

# The Catholic Register



## Diocese Of Altoona-Johnstown

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### Priest Remembered for His Dedication and Sense of Humor

By Tony DeGol  
The Catholic Register

Dottie Bacher was hardly surprised when her brother, Tony, became a priest.

From the time he was little, he talked about it all the time and even celebrated pretend liturgies, she recalled.

“He used to have an altar in the room, and my mother made pillows for around it,” Bacher added.

He ultimately realized his dream, and little Tony became Father Anthony J. Legarski, a beloved priest of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown.

Father Legarski passed unexpectedly on November 5 following a brief illness, saddening his parish family of Saint Mary in Hollidaysburg where he had served as pastor for the past 14 years.



FATHER ANTHONY J. LEGARSKI

He was 61 years old.

“He was just a great person and a great brother,” Bacher said. “No matter what you needed – day or night – he always came.”

Being a priest was everything to him, she added.

“He never complained about

anything – he just loved his job,” she insisted.

Born in Somerset, the son of John and Yolanda (Lapina) Legarski, Father attended Somerset Area High School, Saint Francis University, and Mount Saint Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

He was ordained a priest in 1983 at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Altoona. He served as Parochial Vicar at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Altoona, Saint Mary Parish in Hollidaysburg, and Saint Mary Parish in Altoona.

He was appointed Pastor of Holy Spirit Parish in Beaverdale in 1999, an assignment he held until his appointment as Pastor of Saint Mary Parish in Hollidaysburg in 2005.

Word of his passing was crushing for long-time Saint

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Vienna Boys Choir

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Bishop McCort Scholarship Luncheon

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Women’s Self Defense Class

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Mass For Scouts

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# Students Thank Benefactors for Gift of a Catholic Education

By Tony DeGol  
The Catholic Register

Thanksgiving is still a few weeks away, but for Hans Esteban, the gratitude is flowing a little early this year.

A senior at Bishop McCort Catholic High School in Johnstown, Esteban is quick to point out how much he loves being a Crusher.

"I've made a lot of friends, and I can express my faith at this school," he emphasized.

His story, like so many of our outstanding Catholic school students, is a special one.

Esteban's parents were born in Guatemala and eventually came to the United States. He was born in North Carolina and moved to Johnstown when he was seven. Esteban attended the former Saint Andrew School in Johnstown from second grade until high school.

"I know that being a Bishop McCort student is going to open a lot of doors for me in the future," he admitted. "The reason I know this is because our education is different from other schools. The teachers here are always willing to help, and they're always pushing us to be better. I'm really happy here



**SHOWCASING TALENT:** Bishop McCort Catholic High School students perform a song during the school's annual scholarship luncheon. Student beneficiaries of endowments, named scholarships, and Pennsylvania educational tax credits met and thanked their benefactors and also showed off their diverse talent in arts and athletics.

because everybody is like a family to me."

The experience of faith, family, and academic achievement – for Esteban and many other students – is made possible thanks to endowments, named scholarships, and Pennsylvania educational tax credits.

During an annual luncheon on October 25, students once again had the opportunity to meet and personally thank their benefactors for their support of Catholic education.

"Without your generosity, I probably wouldn't be here," admitted Esteban, an endowment beneficiary.

"This is one of our favorite events of the school year," remarked Mary Clare Piatak, McCort teacher and mistress of ceremonies for the luncheon. "We get to share stories and good news since we were together last."

The energy in the room was contagious, noticed McCort Director of Advancement Tina Mirilovich.

"Each of our donors brings a special feeling with them each year, and that special feeling is generosity," she noted. "With your acts of kindness towards our students, you inspire us to go out and make the world a better place."

Principal Tom Smith echoed praise and thanks to the benefactors, and he could barely contain his Crusher pride as he shared facts about the school including the 100 percent graduation

rate and 100 percent college acceptance rate. Ninety seven percent of McCort graduates go to a four-year college, while three percent enter the military or technical school.

"Perhaps the most important number is that zero percent are lost to the streets of Johnstown," Smith boasted.

Indeed, the impressive statistics are important to parents such as Tracy Murin, whose daughter, Melissa, is a named scholarship recipient.

"Ever since she started here at McCort, she has continued to grow and achieve more than I can ever expect," Murin explained. "Your generous contributions have allowed her to explore her interests, whether it was art, dance, theatre, science, or volunteering in our community."

As for Esteban, he is looking to the future with optimism.

He continues to college-shop, and he plans to study cyber security or computer science.

"Look for me in the world of technology – I will keep your data safe," Esteban assured. "And it is all because of my Bishop McCort launching pad."

## Basilica Rector Marking 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ordination

The Very Reverend John D. Byrnes, JCL, JV, Rector of the Basilica of Saint Michael the Archangel in Loretto and Judicial Vicar of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, is celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his ordination to the diocesan priesthood.

Born the son of David and Theresa Byrnes of Cresson, Father Byrnes is an alumnus of Bishop Carroll Catholic High School, Ebensburg, graduating as valedictorian in 1985. Father Byrnes completed his undergraduate degree in English Literature and philosophy at the Pontifical College Josephinum, Columbus, Ohio, in 1989. He was named to the ranks of Pinter Scholars in 1987. While at the



**VERY REV. JOHN D. BYRNES, JCL, JV**

Josephinum, he completed summer studies at the Cemanahuac Institute, Cuernavaca, Mexico, and served in community building and missionary work in the villages of Chihuahua.

Father Byrnes was assigned to studies in Rome, Italy, in 1989. He completed his graduate studies in Systematic Theology at the Gregorian University in 1992. At the same university, he completed his licentiate in 1994, specializing in canon law. Father Byrnes received his priestly formation at the Pontifical North American College, Vatican City. While in Europe, he served in inner-city / interfaith ministry with Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity, among the Punjabi community, at Saint Anselm Parish in Southall, London, England.

He was ordained to the transitional diaconate by Cardinal James Hickey at Saint Peter's Basilica, Vatican City. He was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Joseph Adamec at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, Altoona, in 1994. He has served in high school, hospital, and parish ministry in Johnstown, Altoona, Cresson, and Loretto. Father Byrnes was Diocesan Director of Vocations and curator of the Prince Gallitzin Chapel House from 2002 to 2006. Father has served on the Administrative Board of the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference. He served as pastor of Saint Aloysius Parish, Cresson, from 2006 -2015. He was appointed the third rector of the Basilica in August, 2015.

Father Byrnes is a member

of the Eastern Regional Conference of Canonists and the Canon Law Society of America. He serves as Judicial Vicar for the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, judge and Director of the Tribunal, as well as a lecturer in canon law for the office of Diaconal Formation. He serves as an ex officio member of the Presbyteral Council of the diocese, as well as a member of the College of Consultors to Bishop Mark L. Bartchak. He serves as Bishop Bartchak's Delegate for the Cause of Canonization of the Servant of God, Demetrius Gallitzin. He is the administrator of the Prince Gallitzin Chapel House and Shrine of Our Lady of the Alleghenies.

## Dedicated Priest Passes

(Continued From Page 1.)

Mary secretary Ethel Cunningham. She described Father Legarski as an employer, a priest, and a friend.

"It hurts," she admitted. "He was all heart. We loved him, and we'll miss him dearly."

That sentiment was echoed by one of his closest friends, the Very Reverend Angelo Patti, VF, Pastor of Saint Peter Parish in Somerset and Dean of the Southern Deanery.

Father Legarski and Father Patti both attended Saint Mary's Seminary together, and the two remained close over the years.

Father Patti fondly recalled Father Legarski's remarkable sense of humor.

"He had that ability to make everyone laugh," Father Patti said. "He was a great imitator. He could imitate everybody, and he did it well. It was always in fun. It was never mean-spirited or hurtful. It was always to make people laugh."

Father Patti also pointed out Father Legarski's great

preaching ability, organization, attention to detail, and ability to thoughtfully solve problems.

In addition to serving the Church, Father Legarski also served his country through the Naval Reserves.

In 1990, he attended the United States Naval Chaplain School in Newport, Rhode Island, and was commissioned a Lieutenant Junior Grade. From late 1991 to early 1999, Father Legarski served on active duty in the United States Navy Chaplain Corps. He was honorably discharged from active duty with the rank of Lieutenant Commander.

A viewing for Father Legarski was held on November 13 and 14 at Saint Mary Parish in Hollidaysburg. A funeral Mass was celebrated on November 15 at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Altoona. Bishop Mark was the celebrant, and Father Patti was the homilist.

In addition to Bacher, Father Legarski is also survived by a brother, John.

## God and Country Celebrated at Annual Patriotic Rosary



**PATRIOTIC ROSARY:** Various elected leaders from Blair and Centre counties participated in the eighth annual Patriotic Rosary at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Altoona. The leaders are pictured above with Bishop Mark and Patriotic Rosary Chair Patricia Gildea (first row, right) of the Catholic Daughters of the Americas. The Catholic Daughters, pictured below with the Bishop, are the sponsors of the gathering.



*By Tony DeGol  
The Catholic Register*

How many of us long for the days when the values of family and faith set the tone for our discussion?

Bishop Mark posed the question at the eighth annual Patriotic Rosary.

"I don't think it takes an expert to tell us that in our beloved country, it seems that we have forgotten how to have honest and decent and respectful conversations about who we really are and how we should be able to promote the true meaning of being a citizen of this great country," the Bishop said.

The Catholic tradition, he continued, teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected.

"That concept is captured in the expression of the founders of our nation who cited the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as essential principles of what it means to be a citizen

of this place," he added.

Sponsored by the Diocesan Courts of the Catholic Daughters of the Americas, the celebration of God and country was held on November 2 at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Altoona. Bishop Mark presided.

Started during the 2012 election year and held every year since, the purpose of the Patriotic Rosary is to pray for wisdom in choosing our elected leaders and for their guidance in office.

Before each decade of the Rosary, the faithful are invited to pray for discernment, wisdom, and knowledge over each state in America.

Various elected officials read inspiring comments from past leaders in our nation's history including George Washington and John Adams. Their words highlight their personal faith and their belief that faith, indeed, has a place in the public arena.

Among the local elected officials who participated in this

year's Rosary were State Senator Judy Ward, Altoona Mayor Matthew Pacifico, Blair County Commissioners Ted Beam and Terry Tomassetti, Blair County Judge Timothy Sullivan, Blair County Magisterial District Judge Paula Aigner, Blair County District Attorney Rich Consiglio, Blair County Coroner Patricia Ross, Centre County Controller Charles Witmer, and Centre County Treasurer Richard Fornicola.

The gathering also included Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and Marian and patriotic music.

"Today God reminds us that we can find what is better when we look at things through the lens of Saint Paul's world view," stated Bishop Mark. "He says very simply and plainly 'our citizenship is in Heaven,' which means that all that is true and good for ourselves and our country begins and ends with the Lord of the whole universe."



**LITTLE SAINTS:** In observance of the Solemnity of All Saints, third grade students at Saint Michael School in Loretto dressed as saints and educated their classmates about the saints following Mass at the Basilica of Saint Michael the Archangel. The Very Reverend John D. Byrnes, JCL, JV, is the Rector; Susan Stevens is the teacher.

## Disalced Carmelites Announce 11th Novena

The 11th Novena of 2019 to Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Saint Therese (the Little Flower) offered by the Disalced Carmelite Nuns of Loretto will open on Friday, November 22 and end on Saturday, November 30.

Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament is held every Sunday at 4:00 p.m. and every first Friday of the month.

Prayer petitions should be sent to Mother Prioress, Disalced Carmelite Monastery, P. O. Box 57, Loretto, PA 15940.

# Knights Gathering Reinforces Need to Support Good Priests

By Tony DeGol  
The Catholic Register

A day to celebrate the Knights of Columbus turned into a powerful reminder about the blessings of the priesthood and the importance of supporting good priests.

“What about the priest you see every Sunday or at daily Mass?,” posed Mark Jago, State Deputy of the Knights. “You need to tell them how much you appreciate their calling, their ministry, what it means to us. Simply go up and shake his hand after Mass and pat him on the back. Say ‘Father, you’re doing a great job.’”

That urging from Jago came during the diocese’s annual K of C celebration on October 13 at Our Lady of Loretto Community Hall in Loretto. Prior to the dinner, Bishop Mark celebrated Mass for the Knights and their family and friends at the Basilica of Saint Michael the Archangel.

A Knight himself, the Bishop treasures the opportunity for fraternity with members of councils from throughout Altoona-Johnstown. The annual liturgy and banquet are opportunities to highlight the Knights’ many contributions and thank them for their presence and support.

This year, the gathering recalled the grand success of the national pilgrimage of the Saint John Vianney heart relic, sponsored by the K of C. It included a stop at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Altoona in late January.

Saint John Vianney is the patron saint of priests. He struggled academically during his seminary years, but after ordination, he quickly turned



**SALUTING THE KNIGHTS:** A Mass and dinner honoring the Knights of Columbus in Altoona-Johnstown was held in Loretto. Pictured (left to right): Ralph Trofino, Knights of Columbus; Bishop Mark; Joe Kadas, Knights of Columbus; Peter Sonski, Director of Education and Outreach for the Knights; Mark Jago, Knights of Columbus State Deputy; and Father Matthew Reese, Chaplain. Below, Knights process during Mass at the Basilica of Saint Michael the Archangel.



the faithful in the town of Ars, France, away from sin and closer to God.

The priesthood, Jago reflected, has changed over the years.

“Now in a lot of parishes, the priests are by themselves,” he reminded. “They have nobody to boost them up and encourage them.”

Especially amid these troubled times in the Church, Jago continued, good priests need our prayers, support, and friendship.

“So continue to do all of the good work you’re doing, but I would encourage you to make a special effort to be a friend to your priest or pastor,” he pleaded. “We’re there to support them in

their ministry and in their calling.”

Peter Sonski is the Director of Education and Outreach for the Knights. Based in New Haven, Connecticut, Sonski traveled around the country with the Saint John Vianney heart relic, including the visit here on that wintry day. He was the keynote speaker at the banquet.

Sonski began by reading a letter from Carl Anderson, Supreme Knight. It stated in part:

*“Thank you very much for your support of the Knights of Columbus in the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown and for this gathering, which highlights the success of the Heart of a Priest pilgrimage. The Knights of Columbus was privileged to sponsor the national pilgrimage at a time when the Church has been experiencing many challenges. The need for good and holy priests in the spirit of (Saint John Vianney) is greater than ever, and you are to be commended for welcoming the heart relic of the patron of parish priests to your diocese.”*

The relic pilgrimage drew thousands to the Altoona Cathedral for veneration, Mass, and/or the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Sonski saw a similar outpouring elsewhere.

“I think what I found most meaningful is that the Church, although wounded, is still strong,” he said. “People very much want to pray for renewal, healing, and change.”

Sonski echoed Jago’s thoughts about the importance of reaffirming good priests. We can do that by being faithful to our own practice of the Catholic faith and ultimately renewing ourselves in holiness. We can assist priests in building up the Church around us.

“It can’t be all a one-way street,” he added. “It has to be a mutual sharing of support.”

Bishop Mark used the occasion to express his heartfelt gratitude to the Knights.

“I wasn’t always an active member of the Knights of Columbus throughout my priesthood, but the Knights of Columbus was always there to support me throughout the years,” he stated. “I can’t tell you how special and meaningful and purposeful that support has been throughout these years already as Bishop of the diocese. It is my blessing and privilege to be able to serve you and work with you. I can ask for no better.”

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## Cathedral Hosts Famed Vienna Boys Choir

As part of its fall tour of the United States, the world-renowned Vienna Boys Choir delighted a packed audience at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Altoona on October 27. The program, *Journey through the Americas*, featured music by Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, and George Gershwin as well as classical European music, waltzes, and polkas. Thank you to photographer Harald Dertinger for capturing some of the images for the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown.



## May They Rest In Peace



**SISTER M. FRANCIS  
BORGIA O'DONNELL,  
IHM**

Sister M. Francis Borgia O'Donnell, IHM, of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, died on November 4 at Our Lady of Peace Residence in Scranton. She was born on October 19, 1931, in Lock Haven and given the name Joan Elaine. She was the daughter of the late Lawrence and Sara McNerney O'Donnell. She entered the IHM Congregation on September 8, 1949, and made her temporary profession of vows on May 8, 1952, and her final profession of vows on August 2, 1955.

Sister Francis Borgia served as a teacher in many schools including Saint Patrick Elementary School in Spangler from 1952-1958. Sister served as a principal at numerous schools including Saint John the Evangelist Elementary School in Bellefonte from 1981-1988.

A funeral Mass was celebrated on November 7 in Scranton. Memorial contributions may be made to support the retired IHM Sisters c/o the IHM Sisters Retirement Fund, IHM Center, 2300 Adams Avenue, Scranton, PA 18509.



**SISTER BRIDGET  
JAMES O'BRIEN, CSJ**

Sister Bridget James O'Brien, 90, died on October 20 in the 70th year of her religious life as a Sister of Saint Joseph. The daughter of James and Bridget Mannion O'Brien, Sister Bridget James entered the Congregation from Saint Veronica Parish in Ambridge, Pennsylvania.

For 42 years, Sister Bridget James ministered in education in the dioceses of Pittsburgh and Altoona-Johnstown. For more than three decades, she served as principal of Saint Andrew in Johnstown (1964-1995) where she was beloved by generations of former students.

Donations in the name of Sister Bridget James may be sent to the Sisters of Saint Joseph Memorial Fund, Development Office, 1020 State St., Baden, PA, 15005.

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## Grandfather Sees Grandsons Carry on Scouting Tradition at Emblem Mass



**JOHN WALSH AND GRANDSONS (LEFT TO RIGHT) TRAVIS, JOSHUA, AND COLIN BECHTEL.**

**By Tony DeGol**  
*The Catholic Register*

Every grandfather enjoys moments of pride as his grandchildren follow in his footsteps and embrace cherished family traditions.

For John Walsh, one such moment came during the recent Catholic Scouting Emblem Award Mass. Bishop Mark celebrated the liturgy on October 12 at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Altoona.

The awards presentation that followed was, indeed, a joy for Walsh as his grandsons Colin, Joshua, and Travis Bechtel received the Ad Altare Dei Award for their commitment to Catholic Scouting.

When Walsh was a scout, he earned the same honor. Now, decades later, he counsels a troop in Erie.

“We need to emphasize the Catholic portion of Scouting,” Walsh commented. “It is very important for the young men to learn about their faith and practice their faith.”

The Ad Altare Dei Award is the first award a boy scouts can earn, noted Walsh.

“It’s really the toughest award because it has a lot of requirements,” he explained. “It’s about the foundation of our faith including the seven sacraments.”

The requirements include a retreat and month-long service project.

Members of Troop 383 at

Our Lady of Victory Parish in State College, the Bechtel brothers engaged in community and parish service.

They were among 11 Ad Altare Dei honorees. Others were recognized with the Pope Pius XII Award, the Pope Paul VI Unit Award, and the Saint George, Angel on my Shoulder, Marian Medal, Light of Christ, and Parvuli Dei Awards.

“This is a great time for you to be recognized from the Boy Scouts of America, from your troop leaders, from your parents, from everyone to recognize that you are listening to and doing what Jesus tells us to do,” said Bishop Mark in his homily. “Keep up the good work.”

The good work of Scouting really is a proud tradition in the Walsh/Bechtel family.

Colin, 17, Joshua, 15, and Travis, 13, acknowledged their grandfather for encouraging them and supporting them over the years and the inspiration of other relatives.

“Our two uncles were Eagles,” Travis mentioned. “We want to be just like them because they grew up to be great men, and we want to be great men and great people in our society.”

Scouting instills the fundamentals of life, Walsh added.

“Scouting teaches you how to be a good citizen of the country and a good member of your Church,” he stressed.

## Beacon of Hope: Journey Of Grace

*Editor’s Note: This is the second in a series spotlighting the inspirational stories of individuals and families coming into full communion with the Catholic Church through the Christian Initiation process. To learn more about the Rite of Christian Initiation or to guide someone through the journey, contact your parish or the Diocesan Christian Initiation Office at [jthompson@dioceseaj.org](mailto:jthompson@dioceseaj.org).*

**By Gerri Ciesielka**  
*For The Catholic Register*

Each time the RCIA process begins in a parish, it is a new experience for the team as any director/coordinator of the process will attest. Individuals that wish to become part of the Catholic faith come from different life experiences and are at different stages in their faith journey. In the many years that I have directed this process for our parish, we have never had a family go through the journey together. That changed in late January of this year when I received a call from our pastor, Father Tom Stabile, TOR, informing me that there was a family interested in becoming Catholic. As the RCIA Director for Holy Family Parish in Portage, I arranged an introductory meeting, and so, together with Father Tom and Melissa Lee, the parish DRE, we met the Hall Family from Johnstown.

Jeremy Hall came from a Protestant background, while his wife, Jen, was raised Catholic, but had left the Church when she married Jeremy to attend his. Their son, Jeremiah, a first grade student at the time, was baptized in the Protestant tradition. The Halls found themselves feeling spiritually unfulfilled. As Jen stated, “I missed the teachings of the Catholic Church and all of the rituals and symbolism. I wanted our son to have the same experiences that I had as a child growing up in the faith.” After some discussion, the Halls decided to try attending the parish that Jen grew up in to see if it would be a good fit for them. They desired a parish that would give them a sense of belonging



**JEREMY AND JEN HALL AND SON, JEREMIAH**

and community. This led them to Holy Family Parish.

About two weeks after the Halls began the RCIA process, another family joined the sessions. Desarae Oravec, an already baptized Catholic seeking to be confirmed, approached Father Tom. She also expressed her growing desire for her son, Rylan, to be baptized. He was also a first grade student at the time and the two boys bonded immediately and the families became friends.

Team member Marsha Troxel often commented on some of the insights into the faith that the boys had. When it was time to select a Confirmation name, Jeremiah did his research. Jeremy and Jen found books for children on the saints and Jeremiah, along with his parents, read these. Jeremiah decided, on his own, that he wanted to take Dominic as his name because he felt a connection to Saint Dominic Savio, a young saint who was cheerful, a good student, and loved to pray. Maybe it was because Jeremiah is also cheerful, a good student, and prays.

After weekly sessions, Jeremy and Jen were married in the Catholic Church. The sessions for the family continued throughout the summer, and in September,

Jeremy and Jeremiah made their Profession of Faith and were received into the Catholic Church. They celebrated the Sacrament of Confirmation and received First Eucharist on that day. Rylan was baptized in August, and Desarae received the Sacrament of Confirmation along with Jeremy and Jeremiah.

The Halls feel that becoming Catholic has changed their lives for the better. They have learned more about both Scripture and the teachings of the Church. This, in turn, has led them to have discussions that they would never have had otherwise, and, according to the Halls, it all has helped the family to grow spiritually. The journey continues for both families. They have remained friends. Rylan and Jeremiah still have play dates together, attend Religious Education class, and walk from class to Church together every Sunday. The two families sit together at Mass, and all the while the Halls continue to commute from Johnstown as Jen has returned home and brought her family to the fullness of God’s grace.

# Parish Self-Defense Class Packs a Punch

By Tony DeGol  
The Catholic Register

In times of danger, prayer can be powerful, and so can packing a punch.

During a recent self-defense class sponsored by Holy Name Parish in Ebensburg, women learned valuable techniques to protect themselves if they are attacked.

"I want you to leave here today realizing that you are not naturally a victim," stressed Dean Gittings. "You are naturally the most powerful, the most intelligent, the most able animal on the planet to defend themselves."

Gittings, a Holy Name parishioner, is the President/CEO of Gittings Protective Security in Ebensburg. He was the instructor for the class, offering the ladies important information about being aware of their vulnerabilities and patterns in their life that could make them a target.

Since we reside in communities that appear to be safe, we should certainly not think we are immune from harm.

"It's scary the level of drug activity, the idea of people just breaking into your house because they're trying to steal so they can get their next fix, that happens in this town all the time," Gittings cautioned.

Some of his tips included obvious steps such as locking your doors and windows and locking your car.

When walking down a street, use confident, erect posture, Gittings urged, rather than being hunched over, glaring at your smartphone, and seemingly oblivious to your surroundings.

Something as simple as a scream or running away from an assailant can be effective.

Class participants also learned physical moves to better defend themselves in a confrontation, including palm heel strikes, thrust kicks, and chokes.

"I just love the small actions that you can actually do to get away from someone," said

Charlotte Sommer, one of the women who attended the class. "Now I'm going to lock my car, put my head up high when walking and not be on my cell phone just to prevent someone from attacking me."

Maria Spayd, another participant, loved learning about the importance of a woman changing her daily routine so a predator cannot predict her usual steps and attack her more easily.

"I just like all the self-defense instructions," she added.

The Church provides for one's spiritual well-being, but it can also provide for one's physical well-being.

"We have a right to defend ourselves, that's morally acceptable to do so," reminded Father Brian Warchola, Pastor of Holy Name Parish. "I thought this was a perfect opportunity to do that and give education to all of us present here and give us an opportunity to truly defend ourselves, our body, souls, and mind. Hopefully these women never find themselves in a situation where they're attacked or in a vulnerable spot where they would have to use these skills they learned, but now they have them."



**LEARNING THE MOVES:** Dean Gittings of Gittings Protective Security teaches two women techniques to protect themselves during a self-defense class at Holy Name Parish in Ebensburg. At right, Maria Spayd (left) and Charlotte Sommer practice what they learned during the class.



## BISHOP'S APPOINTMENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown

**REVEREND JERZY M. AUGUSCIK, OFM CONV.**, appointed Administrator of Saint Augustine Parish in St. Augustine and Saint Monica Parish in Chest Springs, effective October 30, 2019.

**REVEREND GEORGE M. GULASH**, appointed Administrator of Saint Clare of Assisi Parish in Johnstown, continuing as Pastor of Resurrection Parish in Johnstown and Sacramental Minister at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, effective September 30, 2019.

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# Meal Packing and Inspirational Speaker Among the Highlights of SHYCON 2019

By **Tony DeGol**  
The Catholic Register

John Angotti told hundreds of teens what most adults already know: life is not always easy.

“At some point in your life, you’re going to have to ask ‘what is Truth?’” he stated while tapping the keys of his piano. “We have occupations, but, my friends, a vocation is given to us to love and serve the Lord and love and serve each other. For what else could you be in existence for?”

Angotti, a missionary who travels around the world providing inspirational music and witness talks, was the keynote speaker at the annual Senior High Youth Conference, or SHYCON, held on October 20 at Saint Francis University in Loretto.

The gathering of high school students from throughout Altoona-Johnstown is always the largest youth event of the year. It is sponsored by the diocese’s Office of Youth Ministry.

The theme for SHYCON 2019 was “Well Done My Good and Faithful Servant,” which, according to Youth Ministry Coordinator Francine Swope, should prompt the young people to truly reflect on whether or not they are living as servants of God.

“If not, you have a chance to change your life and start doing the things you should be doing,” she added.

In the spirit of service, another highlight of the day was the packing of thousands of meals for the Rise Against Hunger organization.

Students prepared rice and other items to feed people around the world.

Started a few years, the meal packaging continues to be wildly popular with the kids.

“It’s a great feeling,” said Devyn DeGennaro, a member of Saint Mark Parish in Altoona. “You know you’re helping people who really need it because we know how fortunate all of us are here compared to the other

people we’re doing it for who have close to nothing.”

Tommy Urbain loved Angotti’s presentations, but he, too, walked away with great satisfaction after packing rice.

“I like knowing we’re making an impact on everyone else’s lives,” added the parishioner of Saint Demetrius in Gallitzin.

Bishop Mark rolled up his sleeves and joined the youth as they packaged the meals. He was impressed by their commitment.

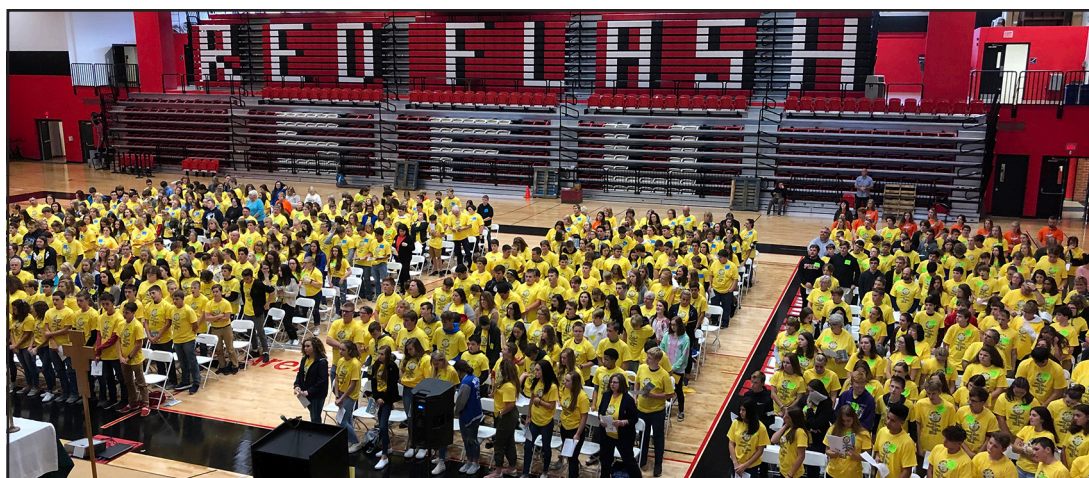
“It’s amazing – I saw smiles on the faces of everyone working at the tables,” he observed. “The students, I can tell, really cared that this is going to help some real person somewhere.”

Later, the Bishop celebrated Mass for the group and talked about prayer during his homily. So often, young people feel that they do not know what to say to God or if He’s listening.

Prayer, Bishop Mark assured, is simply a conversation with the Lord.

“Every time you read the words on the pages of the Bible, that’s God talking to you,” he reminded. “Just open up your Bible and listen to what He has to say.”

**SHYCON 2019:** With support and assistance from Bishop Mark, students packed meals for the Rise Against Hunger organization (top). Various parishes were represented at the youth event, including a group from Saint John Vianney Parish in Mundy’s Corner (middle). The hundreds of participants gathered for Mass with the Bishop to close out the day (bottom).



For additional SHYCON photos and video highlights on *Proclaim!*, visit the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown on Facebook.