical, and social activities. From a Biblical perspective, modeling healthy behavior also means exemplifying values like respect, self-control, and integrity. Ephesians 5:1 encourages believers to “follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children.” By showing children how to use technology responsibly and ethically, parents can help them develop a Christ-like character that extends to their digital interactions as well.

### **Fostering Open Communication**

Open and honest communication is essential for navigating the complexities of the digital world. Studies have shown that children who feel comfortable discussing their online experiences with their parents are better equipped to handle cyberbullying, inappropriate content, and other digital challenges (Livingstone et al., 2017). Therefore, parents must build between them and children a trusting relationship based on open communication which will allow their children to share their concerns, experiences, or any negative encounters they have had while using online content. James 1:19 advises, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.” By fostering an environment of open communication, parents can listen to their children’s concerns, provide guidance, and reinforce the importance of making wise and moral choices, including online content. This approach encourages children to seek parental advice and support when encountering difficult or compromising situations in the digital realm.

### **Teaching Digital Literacy and Online Safety**

Educating children about digital literacy and online safety is crucial in the digital age. This includes teaching them about the potential dangers of interacting with strangers online, the importance of privacy settings, and the appropriate reporting mechanisms for any uncomfortable or suspicious behavior (Livingstone et al., 2017). From our National Catholic perspective, teaching digital literacy can be seen as part of the broader goal of raising children who are “wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16). Parents can guide their children to navigate the digital world with discernment, avoiding harmful content and interactions while using technology for positive and constructive purposes.

### **Addressing Exposure to Sexual Content**

Exposure to sexual content on social media and the associated risks of early sexual initiation are significant concerns of many parents, educators, clergy, and other professionals. Studies have shown that adolescents who frequently view sexual content online are more likely to engage in sexual activity at a younger age, often without adequate understanding of the associated risks (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). Our Catholic parents can address these issues by teaching their children about the sanctity of the body and the importance of sexual purity. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 reminds believers, “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies.” By instilling these values, parents can help their children understand the importance of respecting their bodies and making wise choices regarding sexual behavior. Parents must realize that the sexual purity of their children is not merely a set of rules; it is a pathway to their proper socio-emotional and spiritual development for young people, maintaining sexual purity brings profound emotional and spiritual benefits. Parents need to convey to their children that it fosters self-respect, trust, and healthy boundaries. By safeguarding their bodies and hearts, their children cultivate resilience and avoid the emotional scars that often accompany impulsive or premature choices. Spiritually, sexual purity aligns with sacred values, honoring God’s design for intimacy. It allows space for deeper connections—with self, others, and the divine. In this pursuit, young hearts find fulfillment, purpose, and a sense of holiness. By God's design, sexual purity presents huge benefits for future marriage from the socio-emotional and spiritual perspectives. When young individuals live in purity and then, in their dating relationships honor their commitment to purity, they build a foundation of trust, knowing that their partner values fidelity and self-control. Additionally, it allows them to feel emotionally safe with each other. I have seen time and time again during my counseling encounters with young married couples that their hidden secrets or past regrets cause insecurity, lack of trust, and jealousy. Emotional intimacy flourishes when both partners feel secure and accepted but learning it starts with proper, value-based, sexual education and development starting in childhood. Parents who encourage their children to maintain sexual purity, help them to avoid emotional baggage from past relationships. This absence of emo-



tional scars will allow them to enter marriage with a fresh perspective and open hearts. Moreover, purity encourages healthy boundaries as young people learn to communicate openly about their needs, desires, and limits. These conversations build emotional intelligence and resilience. Research shows that people who have preserved their sexual purity, have the highest marriage intimacy and satisfaction as waiting for marriage creates anticipation and trust. Parents, let us help and set our children for success to have happy and fulfilling marriages.

### **Preventing and Responding to Sexual Abuse**

The rise of digital media has also been linked to an increase in sexual abuse among teenagers. Online platforms can be used by predators to exploit and groom young individuals (Livingstone et al., 2017). Parents must be vigilant about their children's online activities and educate them about the signs of grooming and how to report any inappropriate behavior. Psalm 82:3-4 commands believers to "Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." By taking proactive steps to protect their children from online predators, parents fulfill their biblical mandate to protect and defend the vulnerable. This includes regularly monitoring their children's online interactions, using parental control tools, and having candid discussions about the dangers of online predators and the importance of reporting any suspicious or uncomfortable interactions.

### **Encouraging Positive Digital Engagement**

While there are many risks associated with digital media, they also offer opportunities for positive engagement. Digital platforms, if properly used, can facilitate social connectivity, allowing children to communicate and collaborate with peers across the globe. Properly used social media and online communities can provide avenues for social support and the development of digital literacy skills, which are essential in the modern world. Some argue that these platforms can foster a sense of belonging and community, particularly for children who may feel isolated in school, but this must be moderated properly by adults. Parents can help their children navigate the digital world safely and effectively, ensuring their overall well-being and development.

### **Integrating Faith and Technology**

Integrating faith with technology use can help children understand how their digital lives intersect with their spiritual lives. This can include using apps for Bible study, accessing online sermons, or participating in virtual church activities. However, this should not substitute for attending in-person Sunday Mass and catechism classes. Parents can encourage their children to use technology as a tool for spiritual growth and service, rather than just for entertainment. Deuteronomy 6:6-7 emphasizes the importance of incorporating faith into daily life: "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." By intentionally incorporating digital tools into their family's spiritual practices, parents can help their children see technology as a means to strengthen their faith and serve others.

### **Conclusion**

The relationship between children's screen time and their emotional regulation is complex and multidimensional. Excessive screen time poses significant risks to children's behavioral and emotional well-being, including attention problems, anxiety, depression, cyberbullying, harmful social comparison, and early sexual initiation. Additionally, the increasing incidence of sexual abuse facilitated by digital platforms underscores the urgent need for vigilant and informed digital parenting. An evidence-based approach to digital parenting, involving setting limits, monitoring content, fostering open communication, modeling healthy habits, and educating about online safety, is essential to mitigate these risks. To effectively mitigate the risks associated with digital parenting, it is essential to adopt an evidence-based approach that includes establishing boundaries, closely monitoring content, promoting open communication, demonstrating healthy behaviors, and providing education on online safety. By adopting these strategies, parents can help their children navigate the digital landscape in a way that promotes their overall mental health, safety, moral, and spiritual development.

(References Continued on Page 10.)



(Digital Engagement and Its Effects on Children's Emotional Regulation- Continued from Page 9.)

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## Building the Kingdom of Heaven within the Polish National Catholic Church

St. Stanislaus Cathedral, Scranton, PA



On July 10, 2024, beginning at 10am, our beloved P.N.C.C. was blessed to participate in the Sacraments of the Church in special directions. Firstly, the sacrament of Holy Orders to the priesthood for Rev. Fr. Frank Bartlett, granted by God, administered through the hands and prayers of Prime Bishop Anthony Mikovsky.



Fr. Frank is a retired Anglican priest with ten years of faithful service, prior to moving to Ocala, and joining St. Paul's P.N.C.C. Parish in Belleview, Florida, over two years ago. For the last 18 months, Fr. Frank had gone through priestly training in education and performance in the liturgy and paraliturgical services of the P.N.C.C. Fr. Frank is a welcomed addition to the priestly ranks and has been assigned to St. Paul's Parish in the capacity of Reserve Priest. Fr. Frank is an Army Veteran, and a retired police officer, who answered the call from God to serve as a priest.

Secondly, on the clerical docket that day, seminarian Al Becker also of St. Paul's Parish, was tonsured and received the minor orders of Porter and Reader from Prime Bishop Mikovsky. Cleric Al is enrolled in the Western Diocesan Diaconate program and is receiving fantastic accolades from all his instructors. Cleric Al also serves as President of St. Paul's Parish outreach team and does a fine job in that leadership role, helping to get the message out about St. Paul's Parish.

(Continued on Page 12.)

(Building the Kingdom of Heaven within the P.N.C.C.- Continued from Page 11.)

Additionally, Mark Gilbert, also from St. Paul's Parish, received the Sacrament of Confirmation, bestowed by Prime Bishop Mikovsky. Mark is the current Vice Chairman of the Parish Committee and President of St. Paul's Parish Y.M.S. of R.



Rev. Fr. Mark Niznik, Pastor of St. Paul's Parish, was joined by Deacon Gail Lazenby also from St. Paul's Parish as both served roles during the liturgy.

Fr. Sr. Charles Zawistowski, Administrator of the Western Diocese, along with newly ordained Fr. Frank, both concelebrated during the Mass to the Holy Spirit with Prime Bishop Mikovsky. This was an unusual and complex series of liturgical processes that were brilliantly organized to ensure smooth transitions by Fr. Sr. John Kowalczyk, working in tandem at the Mass with Fr. Jim Ploskonka as Masters of Ceremonies. Fr. Sr. John published complete booklets of the service for everyone in attendance. Much gratitude is given to Fr. Sr. John and everyone involved in the service, both clergy and laity who came out to support the event.

The day was filled with joy in the Lord, with a traditional Tray Pizza reception in Old Forge, PA.

Special gratitude goes out to St. Stanislaus Cathedral for allowing the service to take place in such a sacred place.. Our beloved Prime Bishop Anthony offered a riveting homily during the service and took the time to give a Scranton / Waymart P.N.C.C. tour to a dozen folks from St. Paul's Parish, who traveled well over 1,000 miles by car and plane to support the sacred event.

Please keep Fr. Frank, Cleric Al, and Mark in your prayers that the experience will keep them motivated for ages to keep striving to build the kingdom of heaven here through their commitments to our beloved Polish National Catholic Church.

Blessings and prayers,  
Fr. Mark Niznik, Pastor  
St. Paul Parish  
Bellevue Florida

**Convo 2024 – Running the Race**  
**July 22-26, 2024**  
**Mercyhurst University, Erie, PA**  
**Rev. Jason Soltysiak**



Convo 2024 commenced at Mercyhurst University in Erie, PA, on Monday, July 22<sup>nd</sup>. Welcome remarks were given by Rt. Rev. John Mack, Bishop of the Buffalo-Pittsburgh Diocese and Convo 2024 co-chairs and chaplains Rev. Scott Lill and Rev. Mark Swoger. This year's convo theme was "Running the Race," based on 1st Corinthians 9:24.

Tuesday featured an inspiring pep-talk for our faith by a Youth Minister named Braden Johnson, who was visiting for the week. Prime Bishop Anthony Mikovsky con-celebrated Mass with the other attending bishops, Bishop John Mack and Bishop Paul Sobiechowski, with Bishop John offering the homily.

Everyone participated in the service project of creating and blessing prayer blankets. The Convo Olympics were held in the bright, burning sun, with all sorts of hula hoop adjacent and other games being played by the (randomly) drafted Olympic teams. After dinner, National United Choir announcements and presentations were made, with the exceptional, traditional Convo Dance closing the evening. The men running the DJ booth played hits of yesterday and today; a photo booth allowed for some great, planned shots; and snacks and cold drinks were available for all.

Wednesday's first session after breakfast was by Pam Stenzel, a popular abstinence-only Christian lecturer.

Holy Mass of the Holy Spirit followed, with Bishop John Mack as celebrant and Fr. Jason Soltysiak serving as homilist, bringing in how intertwined the Holy Spirit was with the Christmas story. After lunch, Fr. Scott Lill discussed how the faith was passed from Christ through various saints, beginning with Mary as Queen of the Saints, a follower of Christ before even meeting Christ! Rev. Jim Konicki led a vocations panel for the boys and Darlene Pajak led one for the girls. Fr. Sr. John Kowalczyk led a quick National United Youth Association update and primer before a bit of free time, dinner, and the Scripture/Catechism Quiz Bowl.

Thursday, a beautiful day, began with breakfast and Holy Mass on the Feast of St. James the Greater, celebrated by Bishop Paul Sobiechowski with Rev. Mark Swoger offering a sermon on the extent of the power of God's forgiveness, replete with props! Afterward, everyone went to Waldameer Park & Water World.

After an exciting and picture perfect day at the park, the United Y.M.S. of R. provided a great summer dinner for everyone. Branch 20, Holy Mother of the Rosary Cathedral Y.M.S. of R. set everything out and even provided homemade brownies. The Y.M.S. of R. then made a short presentation, which preceded diocesan caucuses and elections of National United Youth Association delegates. Congrats to all elected!

(Continued on Page 14.)

(Convo 2024- Continued from Page 13.)

Friday, our final day, was picture-perfect once again. A final presentation by Prime Bishop Anthony Mikovsky was combined with the closing ceremonies.

Very Rev. John Kowalczyk, National P.N.C.C. Youth Chaplain, con-celebrated the final Mass with Rev. Jim Konicki (Central Diocese Youth Chaplain) and Rev. Scott Lill and Mark Swoger (Convo Chaplains). Very Rev. Jaroslaw Nowak offered the sermon, navigating the Convo through a dream he had as a rock star and how his mother guided him to preaching about keeping the focus on Jesus. Lunch concluded the 2024 Youth Convo, and then it was time to pack the cars and go.

Thanks be to God for an enjoyable, safe, and spiritual time at our Youth Convo.



View more photos at:  
[Convo 2024 - Google Photos](#)

## National United Choirs 2024 Music Scholarship Awards Announcement

**Cathy Bilinski**

*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 2024 awards were announced during the National Youth Convo held at Mercyhurst University in Erie, Pennsylvania. We were fortunate to have four of the recipients attending Convo! They also imparted us with their musical talents during the Masses by cantering, leading us in the recessional song, playing cello, alto saxophone and trumpet.



**Cathy Bilinski - Music Scholarship Administrator; Jathan Kotulsky; Bishop John Mack - NUC Chaplain; Maria Paletta; Prime Bishop Anthony Mikovsky; John Paletta, Joel Kotulsky**



**John Dryfik**

Junior Incentive Award \$100  
 Holy Family Parish  
 McKeesport, PA  
 Piano

**Samantha Durisko**

Bishop Francis Bonczak Youth Award \$500  
 All Saints Parish  
 Carnegie, PA  
 Piano and Voice

**Mikaela Hoefler**

Bishop Francis Bonczak Youth Award \$700  
 Blessed Virgin Mary of Czestochowa Parish  
 Latham, NY  
 Piano and Organ

**Jacob Kena**

Junior Incentive Award \$100  
 All Saints Parish  
 Sterling Heights, MI  
 Piano

**Jathan Kotulsky**

Bishop Francis Bonczak Youth Award \$750  
 Holy Family Parish  
 McKeesport, PA  
 Trumpet

**Joel Kotulsky**

Bishop Francis Bonczak Youth Award \$750  
 Holy Family Parish  
 McKeesport, PA  
 Alto Saxophone

**Elvira Anne Lau**

Bishop Francis Bonczak Youth Award \$300  
 Holy Trinity Parish  
 McKees Rocks, PA  
 Violin

**John Paletta**

Bishop Francis Bonczak Youth Award \$900  
 Holy Trinity Parish  
 Washington, PA  
 Piano, Organ, Clarinet and Cello

**Maria Paletta**

Bishop Thomas Gnat Award \$900  
 Holy Trinity Parish  
 Washington, PA  
 Piano, Organ, Saxophone, Violin, and Voice  
 9 Awards, \$5,000

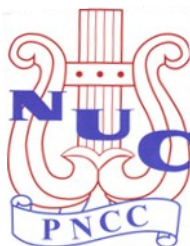
Since inception: 1145 Awards, \$358,085

Congratulations to these talented young 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 P.N.C.C.

Our scholarship program continues to be successful because of the generous donations we get from the faithful of the P.N.C.C. 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](http://www.nucmusicsscholarship.weebly.com)

Cathy A. Bilinski  
 Music Scholarship Administrator  
[nucscholarship@gmail.com](mailto:nucscholarship@gmail.com)





# Clergy Pension Fund

## Donations and Collections

### January 1, 2024 to June 30, 2024



Below are the donations received for the Clergy Pension Fund from January 1, 2024 until June 30, 2024 in the National Church Center offices. The Parish donations, which are collected on Fathers Day (June 2023) are turned over to the Pension Fund are also listed here. These funds are received from the Parishes through the Diocesan Treasurers, then the National Church Treasurer and are given to the Pension Fund at the end of the Church's fiscal year (Ending February 28, 2024)

We are thankful for those who consider the support of our retired clergy in their giving to the Polish National Catholic Church and we keep within our prayers all those who give to support the clergy.

#### **Parish Donations (Taken Father's Day 2023)**

Parishes – Buffalo-Pittsburgh Diocese	\$4,830.00
Parishes – Central Diocese	\$4,457.00
Parishes – Eastern Diocese	\$11,898.66
Parishes – Western Diocese	\$19,336.94

**2023 Dues Apportionment** \$22,280.30

**Honor Your Father on Father's Day** \$5,145.00

#### **Memorial Donations**

sp. G. Matylewicz	\$100.00
sp. Fr. John & Mary Kotula	\$300.00

#### **Donations**

Anonymous	\$2,200.00
Brett & Connie Richards	\$600.00
Chopin Choir, Manchester, NH	\$500.00
ANS Society, McKees Rocks, PA	\$250.00
YMS of R, Houtzdale, PA	\$100.00

Please consider donating to the Clergy Pension Fund of the Polish National Catholic Church to help support those retired clergy who have given many years of service to God and His Holy Church.

## Central Diocese

### Holy Mother of Sorrows Parish Weekend in Waymart

Parishioners and friends of Holy Mother of Sorrows Parish spent a weekend at Bp. Hodur Retreat & Recreation Center in Waymart, PA, July 26-28, 2024. This parish weekend served as a spiritual, recreational, fraternal activity and fellowship for the congregation. Everyone enjoyed the beautiful scenery and serenity of the center. Participants went hiking, golfing, swimming, played games or just relaxed. The highlight of the weekend was the celebration of the Holy Mass on Saturday, followed by a family-style dinner in the pavilion.

Submitted by Very Rev. Zbigniew Dawid



Everyone enjoyed the swimming pool.



Mass Participants



Mass for Parishioners at Spójnia Farm



Family Style Dinner



## New Food Pantry Opened at Mont Pleasant Church

by: Anthony Krolkowski, Cassie Abel

Posted: Jul 26, 2024 / 12:46 PM EDT

Updated: Jul 29, 2024 / 04:57 PM EDT

SCHENECTADY, N.Y. (NEWS10)— A new food pantry opened in Mont Pleasant on Monday, July 29, 2024 at 12:30 p.m. at the Holy Name of Jesus P.N.C.C. Parish, 1040 Pearl Street. The Daily Bread Food Pantry celebrated its opening with a cookout at the church. In an effort to find solutions to reduce food insecurity in Schenectady, the Luken Daily Bread Food Pantry partnered with Schenectady Shares, Concerned for the Hungry and Holy Name of Jesus to create this new pantry.



“Already in 2024, we have been experiencing at least a 40% increase in the number of guests we are seeing, over the same period in 2023,” Jacqueline Clute, volunteer director of the Daily Bread pantry said in a statement. “We have served over 12,000 guests already in 2024 and are thankful for the support we are receiving from all our partners to launch the new pantry.”

“Which is really key because we’re able to serve people with special needs. Whether it’s dietary, halal, kosher, any of those of things; people can be served here. All of us at Holy Name of Jesus are looking forward to welcoming guests of the new pantry,” Konicki said. “It is a wonderful ministry to those in need in our Mont Pleasant community.”

Funding for the pantry came from Schenectady Shares, grants from Concerned for the Hungry, the Rotary Club of Schenectady Foundation and the Carlilian Foundation. The grants were used to purchase necessary equipment, including a refrigerator, freezer and food items. Price Chopper/Market 32 also donated counter space.

The pantry is looking for more volunteers to help with their mission. To learn more about how to get involved or what services the pantry provides, call (518) 347-1385, email [sldailybreadfoodpantry@gmail.com](mailto:sldailybreadfoodpantry@gmail.com) or visit their website, <https://www.stlukesschenectady.org/food-pantry-urban-ministry/>.

## Start the Party! – Vacation Bible School

St. Stanislaus Cathedral, Scranton, PA

Did you hear about the party? The week of July 29 to August 2, 2024, St. Stanislaus Cathedral hosted “Start The Party Vacation Bible School!” Each day brought forth friendship, catchy music, entertaining games, delicious snacks, and awesome crafts.

Attendees listened to Luke 5:27-32 (Man with an unclean spirit), Matthew 22:1-14 (Parable of the Wedding Banquet), Luke 15 11-32 (Parable of the Prodigal Son), John 4:1-26 (Jesus and the Samaritan Women), 39-42, and Matthew 5:14-16 (Salt and Light) and our amazing volunteers helped bring these stories to life! The fourteen children, spanning ages two through ten, partied together all week to celebrate Jesus, inviting those around them to join in the party to celebrate the best friend anyone could ever ask for: Jesus!

Not only the attending youth, but also all of the volunteers had a great time celebrating Jesus and joining together in fun and fellowship. The memory verse for the week was "You will fill me with joy when I am with you" Acts 2:28.



**Eastern Diocese****Holy Name of Jesus Parish Helps Local Homeless  
South Deerfield, MA**

During June, Holy Name of Jesus Parish in South Deerfield, MA, collected new socks, tee shirts and underwear to distribute to local homeless shelters. By July this community outreach project yielded 310 pairs of socks, 156 pairs of underwear, and 76 tee shirts. Thanks to everyone who donated to this worthy cause, helping those in need in the local community and surrounding towns.

Holy Name of Jesus Parish also conducts a monthly grocery giveaway on the third Saturday of the month to help those who are feeling the crunch of the high prices of food.



## Western Diocese

### St. Mary's Parish in Parma, Ohio's Food Ministry Program Reaches Milestone: 25,000 Meals Served

**Rev. Dr. Jim Ploskonka**

On July 24th, the Food Ministry program of our St. Mary's Polish National Catholic parish celebrated a significant milestone: the distribution of its 25,000th meal. This achievement marks not just a number, but a testament to the dedication, compassion, and unwavering commitment of our community to live out the teachings of Christ.



#### Answering Christ's Call

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says, "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink" (Matthew 25:35). These words are at the heart of our Food Ministry program. The act of feeding the hungry is not merely a charitable act; it is a direct response to Christ's call to love and serve the least among us. By providing for those in need, we affirm our faith and our commitment to living out the Gospel in practical and impactful ways.

#### The Journey to 25,000 Meals

The journey to 25,000 meals began with a simple but profound mission: to provide a meal to those who are hungry. Volunteers have come together, united by a common purpose, to prepare, cook, and distribute meals. Their tireless efforts, fueled by faith and love, have made this milestone possible over the past ten years.

Each meal served represents a story of hope and compassion. For many, these meals have been a lifeline during difficult times. The elderly who live alone, families struggling to make ends meet, and individuals facing unexpected crises have all found solace and support through the Food Ministry program.

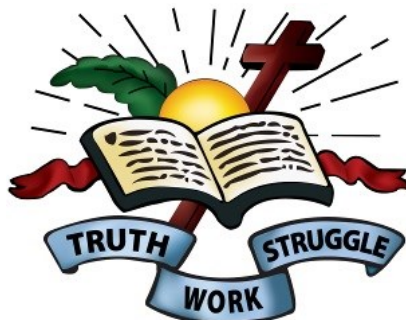
#### The Power of Community

The success of the Food Ministry program is a powerful reminder of what can be achieved when we come together with a shared vision. Parishioners, local businesses, and many others have all played a crucial role in supporting this mission. Donations of food, funds, and time have been instrumental in sustaining and expanding our outreach.

The kitchen, often seen as the heart of a home, has become the heart of this parish. It is a place where volunteers gather, not just to prepare food, but to forge bonds of friendship and fellowship. The act of serving others has strengthened our community, deepening our sense of connection and purpose.

(Continued on Page 24.)

**Education and Youth Commission  
of the  
Polish National Catholic Church  
Thank You Notes**



Here are a few of the Thank You notes received from the 2023-2024 academic year.

*Thank you so much for your prayerful support and your generous stipend as I continue my studies at Villanova University. I will be sure to tell the people of my P.N.C.C. parish of your generosity and remain an active and faithful servant. May the Lord bless you all!*

*Thank you.  
Josh Mazurkiewicz*

*Thank you for your generous stipend from the P.N.C.C. It will help me greatly in purchasing books this semester! I am honored to be a part of the P.N.C.C., and I hope, through my education to contribute to its prosperity in the following years.*

*Thank you again for your kindness,  
Best Wishes,  
Jacob Mazurkiewicz*

*I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the Education and Youth Commission of the P.N.C.C. for the very generous stipend I recently received. This will help with the added expenses of being a college student. I am honored to be a member of the P.N.C.C. community as I enter my senior year in the fall of 2024 to complete my course study in the College of Engineering at Penn State University.*

*Thank you again for your generous support.  
Jacob Stankowski,  
Civil Engineering student at Penn State University*

Each academic year the Education and Youth Commission of the P.N.C.C. offers this Undergraduate Stipend Program to qualified P.N.C.C. members enrolled in a college or university. Applications and instructions for receiving this stipend are published in the God's Field in January or February, and application deadline is May 15th. Keep an eye out for the next academic year application!

(St. Mary's Parish in Parma, Ohio - Continued from Page 22.)

### **Looking Ahead**

As we celebrate this remarkable milestone, we are reminded that our work is far from over. The need for food assistance remains pressing, and our commitment to serving the hungry continues. The Food Ministry program will persist in its mission, inspired by the teachings of Christ and the resilience of those we serve.

We look forward to the future with hope and determination, knowing that each meal served is a step toward building a more compassionate and just world. As we move forward, we invite all members of our parish and community to join us in this mission. Whether through volunteering, donating, or offering prayers, every act of support makes a difference.

### **A Prayer of Gratitude**

As we commemorate the serving of the 25,000th meal, let us offer a prayer of gratitude:

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the abundant blessings You have bestowed upon our Food Ministry program. We are grateful for the volunteers, donors, and supporters who have made this milestone possible. We ask for Your continued guidance and strength as we strive to serve those in need. May our efforts always reflect Your love and compassion. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

### **Conclusion**

The 25,000th meal served by our Food Ministry program is a milestone that celebrates more than just numbers; it celebrates the spirit of giving, the power of community, and the teachings of Christ. Let us continue to be His hands and feet, reaching out to those in need with love and compassion, and striving to make a meaningful difference in the lives of our brothers and sisters.

