On Dec. 8, 2015, five parishes in the diocese—St. Joseph in Mason, St. Mary Cathedral in Austin, Holy Trinity in Corn Hill, Sacred Heart in Waco, and St. Mary in College Station—were designated as pilgrimage sites for the Year of Mercy, and the doors of those churches were festooned with drapery and banners inviting pilgrims to enter. A website, www.austindiocease.org/yearofmercy was created with information about how to obtain the Jubilee Year indulgence, an explanation of what events were taking place, links to other Year of Mercy websites and resources, and an interview with Bishop Vásquez. You might have seen posters displayed near parish confessional and reconciliation rooms, inviting penitents to the Sacrament of Reconciliation in this “special place of mercy.”
Maybe you’ve already taken a road trip on I-35 or Highway 79 and walked through the “holy doors” of one of the pilgrimage sites (if you haven’t, you still have about 275 days to make the trip!). Or perhaps you’ve made it a point during the Lenten season to make a good confession. Or you’ve dusted off and reviewed those “Seven Corporal” and “Seven Spiritual Works of Mercy” and been more intentional about feeding the hungry, bearing wrongs patiently or praying for the living and the dead. “Many people are already doing these works of mercy on a regular basis; however, perhaps it is time to challenge ourselves to do something different that moves us out of our comfort zone,” Bishop Vásquez said.

Pope Francis’ exhortation in the papal bull Misericordiae Vultus reminds us of the reason for the Jubilee, “At times we are called to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father’s action in our lives.” In this special time for the Church, the Holy Father is praying that “the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective.” And indeed, all of those activities mentioned above bear public witness and strengthen our commitment to being those effective signs.

We also know from the Gospel that without a change of heart, all those external observances don’t bear much fruit.

“[BUT] TAKE CARE NOT TO PERFORM RIGHTEOUS DEEDS IN ORDER THAT PEOPLE MAY SEE THEM; OTHERWISE, YOU WILL HAVE NO RECOMPENSE FROM YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER.”
– MT 6:1

Nor should we approach the observances of the Year of Mercy as activities that we simply check off a list. (“Year of Mercy? Been there, done that.”) That’s why in the Diocese of Austin, our adaptation of the logo for the Jubilee includes the words: Receive, Understand, and Share—all three aspects are important. In the next several installments of Reflections, we will take a closer look at what those three expressions mean and how as “pilgrims of Mercy,” we might experience more fully the interior movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives even as we demonstrate those exterior signs on our way to becoming “merciful like the Father.”

St. Anselm
Bishop and Doctor
(1033-1109)

St. Anselm was born in northern Italy. At 27, he entered a Benedictine Abbey in France and became first the prior and eventually the abbot. When he was 60, he was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury where he vigorously defended the freedom of the Church and was twice exiled. An original thinker and a patient, gentle teacher, he was a man of many gifts. His biographer describes him as a man of “benevolence, kindness, love, gentleness, meekness, pardon, [and] smiling exhortation.” He was also an insightful theologian, the “father of Scholasticism,” whose contributions to systematic theology always emphasized the contemplative and spiritual aspects. “Credo ut intelligam” (“I believe that I may understand”), he said, emphasizing the need to be guided by the light of faith rather than to rely on reason alone. As we celebrate the life of St. Anselm, it would be good stewardship of our spiritual gifts to pray as he did: “Oh God, let me know you and love you so that I may find my joy in you; and if I cannot do so fully in this life, let me at least make some progress every day, until at last that knowledge, love and joy come to me in all their plentitude.” Amen.

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At Holy Vietnamese Martyrs Parish in Northeast Austin, the Mass celebrating Tet, the Vietnamese New Year, is one of the most beautiful services of the year for the Vietnamese-American congregation. The church is decorated with flowers, trees are festooned with red envelopes and red ribbon, and many gifts wrapped in red cellophane surround the altar and ladies wear Vietnamese traditional dresses made of brightly colored silk.

For many Vietnamese families, Tet, the Lunar New Year, is a time when families gather, the elderly are honored and there are many gifts and special foods for the holiday.

It was particularly special this year since Holy Vietnamese Martyrs welcomed a new pastor, Father Le-Minh Joseph Pham, just four months ago. Msgr. Joe Van Anh Nguyen, the longtime pastor at the parish, retired and is now pastor emeritus.

“It is new and exciting and I am still learning,” Father Pham said. “Transitions are always challenging. I’m coming back to my roots here. The parish is also getting used to a new pastor. We have a good relationship.”

In Vietnam, Tet is like “Thanksgiving and Christmas combined,” he explained. “We give thanks, we gather to thank God and pray for his continued guidance, and we exchange gifts.”

At Holy Vietnamese Martyrs Parish this year, the Mass took place on Feb 7. Bishops Joe Vásquez and Daniel Garcia concelebrated the Mass, along with Father Pham and Msgr. Nguyen. Also concelebrating the Mass were Father Matt Iwuji from St. Albert the Great, Father Hai Dong Nguyen from St. Mary’s Cathedral and Father Dominic Hanh Nguyen, of the Benedictine Monastery of Thientam. Deacon Hoa Mai assisted with the ceremony.

Bishop Vásquez began the Mass by welcoming the parishioners in Vietnamese, to great applause. He proceeded in English, and his homily was translated into Vietnamese for the audience.

“I’m very pleased to join you for this celebration of the Lunar New Year,” the bishop said. “The new year always opens with hope. I pray you and your families experience hope as we begin this new year.”

Bishop Vásquez’ homily centered on the Gospel reading, Luke 5:1-11, in which Simon Peter has an encounter with Jesus and his life is transformed.

“The fishermen could not have imagined how their lives would be transformed,” Bishop Vásquez said. In this new year, “we should expect that Christ will move us. He will step into our lives, into your life and my life. Can we be open to what Christ is offering us?”

He talked about how Jesus has Peter fish from deeper waters. In our own lives, he said, we need to go deeper as well, to be willing to take risks. We need to be open to the blessings God wants to give us, even if we feel apprehensive or scared.

“God wants to use your life and my life for good. Allow the Lord to move you in a new direction. He will provide,” the bishop said.

At the conclusion of Mass, as part of the Tet tradition, gifts were given by the parish to the elderly and the children in the congregation.

Bishops Vásquez and Garcia presented the gifts, first calling parishioners age 90 and up, and then those in their 80s, and next those in their 70s. Each elderly person was warmly greeted and given a present; it was a moving and joyous moment, with lots of smiles.

After the elderly were honored, children age 5 and under came up to receive red envelopes with money, and then children ages 5-12.

After the Mass, hundreds of people went across the street to a festival, where there was plenty of traditional Vietnamese food, music and a lion dance performance.

Then the celebration of Tet continued at the parish for two more days, Father Pham said. Traditionally, the first day of Tet is a day of thanking God; the second day, the community remembers their parents, grandparents and other ancestors; and the third day, they pray for prosperity throughout the year. He said many people attended daily Mass on the Monday and Tuesday after Tet.

Phong Nguyen, 74, has been a parishioner at Holy Vietnamese Martyrs for more than 25 years.

The New Year’s celebration, he said, symbolizes that “every New Year is a new opportunity, for the parish, for the families, for our community. It’s the opportunity for a fresh start.”
We’ve all heard the phrase “You can’t take it with you,” but how many of us have taken the time to make an estate plan that will determine how our property will be distributed when we are gone? If you have not yet taken the time to develop an estate plan, the state probably has one for you, but it might not be one that you like!

As you review your estate plan, ask yourself these questions:

• Whom do I want to inherit my assets?
• What is the legacy that I wish to leave behind?

The Catechism reminds us that we should regard our material goods “not merely as exclusive to [ourselves] but common to others also, in the sense that they can benefit others as well as [us]. The ownership of any property makes its holder a steward of Providence, with the task of making it fruitful and communicating its benefits to others, first of all his family.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2404)

In determining the allocation of our wealth, our first task should be to provide for the present and future needs of our family. Once our family is taken care of, we can begin to consider how our wealth can benefit those outside the family. Consider including a charity in your estate plan, either through a bequest, a charitable gift annuity, or an outright gift. Scripture tells us that the generous use of our talents and treasures on earth allows us to store up treasures in heaven:

“Tell the rich in the present age not to be proud and not to rely on so uncertain a thing as wealth but rather on God, who richly provides us with all things for our enjoyment. Tell them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous, ready to share, thus accumulating as treasure a good foundation for the future, so as to win the life that is true life” (1 Tim 6:17-19).

By being good stewards of the gifts God has given us, we may not be able to “take it with us,” but we will be able to send it on ahead!

**You Can’t Take It With You!**

“For we brought nothing into the world, just as we shall not be able to take anything out of it.” – 1 Tim 6:7

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**UPCOMING DIOCESAN EVENTS**

**April 13**  
Pastoral Plan Gathering (Spanish)
St. Joseph Parish, Bryan

**May 18**  
Assembly of Catholic Professionals
Hyatt Regency, Austin

**May 21**  
Transitional Diaconate Ordination
St. Vincent de Paul Parish, Austin

For event information, visit [www.austindiocese.org](http://www.austindiocese.org)
For Catholics, the Eucharist is the “source and summit” of our faith; however, there is the all-important journey of faith, a metaphor for the road we travel together as a church. And our journeys are often profoundly impacted by retreat and renewal experiences.

Dorothy Polchinski, associate director for evangelization at the Diocese of Austin, said spiritual formation for our faith journeys can be found through various parish renewal programs like Cursillo or Amazing Parish, and in retreat opportunities such as Christ Renews His Parish or Cedarbrake Catholic Retreat Center.

“A key element in these retreat and renewal programs is the aspect that we are journeying together toward Christ. A very powerful example we have of that is the Gospel’s road to Emmaus, where Jesus is walking with the two people, and he’s in conversation and listens to them,” Polchinski said. It is often through these “journeys” that people encounter Christ.

Launched in 2015, the diocesan Pastoral Plan focuses on encounter with Christ that leads to transformation. One of the goals of the plan is to help parish communities offer retreats for their parishioners. Through the listening sessions and surveys, people described the value of attending a parish retreat and how much those experiences enhanced their faith life and their relationship with Christ.

There is power in parish renewal groups and retreats, said Polchinski. “It is an opportunity to acknowledge, embrace, and encounter who Christ is, and to live that out in your everyday life — to live out that transformation as disciples.”

Cursillo

One parish renewal group, the Catholic Cursillo Movement, started in Spain in the 1940s and was first established in the U.S. at Waco in 1957. Doc Alvarez, lay director of the Spanish Cursillo for the Austin Diocese, estimates that in the last 60 years 50,000 people have participated in both the English and Spanish Cursillo movements. Cursillo, which means “short course,” begins with a weekend retreat, which is based on encounters with self, Christ and others.

"After the encounter with self, the next phase is the encounter with Christ,” said Robin Spencer, Cursillo-English lay director. “Saturday’s talks involve getting to know our Lord, the Passion, looking at the example God set for us here on earth. The third phase is the encounter with others, which is really what the movement seeks to do for people. We want you to experience this metanoia in order to go through this radical change of mind and heart, which includes more growth and learning opportunities as the journey continues.”

Robin Sutton, a parishioner of Holy Family Parish in Copperas Cove and a Cursillo member for 15 years, credits the Cursillo weekend retreat with changing her life.

“I entered that weekend being a Catholic who did what Catholics are supposed to do; go to church on Sundays, take your kids to church, and go through the motions of being a Catholic,” said Sutton. “I came out of the weekend completely embracing being Catholic as the primary part of who I am. The whole weekend was a very profound experience, being totally in (the Lord’s) presence.”

The weekend retreat is followed by the “Post Cursillo,” which includes large group meetings called Ultreyas, and smaller “Groupings,” which are friendship groups for either men or women that meet weekly to discuss piety, study and action.

“The most important part is the fourth day — the rest of your life, following the three-day weekend. Within the methodology is a support system. When you leave a Cursillo weekend, there are people in your environment who will help you along your path,” Spencer said.

A life-long Catholic who has been a Cursillo member since 1999, Spencer says, “The support network exists for you. It helps us stay on a mature level, rather than reverting back to a human, emotional level. Grouping sisters and brothers are there for the purpose of supporting you, and helping you persevere when you feel like giving up.”

According to Alvarez, who has served on the international Cursillo North American Caribbean Board, the Austin Diocese [continued on page 6]
has grown to include Spanish, English and thriving Vietnamese groups. The only
difference between them, said Alvarez, is language.

“Cursillo is about being in community,” he said. “The rubric in line with the Pastoral
Plan, in terms of evangelization, is that it has a follow-up and follow-through. For
example, we meet with small groups to discuss your piety, what are you doing on a
weekly basis? If you take to heart the concept of Cursillo, you will always have that
community to fall on, to reach to out in prayer.”

Retreat Center

Cedarbrake Catholic Retreat Center, established on 44 acres of woodlands along Leon
River near Belton, is focusing many of its 2016 retreats on fostering that “encounter with
Christ” by awakening faith, engaging hearts and transforming believers.

Brian Egan, the director of Cedarbrake, said three retreats have already been
scheduled for 2016 based on ‘encounter.’ The first retreat was held earlier this year
and led by the Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist, and the two other
retreats will be led by Franciscan Father Albert Haase.

“When we do encounter the love and mercy of our Lord, we will magnify this same love
and mercy to others and, thus, make the body of Christ stronger as a whole,” Egan said.

In addition to their most popular retreats, Desert Solitude and the Advent and
Lenten silent retreats, Cedarbrake offers a unique experience called Healing Hearts,
which is a retreat for women who have experienced sexual trauma, said Beverly Colin,
assistant director of Cedarbrake.

“This retreat offers women a safe place to tell their story, to experience God’s
healing and compassion, and to renew or deepen their own relationship with
Jesus Christ. The breakthrough has been so powerful that there have been times
when I did not recognize the participants on the final day. The transformations are
beautiful!” she said.

Cedarbrake, which also hosts groups such as parish councils, and other religious
and lay groups, sees an average of more than 7,000 visitors per year.

“I have heard so many people say, ‘When I come up the long driveway entrance
into Cedarbrake, everything feels lighter,’” Egan said. “Giving yourself the gift of a
retreat is a gift of being aware and of letting go. Walking on the grounds here and
observing simple things in nature re-opens your heart and mind to God who creates
all that surrounds us.”

Polchinski, who serves as a resource and support for parishes needing to con-
nect with parish renewal groups or retreats, said the beauty of these various retreats
is that not only do they provide an opportunity to encounter Christ, but also to
experience him through the love of the team members putting on the retreat.

“Attending a retreat or a parish renewal group accepts you wherever you’re at
on your journey. You don’t have to have it all together. You just have to come as
you are. That’s where Christ will meet you,” Polchinski said.

For more information about Cursillo, visit www.austinengliscursillo.webs.com.
For more information about Cedarbrake, visit www.austindiocese.org/cedarbrake.