



FAIRFIELD COUNTY CATHOLIC

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June 2023

Diocesan News

Newly ordained 'walks with others' in love and service

BRIAN D. WALLACE

BRIDGEPORT—In a joyful Mass on the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano ordained David Klein of Trumbull to the order of Transitional Deacon at St. Augustine Cathedral.

"Become a living sacrament of service. Lay down your life in love," Bishop Caggiano said to Klein during his homily to begin the Rite of Ordination. "To love as Christ loves costs dearly, but rewards us infinitely."

Almost 400 turned out for the Mass, including Klein's parents Matthew and Sabrina Klein of Trumbull, who served as Gift Bearers, bringing the bread and wine to the altar, where Klein received them.

Bishop Caggiano concelebrated the Mass with diocesan priests and guest celebrants including Bishop James Massa, Auxiliary Bishop of Brooklyn and rector of St. Joseph Seminary in Yonkers,

N.Y., and Father Zbigniew Kukielka, rector of Redemptoris Mater Seminary in Stamford.

Many friends and families from the Neocatechumenal community in the diocese turned out to support the newly ordained and to show their appreciation by breaking into warm applause three times during the ceremony.

David Klein was vested by Father Ricardo Batista Comim, parochial vicar at St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Bridgeport and the first to be ordained a priest from Stamford's Redemptoris Mater Seminary.

At the end of Mass, the Bishop announced that the David Klein has been assigned to St. Peter Parish in Danbury to complete his final year of formation and studies before being ordained to the priesthood.

David Klein began his studies in September 2015, when he entered Redemptoris Mater Seminary, the missionary seminary of the Diocese of Bridgeport. He is now completing his work in

theology at St. Joseph's Seminary in Yonkers, N.Y.

The bishop noted that David's missionary experience as a seminarian in the Neocatechumenal Way has taken him to every corner of the world.

"You have seen poverty and dignity going hand in hand, and you have seen God's great mercy," the bishop said, noting that Klein has walked with others in many different cultures.

"As your spiritual father I am grateful for all that you have walked and will do so in the years to come," the bishop said, thanking David for accompanying others through his missionary service that took him to locations throughout the U.S., as well as the Pacific Islands of Kiribati, Fiji, New Zealand, New Caledonia, Wallis, Futuna, and Tahiti.

"No one is ordained to be the housekeeper of the altar, but to bring the bread of life to the elderly, the sick, and the abandoned, and to remind them that they are



loved by God," the bishop said.

"Am I ready? The answer is, No! No one is. Am I worthy? No one is," the bishop said to David Klein, "but in the great mystery of ordination and of God's love," we all can find the courage to overcome our weakness and limitation and serve others.

The Rite of Ordination begins when the elect stands before the bishop who asks him to declare his resolve to accept the duties and responsibilities of the Diaconate. The candidate promises respect and obedience. The promise is followed by the Litany of Supplication, the Laying on of Hands and the Prayer of Ordination. The newly ordained is then vested with a diaconal stole and dalmatic and the bishop presents him with the Book of the Gospels.

Transitional deacons admin-

ister baptism, dispense the Eucharist, assist at and bless marriages, bring Viaticum to the dying, read scriptures to the faithful, and preside at funeral and burial rites.

Before giving the final blessing, the bishop once again thanked the Klein family and members of the Neocatechumenal way for the role they played in bringing David to his moment of diaconal ordination, and he urged all present to pray for the diocesan seminarians who "are good faithful, talented young men who are a blessing to our Church."

The bishop also thanked Dr. William H. Atwood, diocesan director of Music Ministry, the Ordination schola and The Redemptoris Mater Seminary Choir for providing

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2023 Bishop's Appeal

St. Thomas More, St. Mary to enter partnership

By KATHY-ANN GOBIN

DARIEN—A beacon of faith for almost 100 years in the city of Stamford, St. Mary Parish is poised to get a much-needed exterior restoration thanks in part to a partnership with its sister-parish, St. Thomas More in Darien, through the Bishop's Appeal and grants from Foundations in Faith.

"We are in the process of saving a beautiful French Gothic church," said Father Gustavo Falla, pastor of St. Mary's. "St. Mary is spiritually and pastorally vibrant, but we are in need of some financial assistance."

Father Falla and two parishioners of St. Mary who have been working together to assess the restoration needs of the parish in conjunction with support from Foundations in Faith, which provides comprehensive support to enhance pastoral care for parishes



and programs in the diocese, met with members of St. Thomas More to thank them for their financial assistance and update them on the status of the project.

"St. Mary's is very grateful to St. Thomas More," Father Falla said during a Finance Committee meeting at the sister church in Darien. "Thanks to your contribution, we were able to move

ahead and cover costs to see what the architect can do for us."

St. Thomas More, at the suggestion of Joseph Gallagher, Chief Development Officer for the Diocese of Bridgeport, agreed to donate \$48,000 of its 2021 Annual Catholic Appeal overages to the St. Mary Water Infiltration project.

St. Mary's has been plagued with water leaks and the fund-

ing afforded them the ability to properly assess the situation and carefully consider the best way to approach the repairs needed for the church, which was much more than simply replacing the roof.

"Virtually the entire building needs help in one place or another," said Joe Aulenti, Finance Chairman for St. Mary's, who presented color-coded architectural renderings to highlight where existing issues are throughout the exterior of the building. Red areas denoted water damage, pink represented flashing or gutter issues and black indicated missing or damaged slate on the historic church.

"With the weekend we just had there is water in the church," said Aulenti and fellow St. Mary parishioner George Schiff agreed. "The main problem is water infiltration and it's coming in from everywhere."

The May meeting followed days of relentless rainfall in Fairfield County.

"Water damage is complicated. It's not just a roof issue, it's a multitude of issues contributing to the problem," said Kelly Weldon, Director of Foundations in Faith. The organization has provided grants totaling \$82,000 to study and diagnose the water issue, work with land surveyors, attorneys, planning and zoning experts, and for co-payments for Partners for Architecture drawings and bid documents.

Under the restoration plan, portions of the slate roof would be replaced with a metal roof and snow guards would be added. New gutters, leads and flashing would also be appropriately placed on the structure to mitigate inclement weather. Aulenti said regrouting is also necessary on

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Catholic Cemeteries

Cemeteries unveils 'Homeless Jesus' statue

By JOE PISANI

NORWALK—When Dean Gestal and his wife Janie were in London recently, they stayed across the street from the historic Jesuit Church of the Immaculate Conception in the center of the city. When Gestal went for a walk, he noticed a homeless person sleeping on a bench near the church, and upon looking closer, he realized it was someone he recognized ... after he saw the nail wounds in the man's feet.

What he encountered was the world-famous bronze sculpture titled, "Homeless Jesus," by Canadian artist Timothy Schmalz, which depicts Christ as a homeless man under a blanket, sleeping on a park bench with his head and hands hidden.

"As I drew closer, I was awestruck," said Gestal, Executive Director of Catholic Cemeteries of the Diocese of Bridgeport. "When I saw the wounds in his feet, it brought the Passion of Our Lord to mind—his suffering and death on the cross to save our souls."

Gestal was so moved that



shortly afterward he contacted the sculptor, who recently unveiled a new National Life Monument near the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Washington. The colossal bronze sculpture celebrates the miracle of life and depicts a mother with a world-shaped womb and an unborn child in the center.

Gestal obtained a cast of Homeless Jesus and had it erected in front of the new headquar-

ters of Catholic Cemeteries at 154 East Avenue in Norwalk. There are more than 100 worldwide, but the only other one in the New York metropolitan area is at the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine in upper Manhattan. Another is in Rome, outside of the Papal Office of Charities on the street leading to St. Peter's Basilica. The original was installed in 2013 at Regis College in Toronto.

Describing his encounter with the Homeless Jesus sculpture in London was "a wake-up call," Gestal said, "I stood there for ten minutes, and my thoughts turned into prayer. That piece of art threw a spear into my heart and brought to mind so many other things in life we brush over. All of us have to ask, 'How do we help the helpless?' That's what we deal with every day here."

After a successful career on Wall Street, Gestal was called to lead Catholic Cemeteries. "God has a plan for all of us," he said, "and for me it has been this new vocation in Cemeteries, which makes me think about what we have to do to improve the lives of others."

The statue on the busy Norwalk street has evoked similar responses from people who pause to look at it, Gestal says. Some take photos, others sit down beside it and seem to pray. When rush-hour traffic is backed up at the intersection, cars stop while motorists stare in curiosity, at first not quite sure what they are looking at.

Schmalz, whose oeuvre is inspired by his Catholic faith and the Works of Mercy, believes that "Christian art is a weapon that can be used in a passive nihilistic society to awaken people to morality and spirituality embedded in our history, which we so arrogantly and foolishly pretend we do not need."

He sees the Homeless Jesus as an artistic representation of Jesus' words in Matthew 25: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom pre-

pared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me."

And Jesus, the king, will tell them, "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me."

Schmalz says, "This is word for word from the Bible of how Jesus wants to be represented himself... as one of the marginalized."

"Here we are in 2023 and this sculpture is going artistically viral," he said. "It's being installed everywhere in some of the most historic and significant places in the world," including the centers of Munich and Amsterdam, and the entrance to Capernaum, where Jesus himself walked.

Kenn Devane, who handles community relations for Catholic Cemeteries, said, "What comes to mind when I see the sculpture of Homeless Jesus is 'There, but for the grace of God, go I.'"

He believes people can be uncomfortable when they encounter a homeless person, and that "Catholic Cemeteries is extending its ministry to the public street and asking people to consider that we are all equal in the eyes of God. You would feel differently about the person sleeping on the bench or in the train station if you knew it was Jesus. We want to make people think, and maybe in doing so, they will be kinder to the next person they encounter."

The public display of the sculpture goes hand-in-hand with the Catholic Charities mission, Gestal says.

"What we do day to day, in one word, is deal with death," he said. "Death is an end, but death is not the end. We have to dig deep for answers. Life can become pretty routine for all of us, but life is not ours alone. The Homeless Jesus forced me to look at myself first and then others and the world around me. I want it to do the same for other people. Are we ready to meet our Maker? Is anyone ready? These are questions we have to ask ourselves, and this sculpture compels us to do that."

ST. THOMAS MORE, ST. MARY FROM PAGE 3

some of the masonry on the façade of the church.

The project is currently out-to-bid but once started, it is expected to take eight months to complete in two different phases.

"If we start this summer, we can get the most critical phase done," said Aulenti.

Phase One is expected to cost \$2.2 million, and Phase Two is expected to cost \$500,000 to \$750,000. The total project for all the exterior work is expected to cost \$3.4 million.

The architect has advised that any interior restoration work wait for at least two years to be completed just to ensure all exterior work is successful.

St. Mary's is exploring options to raise the capital needed for the work, including potentially selling one acre of property that the parish is not using.

"We would not be in this good of a position without the

funding from St. Thomas More," Aulenti said.

The entire renovation project including repairs to the inside is expected to take about three to four years, Aulenti said, noting that many parishioners who are professional contractors in the painting industry are ready and willing to help.

The St. Thomas More finance committee extended an invitation to Father Falla to speak to parishioners at St. Thomas More at upcoming weekend Masses.

In turn, Father Falla welcomed the committee and parishioners of St. Thomas More to not only tour the Elm Street church but to attend the annual carnival fundraiser that will be held in June.

All agreed the nature of the relationship between the sister parishes should be comprehensive.

"You are our neighbors. This is what being a part of the Diocese means," said St. Thomas More's pastor, Father Paul

Murphy. "We don't want this partnership to be financial and bricks and mortar but a collaboration of sister parishes working together and incorporating families into that."

"I think this is one of the best things our parish is doing," said Joseph Roxe, a trustee for St. Thomas More.

Gallagher agreed, crediting Bishop Frank J. Caggiano with paving the way for this type of parish partnership.

"The community building between the two parishes is paramount," he said, "It is a prime example of the collaboration between parishes being encouraged by Bishop Caggiano."

"You've set an example for other parishes to come together in this special way," Weldon said, adding that it is an opportunity for relationship and fellowship building in the diocese. "Thank you to St. Thomas More for joining us in this effort." ■