



**MacKenzie Harvey**  
High School Division



**Lauren Lance**  
Middle School Division



**Sage Thayer**  
Elementary Division

## Venerable Augustus Tolton essay winners announced

Tolton Ambassadors-Louisiana and Associates held the Inaugural Venerable Father Augustus Tolton Essay Contest during the month of February. An awards ceremony was Sunday, March 12, to honor students participating from throughout the Diocese of Lake Charles and Calcasieu Parish schools for their extraordinary and outstanding essays.

Each division — Elementary, Middle and High School — wrote an essay on different topics of why Venerable Father Augustus Tolton (1854-1897) should be a Saint.

**The Elementary Division:** Grades 4-5 reflected on Venerable Father Augustus Tolton's life journey and how he inspired all Catholics to live a Christian life. The first-place winner in elementary was **Sage Thayer**, a fifth-grade student at Immaculate Conception Cathedral School. She was awarded an iPad, a \$50.00 gift card and a certificate of participation.

**The Middle School Division:** Grades 6-8 reflected on Venerable Father Augustus Tolton's perseverance against all odds to become a priest, and his life of devotion and service to Catholics of all races during challenging times in America. The first-place winner in middle school was **Lauren Lance**, a seventh-grade student at Moss

Bluff Middle School. She was awarded an iPad, a \$100.00 gift card and a certificate of participation.

**The High School Division:** Grades 9-12 reflected on how Venerable Father Augustus Tolton's ministry helped to lay the Foundation for a true Catholic gathering in our time. The first-place winner in high school was **MacKenzie Harvey**, a senior at Washington Marion High School. She was awarded a laptop, \$200.00 gift card and a certificate of participation.

Other participants are listed by their division level:

- **Elementary** — Anna Hodges, Grady Byrd, Isla Dourousseau, Judith Melton, Knox Guidry, Ramsey Vincent, Scarlett Carmen, Sophia McCain, and Thompson Abendroth, all fifth-grade students at Immaculate Conception Cathedral School; and Aubrie Stevens, grade 5, Hamilton Christian Academy
- **Middle School** — Damond Bellard, grade 8, Hamilton Christian Academy
- **High School** — Breyton Stevens, grade 8, Lake Charles College Prep; and Sidney Woods, a senior at Barbe High School

All students participating were recognized and awarded a gift card and a certificate of participation.

## Pro-Life RV Tour visits Diocese of Lake Charles

By Pamela Seal  
Diocese of Lake Charles

LAKE CHARLES — Louisiana Right to Life brought its "Keep Louisiana Pro-Life RV Tour" to Lake Charles and Sulphur on Monday, March 13, with a message that every life matters for babies and mothers.

The two one-hour stops took place from noon to 1:00 p.m. at Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic Church and 4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. at Our Lady of Prompt Succor Catholic Church.

Despite the blustery cold weather, the RV tour at Our Lady Queen of Heaven drew a crowd of approximately 100 pro-life supporters, including Rep. Phillip Tarver, former Sen. Dan "Blade" Morrish; Tabitha Dugas, Executive Director of New Life Counseling; Becky Girola, Executive Director of ABC Pregnancy Resource Center; Mary Wilkinson, Right to Life Billboard Outreach Coordinator, and a group of OLQH seventh-graders.

Showing their support at Our Lady of Prompt Succor Parish were Sen. Jeremy Stine, Rep. Les Farnum, Rep. Troy Romero, and Tarver.

According to Ben Clapper, Executive Director for Louisiana Right to Life, the main message of the tour is to protect babies, to assist moms, and keep Louisiana a pro-life state.

The tour began on February 27 in the New Orleans region and made its way around the state ahead of the legislative session that kicked off on April 10.

"Since we had this great success last summer with Roe v. Wade being overturned, abortion facilities in Louisiana have been shut down and

babies are being protected," said Clapper.

He warned that it only takes one legislative session for the laws in Louisiana to go from pro-life to allowing abortion, something Clapper said that pro-life supporters cannot allow.

"What we don't want to happen is for a silence in the pro-life movement in any way seem like we are saying to our elected officials that we can go back," he continued. "We want to go forward in Louisiana and let our legislators know that the pro-life movement is here, and we are always going to protect life."

Clapper praised the Southwest Louisiana community for the resources available to moms in need of support.

"You are blessed right here in Lake Charles with two of the best pro-life pregnancy centers in the state with both New Life Counseling Center and ABC Pregnancy Resource Center," said Clapper. "A lot of efforts in the community are also church-based such as the Gabriel Project in the Diocese of Lake Charles."

The highlight of each one-hour stop was the inspiring testimony of Dustin Bertrand, who drove the Right to Life RV on the tour. Bertrand is living proof that every life matters no matter the circumstances in how one is conceived.

"I am a tangible witness that we should keep Louisiana pro-life from the womb to the tomb, continue to support our women and protect the lives of unborn babies," said Bertrand, who was conceived as the result of rape when his mother was 25 years old.

It was in high school when Bertrand began to realize that he was being judged for something that was out of his

control. For the first time, he said he knew he was different than his surrounding family.

He still recalls with detail the conversation he had with his mother when he learned of the story behind her pregnancy.

"It happened in Abbeville, south of the airport on a green picnic table over some gravel rocks next to a gray Lincoln owned by my grandmother on a Saturday in August," Bertrand described vividly.

It was during the paperwork process for open heart surgery when Bertrand was 20 years old that he began asking about his biological father.

"My mom started to cry and apologize to me that she could not give me the information I was seeking," he said, but still looks up to her as a hero for choosing his life during an unfortunate situation.

Bertrand admits that he never thought he would be part of the pro-life movement in the capacity that he is now but is traveling the state to spread the message that every life matters.

"The pain of abortion cannot erase the pain of rape. My mother realized that I should have life despite the horrific actions of my biological father," Bertrand said. "It wasn't easy for her, it wasn't planned, but she loved me unconditionally."

Before the RV left for its next stop in Sulphur, a delicious jambalaya lunch prepared by Chris Habetz and Jay Wilkinson was served.

Those attending the event had the opportunity to sign a Keep Louisiana Pro-Life Petition, also available at KeepLaProLife.com.

### DIOCESAN RECOVERY UPDATE No. 10

More than two and a half years have passed since Hurricane Laura made landfall on August 27, 2020, as a Category 4 hurricane in Southwest Louisiana with 150 mph winds and over nine feet of storm surge. More than \$150,000,000.00 of damages were incurred by the Diocese of Lake Charles alone.

Many of the churches and schools are under construction with permanent repairs. Others are in various phases of design and awaiting obligations of federal assistance from FEMA to be approved. Structures slated for demolition are awaiting requisite clearance from FEMA on any potential environmental or historical issues.

The Federal assistance claim is laborious, as the Diocesan Recovery Teams works with FEMA to validate damages and costs for restoration or replacement of the severely damaged parish facilities and schools. The Diocese recently advertised for submissions for interested FEMA consultants. A total of 11 firms submitted. The selection decision will be announced once all submissions are reviewed in detail.

Figures below reflect the current monthly snapshot highlighting the ongoing recovery in the Diocese of Lake Charles as of April 4, 2023:

| DIOCESAN EXPENDITURES                  | through Feb 2022       | March 2023            | through March 2023     |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Emergency Work (Category B)            | \$10,351,279.01        |                       | \$10,351,279.01        |
| Emergency Work (Insurance Contractors) | \$13,829,967.75        |                       | \$13,829,967.75        |
| Permanent Work Repairs                 | \$14,187,893.25        | \$2,552,424.02        | \$16,740,317.27        |
| Temporary Facilities (See below)       | \$9,531,932.53         | \$406,824.75          | \$9,938,757.28         |
| Restoration Design (Architects) and PM | \$6,661,920.38         | \$546,425.17          | \$7,208,345.55         |
| Insurance Consultants                  | \$440,459.15           |                       | \$440,459.15           |
| FEMA Consultants                       | \$2,342,335.30         |                       | \$2,342,335.30         |
| <b>TOTAL Expenditures to date:</b>     | <b>\$57,345,787.37</b> | <b>\$3,505,673.94</b> | <b>\$60,851,461.31</b> |

#### TEMPORARY SITES (Expenditures to date)

|                                     |                |              |                |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|
| Our Lady's School Temp Facility     | \$2,743,958.01 | \$102,707.40 | \$2,846,665.41 |
| St. Louis High School Temp Facility | \$3,699,824.64 | \$136,036.09 | \$3,835,860.73 |
| St. Margaret School Temp Facility   | \$2,919,706.62 | \$155,341.26 | \$3,075,047.88 |
| Christ the King Church              | \$101,122.90   | \$2,400.00   | \$103,522.90   |
| DOLC Storage                        | \$67,320.36    | \$10,340.00  | \$77,660.36    |
|                                     | \$9,531,932.53 | \$406,824.75 | \$9,938,757.28 |

#### PROJECTS COMPLETED / PROJECTS IN DESIGN

|   |
|---|
| A total of 65 DOLC project sites impacted by Hurricane Laura. (DOLC Misc properties consolidated into 1 project site) |
| A total of 29 DOLC project sites are under active design or specifications development for repairs / restoration.     |
| A total of 20 DOLC project sites have a combination of active work and/or active design for repairs / restoration.    |
| A total of 16 DOLC project sites, restoration is complete.  |

|                             |                 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| TOTAL INSURANCE PROCEEDS    | \$30,000,000.00 |
| FEMA OBLIGATIONS TO DATE    | \$23,892,649.62 |
| FEMA REIMBURSEMENTS TO DATE | \$8,493,747.34  |

Data as of 4 April 2023

## An Afternoon with Christ

2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. Sunday, May 21, 2023

Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, 935 Bilbo Street, Lake Charles





**NATIONAL Eucharistic Revival**

Monsignor Daniel Torres  
Pastor of Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic Church

PRAISE · ADORE · REFLECT

Rev. Monsignor Daniel A. Torres, Pastor of Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic Church in Lake Charles, and Vicar General for Pastoral Ministry, will lead the fifth session of "An Afternoon with Christ," 2:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Sunday, May 21, in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. The afternoon will begin with the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, followed by a reflection by Monsignor Torres, and conclude with Benediction. The monthly series is part of the National Eucharistic Revival to help people foster a habit of spending time with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. For more information, call the Cathedral office at 337-436-7251.



A group of pro-life supporters gather in front of the "Keep Louisiana Pro-Life" RV at Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic Church in Lake Charles on Monday, March 13. The RV was touring the state of Louisiana to collect signatures to help Keep Louisiana pro-life. The RV also made a stop at Our Lady of Prompt Succor Catholic Church in Sulphur. (Morris LeBleu / Diocese of Lake Charles)



Dustin Bertrand of Abbeville shares his inspiring pro-life testimony of hope in the face of immense adversity. He spoke at two stops in the Diocese of Lake Charles as part of the The "Keep Louisiana Pro-Life RV Tour." (Morris LeBleu / Diocese of Lake Charles)



**APRIL 23**

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## Holy Week in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception



On Palm Sunday, Bishop Glen John Provost blessed the palms to be given out to the faithful in a ceremony before the Mass that took place in the Cathedral courtyard.



During the Chrism Mass, the Bishop consecrated the sacred Chrism and blessed the Oil of Catechumens and Oil of the Sick that will be used in the coming year. Also at this Mass, priests from across the Diocese concelebrated with Bishop Provost and renewed their commitment to priestly service.



After having mixed balsam with the olive oil, Bishop Provost breathes into the vessel of Sacred Chrism in a gesture symbolizing both the Holy Spirit coming down to consecrate the oil and the life-giving, sanctifying nature of the sacraments for which it is used.



After reaching the Oratory, the Bishop kneels before the tabernacle along with the faithful, as all venerate the Blessed Sacrament, which remained available until midnight.



Bishop Provost incenses the altar and the Blessed Sacrament placed there following the celebration of Mass of Holy Thursday. The Bishop then processed with the Blessed Sacrament from the Cathedral next door to the Oratory of St. Bernadette for adoration.



During the singing of the Alleluia, Bishop Provost blesses Deacon Joshua Page who has profoundly bowed before the bishop and asked for his blessing preparing Deacon Page to proclaim the Gospel for the Mass of Holy Thursday. It was during this Mass that the feet of the Catechumen and the two Candidates from the Cathedral parish were washed commemorating the washing of the feet of the Apostles by Jesus.



On Good Friday, the only day of the year when Mass is not celebrated, a large wooden cross is processed up the center aisle. It stops three times and is incensed each time and for recited prayers (Behold the wood of the cross on which hung the salvation of the world; and the response Come, let us adore.)



Bishop Provost venerates the cross with those in attendance each doing so in an appropriate manner, before Communion and followed by a quiet departure.



The Service of the Easter Vigil must begin after sunset, the start of the new liturgical day, with what previously was called the "Service of Light" but now is known as "The Solemn Beginning of the Vigil or Lucernarium." The solemn liturgy begins – usually outdoors – with the blessing of the fire.



Bishop Provost processes out of the Cathedral giving his blessing to the people at the conclusion of the Easter Vigil in the Holy Night.



The people have lighted their own candles to shed light on the liturgy, ostensibly all coming from the "one light" – the new Paschal Candle.



Here, the Bishop after praying the liturgy and preparing and blessing the Paschal Candle, lights the candle prior to its procession into an otherwise dark Cathedral for the Liturgy of the Word.

## A fond farewell for Father Charles Okorougo

By Pamela Seal  
Diocese of Lake Charles

A Mass of Thanksgiving to celebrate the retirement of Rev. Charles Okorougo was held Thursday, March 2, at Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic Church. Father Okorougo, who was ordained on August 1, 1987, is returning to Nigeria after serving in the Diocese of Lake Charles the past 10 years as Chaplain at Christus Ochsner St. Patrick Hospital.

Monsignor Daniel A. Torres, V.G., who served as celebrant, expressed the gratitude of all gathered for the years of service that Father Okorougo has given to the hospital and to Our Lady Queen of Heaven Parish as well as to the multitude throughout the Diocese of Lake Charles over the years.

"My friend, you have been a great example of Christ's love and compassion to all of us. We thank God for sharing those gifts with us all," said Monsignor Torres. "We say to you, Father Charles, also known as 'Father Charles of Lake Charles,' thank you and that we love you."

Monsignor Torres made a comparison to how Father Okorougo's way of living mirrored that of the Gospel of Matthew 7:12: "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you."

"Father Charles brought the verse from today's Gospel alive in his daily life," Monsignor said. "He is humble before others so that God's presence can be felt with his words and actions."

Monsignor Torres said that Father Charles did his best to emulate the love and mercy of God.

"Through the humility he possessed, his spirit radiated a unique prayerfulness and richness in faith and God, patience, staff, as well as countless parishioners of the diocese he served," Monsignor continued.

While acknowledging that change is difficult, Father Okorougo said that change is always fruitful. In remarks to the congregation, he reminded the faithful to always be strong in faith.

"The journey is not easy. As some say, it is not an easy road, but God has promised us that He will be with us until the end of time," said Father Okorougo. "God is good. God will always reward you."

Father Okorougo expressed his gratitude to all.

"Thank you for your goodwill in assisting me in my 10 years of ministry in the Diocese of Lake Charles," he said. "I have made wonderful friends and family here in the service of my ministry."

Joining Monsignor Torres for the Mass were Very Rev. Ruben Villarreal, Rev. Levi Thompson, Rev. Bert Borel, Rev. Brian King, Rev. Andrew DeRouen, Rev. Felix Okey Alaribe, Rev. Cyprian Eze, Monsignor Charles Dubois, and Deacon Harold Nixon.



Rev. Charles Okorougo was honored during a Mass of Thanksgiving on March 2 at Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic Church to celebrate his retirement before returning to Nigeria. Monsignor Daniel A. Torres, V.G., who served as the celebrant, encourages Father Okorougo to give a few closing remarks. (Morris LeBleu / Diocese of Lake Charles)