



A Penitential Procession in Time of Calamity took place Sunday, March 15, on the streets of downtown Lake Charles. The Eucharistic Procession of Reparation was held to beg God's mercy and protection against the present COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak. Bishop Glen John Provost was joined by clergy, religious and lay faithful for the intercession of the Immaculate Conception and of Saint Michael the Archangel for the spiritual and bodily welfare of those affected by the virus and for the acceptance of God's Holy Will.

Diocese responds to pandemic

Announcements, event postponements and cancellations regarding the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic:

For more news, updates, and a daily reflection from Bishop Provost follow the Diocese on lodiocese.org and on its Facebook page Roman Catholic Diocese of Lake Charles

An Act of Spiritual Communion Prayer

Given the circumstances where many are unable to assist at Mass, Bishop Provost is providing this prayer for the use of the faithful:

Act of Spiritual Communion

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least into my heart. I embrace You as if You are already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.

(You may make this Act of Spiritual Communion anytime you need it and as often as you need it.)

Saint Charles Center temporarily closed

Due to the restrictions in place while trying to contain the coronavirus pandemic, all programs at Saint Charles Center are cancelled until Easter. At that time the situation will be re-assessed and adjusted accordingly.

Catholic Charities cancels Jazz Brunch

The annual Jazz Brunch, benefitting the ministry of Catholic Charities of Southwest, has been cancelled and there are no plans to reschedule for this year, according to Sister Miriam MacLean, R.S.M., Director of Catholic Charities. The event had been scheduled for Sunday, April 26, at the Lake Charles Country Club.

Because the net proceeds from the event go directly to serve the poor, Sister Miriam said donations would still be greatly appreciated for their ongoing works of providing assistance to people of all faiths and denominations in Southwest Louisiana.

Clergy Cook-Off called off

The Diocese of Lake Charles Office of Pro-Life has cancelled the third annual Clergy Cook-Off, originally scheduled for Saturday, April 18, at Prien Lake Park, according to Rickard Newman, Director of Pro-Life and Family Life.

Bishop's April breakfast, luncheon presentations cancelled

The next series of Bishop's breakfast and luncheon presentations has been cancelled for the month of April. The Ladies Luncheon was scheduled for Wednesday, April 1, and the Men's Prayer Breakfast was planned for Friday, April 3. Both events are held in Ave Maria Hall of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception Office Complex.

Diocesan Quiz Bowl Cancelled

The Diocesan Quiz Bowl for middle schoolers, originally scheduled from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. March 28-29 at Saint Louis Catholic High School, has been called off.

"Come and See" Weekend Cancelled

Due to more cases of the coronavirus (COVID-19) being identified in the Greater New Orleans area, administrators at Saint Joseph Abbey have made the decision to cancel the Spring 2020 Come and See Weekend, originally scheduled for April 3 through April 5.

Cancellations at the Cathedral

All meetings in the Cathedral office building are cancelled until further notice. The following activities in the church are suspended until further notice:

- Holy Hour of Reparation** — Every Thursday, 11 p.m. to 12 midnight
Those who wish to make a Holy Hour of Reparation in the church may do so privately during the time the church is open.
- Stations of the Cross** — Every Friday of Lent, 11:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m.
Those who wish to pray the Stations of the Cross in the church may do so privately during the time the church is open. The booklets will be available in the narthex.
- Eucharistic Adoration** — Every Friday of Lent, 12:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Those who wish to pray before the Blessed Sacrament in a monstrance may do so privately during Confession hours.

Bishop urges pilgrimage

During this time of pandemic, Bishop Glen John Provost urges pilgrimages in the Diocese of Lake Charles to the Shrine of Our Lady Star of the Sea in Cameron for the duration of the pandemic, and especially during this Lenten Season.

Every year Bishop Provost leads a pilgrimage to the Shrine at the beginning of the hurricane season. He said it is only appropriate that the faithful should seek Mary's intercession when so many are becoming ill and serious concern of the coronavirus is spreading.

"I fear that the faithful of the Diocese do not fully realize that Our Lady Star of the Sea is a duly erected shrine," said Bishop Provost. "We should seek Mary's intercession during this pandemic at this our own shrine, where her aid so powerful intercession has come to our aid so often in the past."

The Shrine was established by Bishop Maurice Schexnayder in the 1960's, and Bishop Provost has recently approved a Decree establishing statutes for the Shrine. The Shrine enjoys, with papal approval, the same spiritual privileges as the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome, one of the four major basilicas in the Eternal City. A plenary indulgence may be gained by an Act of Spiritual Communion, a sacramental confession, and praying for the intentions of the Holy Father.

The Church of Our Lady Star of the Sea, located at 135 Our Lady Road, is open every day from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. For questions, contact Father D.B. Thompson, rector of the Shrine, at 337-542-4795.

May Mary's prayers directed to the throne of God protect us during this crisis, preserve us from all illness, and grant us good health.

The Cathedral will remain open for individual visits and private prayers: Church hours are Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday, 3-5 p.m.; and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Confessions will be heard Monday-Friday, 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.; Saturday, 3-4:30 p.m.; and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Closure of Catholic Schools

The Most Reverend Glen John Provost, Bishop of Lake Charles, made the following statement on March 13, 2020:

"In the interests of the safety and health of our Catholic School communities in this time of pandemic and in response to the closure of public schools ordered by the Governor in his Executive Proclamation of March 13, 2020, I am directing that all Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Lake Charles be closed from Monday, March 16, until Monday, April 13. Developments will be monitored. Further directives will be issued as needed. Please pray for the sustained good health of all and for the recovery of the sick."

Pope Francis entrusts entire world to Blessed Virgin Mary

Pope Francis offered the following prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary on March 11, entrusting the city of Rome, all of Italy, and "the entire world to the protection of the Mother of God, as a sign of salvation and hope" during the ongoing coronavirus emergency. Let us join our Holy Father in prayer, penance, and fasting in response to this time of trial.

Salus Populi Romani Protectress and Health of the Roman People

O Mary, you shine continuously along our journey as a sign of salvation and hope. We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick, who at the Cross were near to the pain of Jesus, keeping your faith firm. You, Salvation of the Roman people, know what we need, and we trust that you will provide for those needs so that, as at Cana of Galilee, joy and celebration may return after this moment of trial. Help us, Mother of Divine Love, to conform ourselves to the will of the Father and to do what Jesus tells us, He who took our sufferings upon Himself, and took up our sorrows to bring us, through the Cross, to the joy of the Resurrection. Amen. We seek refuge under your protection, O Holy Mother of God. Do not despise our pleas - we who are put to the test - and deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin.

Bishop Provost Suspends Public Religious Services

My dear People of God,

Given the most recent developments regarding the coronavirus (COVID-19) at the federal and state levels and in the interest of the common good, with great reluctance and a very heavy heart, I am suspending public liturgical services in the Diocese of Lake Charles, effective at noon on Tuesday, March 17. Churches and chapels will remain open, according to their established schedules, for individual visits and prayer. Confirmations will be rescheduled at the earliest possible future date. Directives on funerals and weddings will be forwarded to the clergy very soon. The priests and I will continue to celebrate Mass daily without congregation for your intentions. The clergy will also be available for the administration of the Sacraments of Penance and Anointing of the Sick on an individual basis.

The question will be asked: How long will this last? I regret that this is an unknown, because the coronavirus and the ensuing consequences have proven so unpredictable. What I can say is that this situation will be reviewed daily.

I am dispensing the faithful of the Diocese of Lake Charles from the obligation of attending Masses on Sundays and Holy Days during this period of suspended public liturgical services. At the same time, we must continue to keep the Lord's Day at home, quietly reading and meditating on the readings of the holy, praying the rosary, and refraining from unnecessary work. I strongly encourage the faithful to avail themselves of the frequently televised Mass on EWTN. I will be working with the diocesan staff on the possibility of live-streaming services of local origin on our website.

I must say that this is one of the saddest decisions I have ever made as a bishop and a priest. However, this pandemic has forced issues upon us which are truly beyond our control. We must pray for an end to this affliction. I will do everything in my power to return us to some normalcy regarding what is most precious to us as Catholics, the celebration of our sacraments, most especially the Eucharist.

Please pray for me, as I do for you daily. Lord Jesus, Redeemer of the world, have mercy on us. Our Lady, Star of the Sea, pray for us.

Devotedly yours in our Lord,

✠ Glen John Provost
Bishop of Lake Charles

Catholics cling to faith as Masses suspended

By Pamela Seal
Diocese of Lake Charles

It wasn't a Holy Day of Obligation or even a Sunday Mass. But that didn't keep area Catholics from filling the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception to near capacity on Tuesday for what would be the final public Mass as all public liturgical services in the Diocese of Lake Charles were suspended, effective at noon on March 17.

Faithful in the diocese were informed of the halt in liturgical services through a letter on March 16 from Bishop Glen John Provost. The difficult decision came following recent developments regarding the coronavirus (COVID-19) at the federal and state levels and in the interest of the common good, according to the letter.

"This was the most touching and emotional Mass I have ever celebrated," the Very Reverend Rommel Tolentino, pastor of the Cathedral, said in his closing remarks.

For many Catholics, the suspension of Masses is not about social distancing, but more about being separated from the real Presence of the Body of Christ given through Holy Communion. Crying and heavy sobbing could be heard throughout the church as people received the Eucharist one last time, at least for a while.

Not knowing when the Holy Eucharist will be available again, Tricia Flavin said she would not have missed the Mass for anything. "As Catholics, the Eucharist and the sacraments are what sustain us and what we live for," she said.

Amanda Martin echoed those sentiments saying the Mass gave her hope that she was not alone in this. "Once I was here, I knew this was exactly where I needed to be," she said noting that the attendance felt more like a crowded Sunday Mass. "There was



Catholics throughout the Diocese of Lake Charles attend Mass at 11 a.m. Tuesday, one hour before all public liturgical services were suspended at noon on March 17 due to developments in the coronavirus (COVID-19) gripping the nation.

a much longer line for confession," she observed, "and that was with two priests."

Anyone who is in regular attendance at daily Mass in the Cathedral knows the typical time frame is about a half hour. Tuesday's Mass began at 11 a.m. instead of the usual time of noon and lasted a full hour. Many people remained in the church afterward to spend time in the presence of God.

"The Eucharist is the core of our faith," said Maria O'Dowd. "It's heartbreaking since we don't know when we will get to come back."

Father Tolentino did inform everyone that the Cathedral will remain open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday, and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday for anyone wanting to spend quiet time in prayer and reflection.

In his homily, Father thanked everyone for attending and reminded them they had come to the right place during this time of difficulty.

"We have to trust in our bishop, our good shepherd," Father Tolentino said. "He is doing this with a heavy heart

and with much sadness."

Father said this is a time for Catholics to reflect on their faith and their relationship with Christ.

"We are spoiled as Catholics," he said, "as we can receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist anytime. Many places in the world are still being persecuted and are not allowed to practice their faith. We need to always be grateful for what we have."

Father also encouraged people to get into a regular prayer routine at home suggesting ways to foster their faith.

"Pray the rosary as a family, read Scripture together, turn to Our Lady who recognizes our needs even before we do," he said.

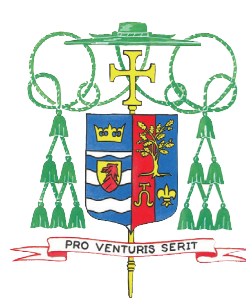
Father's message was comforting for Jennifer Wainwright. "I think it is important to gather as a community and be able to hear words of wisdom from Father Tolentino for this time that we are going through," she said. "He gave us some really good thoughts to remember and keep in mind for however long this takes."

Father Tolentino reassured the congregation during this penitential season of Lent that priests throughout the Diocese would still be available to administer the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick.

"Now is the time to turn to God. He is the one who can help us," Father said. "We need to turn to God in humility and repentance asking for His mercy."

The offices of the Diocese of Lake Charles will be closed Holy Thursday and Good Friday, April 9 and 10, as well as Easter Monday, April 13.

Regular office hours, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., will be observed Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, April 6, 7, and 8, as well as Tuesday through Friday, April 14-17.



Good works of Catholic Charities reaching more people in SWLA

By Pamela Seal
Diocese of Lake Charles

For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore, I command you, "You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor in your land." — Deuteronomy 15:11

Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana remains faithful in its efforts to hear the cry of the poor and assist them in times of need. "Our services meet the basic needs of people, especially with food and shelter," said Sister Miriam MacLean, R.S.M., Director of Catholic Charities and Secretary for the Ministry of Pastoral Services.

Now these good works are reaching even more people because of funds received through the recent Return to the Lord Capital Campaign in the Diocese of Lake Charles, in addition to grant money and generous donors.

"We have increased our food distribution sites to Sacred Heart Catholic Church Life Center in Creole and St. Mary of the Lake Catholic Church in Big Lake while continuing to serve individuals and families at our Lake Charles site."

One of the goals of the capital campaign when it was launched in 2016 was to expand the services of Catholic Charities. A total of \$800,000 was allocated to enhance the Diocesan Social Ministry Program.

As an extension of Catholic Charities USA, each Catholic Charities in dioceses across the United States all share a common goal: to provide services to people in need, to advocate for justice in social structures, and to call the entire church and other people of good will to do the same.

"We are small compared to some Catholic Charities throughout the United States, but we are still a valuable service to the community of Southwest Louisiana," Sister Miriam said. "We are always trying to get the word out that we are here to assist the five civil parishes of Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu, Cameron and Jefferson Davis."

Sister Miriam emphasized the importance of making sure the poor — whether they are Catholic or not — know they are not forgotten.

A focus in recent years has been expanding services to the five-parish area, she said, and extra funds have allowed more people to receive assistance. The purchase of a 26-foot refrigerated truck in June 2019 is already proving useful to better serve surrounding parishes.

In addition to food banks and emergency rental/mortgage assistance, other types of services offered include assistance with utilities, funeral expenses, prescription medication, identification cards, birth certificates, medi-

cal transportation, disaster operations, English language classes, and referrals for other resources.

Many church parishes already have something in place to help those in crisis. Sister Miriam assures those facing a hardship that Catholic Charities works in conjunction with churches to ensure the needs of the poor are met.

"We are working with some churches to see where we might be able to increase our food distribution locations," she said. "We have quarterly social ministry meetings where we meet with people in the church parishes who work with the poor to let them know about the resources we provide. It's a beautiful way to be in collaboration with the churches."

While homeless prevention, food and utility assistance are primary services provided by Catholic Charities, they also help victims of disasters through its Long-Term Disaster Recovery Program. Improvements to the ministry's warehouse have advanced this effort through increased storage capacity.

Sister Miriam said people are in great distress after their home is ruined. It is very disorienting and difficult for them, especially when they are already lacking in basic needs. "In recent years we have provided a lot of disaster assistance following the 2016 floods, Hurricane Harvey and Hurricane Barry," she said.

Catholic Charities also responded after a tornado destroyed several homes in Beauregard Parish this past December.

"As it turned out, our help wasn't needed, but it was a beautiful experience to be with the people," recalls Sister Miriam. "Many asked if we would pray with them. You get the sense that the Church is present to them. To me, that is one of the greatest gifts. I like to be able to go out to see the people to let them know that the Lord loves them. That's why we are here."

Sister Miriam credits donors and volunteers with making it possible for Catholic Charities to carry the burdens of the unemployed and low-wage workers, the elderly, and the forgotten among us.

"I am so grateful for the generosity of the community which allows this work to happen," she said. "It is all through the donations and the volunteers that we are able to keep our costs as low as possible so that we can serve as many people with all of the funds that we receive."

Sister Miriam also noted the past several years have been unique in that a \$2 million three-year grant through Catholic Charities USA greatly subsidized disaster efforts along with funds from community partners.

Catholic Charities and stewardship go hand in hand as people donate their time



Volunteers of Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana load a vehicle with a food basket, which included a holiday turkey, during a food distribution event held at St. Mary of the Lake Catholic Church in Big Lake prior to Thanksgiving in 2019.

and talent. Primarily, close to 100 volunteers run the diocesan ministry on a regular basis. There is no shortage of the ways volunteering can make a difference when reaching out to others.

"We couldn't do what we do without volunteers," Sister Miriam said. "A lot of them help with food distribution. Some are here every day keeping the warehouse going, taking incoming donations, cleaning up and stocking things. Volunteers help with some of the case work for giving out utility assistance, air-conditioners and heaters."

"Volunteers can also help by hosting food drives at places of employment or through churches. Extra volunteers are always needed during the holidays to help with food baskets for senior citizens."

Sister Miriam said she is in the process of forming a volunteer program to be able to do scheduling with clearly defined roles and jobs. This will allow for more effective communica-

tion between the staff and the volunteers.

Aside from tending to people's material needs, Sister Miriam hopes to have some office space at Catholic Charities repurposed into a chapel within the next calendar year. The chapel, she said, would serve as an opening to fill the spiritual poverty many people possess.

"Yes, we are giving material food for sustenance, but the Lord is the food of eternal life that doesn't pass away," she said. "It's an important piece. We do care about spiritual needs as well as physical needs."



For more information, visit www.catholic-charitiesswla.com. Anyone needing assistance or those wanting to volunteer may call Catholic Charities at 337-439-7436 Monday-Friday from 9:00 a.m. to noon and 1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Meetings are by appointment only.

CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

The staff and volunteers at Catholic Charities are working hard to ensure continuity of operations given the restrictions due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) in Southwest Louisiana. So far, the office has been able to remain open, and the staff continues to help people with rent, utilities, medication, funerals, etc. Should the office need to close, calls will be forwarded and assistance will continue to be offered. Donations are welcome and may be sent to Catholic Charities, 1225 Second Street, Lake Charles, LA 70601 or by going to catholiccharitiesswla.com and clicking on the donate button.

Deacon McNeal interred in New Bethany Cemetery



Deacon Bennett McNeal

JENNINGS – Deacon Bennett McNeal, 60, a Permanent Deacon of the Diocese of Lake Charles, was interred in New Bethany Cemetery at Saint Charles Center following a Mass of Christian Burial Thursday, Feb. 27. Deacon McNeal died Sunday, Feb. 23.

He was ordained to the Permanent Diaconate by The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton on Dec. 1, 2001 in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.

Born in Jennings on October 9, 1959 to Jackson McNeal and Virginia Jean Fontenot McNeal, he worked as Assistant Executive Director of Calcasieu Association for Retarded Citizens (CARC) in Lake Charles for more than 20 years.

Involved in many organi-

zations including being a first degree knight for the Knights of Columbus, he was also a Spiritual Director for the Faith Renewal and served as Director of Religious Education at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church. He also loved watching football, especially the LSU Tigers and the New Orleans Saints, praying the Rosary, attending church, and reading.

Survivors include his wife, Monica L. McNeal of Jennings; his four sons, Benjamin Landry of Jennings, Bennett McNeal, II of Maxie, La., Michael McNeal of Lake Charles; Gabriel McNeal of Jennings; his daughter, Ashley McNeal Gay (Blain) of Jennings; his seven grandchildren, Mackenzie, Tanner, Mya, Taygan, Jonah, Sawyer,

and Cam; his two sisters, Joline LeJeune of Jennings and Julie Burgess of Charenton, La.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Jackson & Virginia McNeal; two brothers, Jerry & Steven McNeal; two brothers-in-law, Donald LeJeune and Rodney Burgess; and his niece, Michelle LeJeune.

Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May his soul and all the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

CATHOLIC CHARITIES BY THE NUMBERS

According to Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana, more than 3,500 persons were assisted in 2019, and a total of \$859,595.49 was given in assistance to the civil parishes of Calcasieu, Allen, Beauregard, Cameron and Jefferson Davis. Some of the services and assistance provided includes:

- **Rent/Mortgage Assistance/Homelessness Prevention Program:** \$128,543.27; total assisted: 275
- **Utility Assistance:** \$74,415.61; total assisted: 267
- **Funeral Assistance:** \$13,660; total assisted: 70
- **"Beat the Heat" air-conditioning program:** \$19,765.00; total assisted: 155
- **Prescription Assistance:** \$6,047.25; total assisted: 67
- **Adopt a Senior/Head Start Child Christmas Project:** \$5,830
- **Transportation Assistance:** \$1,643.83; total assisted: 221
- **Employment/ID Assistance:** \$28,555.83; total assisted: 258
- **Food Assistance:** \$577,041; total assisted: 2,180
- **Debbie Warshaw Fund Assistance:** \$4,093.70; total assisted: 8

Disaster Assistance has continued to be given for the 2016/2017 floods, Hurricane Harvey and Hurricane Barry. An estimated 168 persons were assisted and a total of \$704,812.48 has been given in disaster assistance. Catholic Charities continues to help the victims of these disasters to recover through its Long-Term Disaster Recovery Program.

Source: Charity Tracker

Two St. Louis students named National Merit Finalists

LAKE CHARLES – St. Louis Catholic seniors Ethan Hebert and Caroline Obluda, who each achieved perfect ACT scores earlier in their high school careers, have been named National Merit Scholarship Finalists.

Only about 1 percent (15,000 out of 1.5 million) of the U.S. high school students who took the PSAT/NMSQT® in October 2018 and met other program participation requirements reach National Merit Finalist standing. All Merit Scholarship® winners (Merit Scholar® awardees) will be chosen from this elite group of finalists based on their abilities, skills and accomplishments.

Hebert said being a National Merit Finalist will enable him to attend Louisiana Tech University and major in Cyber Engineering.

"When I first took the PSAT, I didn't

know what National Merit was at all," Hebert said. "I didn't think scholarships like this actually happened to people – it seemed just like a movie thing. This will help a tremendous amount with college financially."

Hebert also strongly advises his fellow classmates to take the PSAT seriously.

"Everybody gives so much attention to the ACT, which does have its rewards, but a high score on the PSAT can directly give students scholarships, something the ACT doesn't do," said Hebert, a graduate of Our Lady Queen of Heaven School. "Students need to be advised of the amount of opportunity that is in this test and scholarship. From freshman year, I was always hoping for some miraculous scholarship that would be the culmination of all my hard work in high

school, and that's exactly what National Merit Finalist turned out to be."

Obluda is an alumna of Immaculate Conception Cathedral Catholic School in Lake Charles whose dream job is to work at NASA some day. She credited her parents and St. Louis Catholic teachers for reaching Finalist status.

"I am honored to be named as a Finalist," Obluda said. "I am very grateful for the opportunity to earn a scholarship, and I appreciate the recognition for the work I've done the past four years. I'm currently deciding between studying at Colorado School of Mines or Louisiana Tech, majoring in mechanical engineering and possibly astrophysics. Either way, I'd like to work at NASA someday and discover new things in the universe."



Ethan Hebert



Caroline Obluda