A couple of years ago Pope Francis “prescribed” praying the rosary daily. “It’s spiritual medicine ... it’s good for your heart, for your soul, for your whole life,” he said.

At Fatima 100 years ago, our Blessed Mother told the children to whom she appeared, “Pray the rosary every day to obtain peace for the world.”

My devotion to the rosary and to Our Lady of Fatima began as a child. We were 10 children, growing up with chores of feeding the chickens, milking our Jersey cow and putting together steam engine cars. We prayed the rosary every night when Dad got out the rosary after the 10 p.m. weather. It was not always pleasant, but it was always something we did to hold the family and the world together.

My sister Clara remembers Mom reading to us the story of the Three Children of Fatima. In 1917, when Our Blessed Mother appeared in Fatima, Portugal, my mother would have been 14 years old, the year of her First Holy Communion. Mom always had flowers by the Sacred Heart statue.

When I was 16, a high school sophomore, I contracted cancer of the lymphatic system, Hodgkin’s disease. At that time I was told to expect a two-year roller coaster ride of ups and downs, and I remember telling my mom “not to cry because I would just go to heaven.”
The family continued to pray the rosary nightly and the prayers of countless relatives and friends ascended to heaven as well. I received one set of treatments, and the disease completely vanished. My doctor was astonished.

After 35 years of active priesthood here in the Austin Diocese, I went to the doctor for my yearly exam and was told that the roller-coaster had picked me up once again. I was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer.

By an unspeakable grace of God, I received as a gift a Pilgrim Statue of Our Lady of Fatima. I brought her to my home and was gifted with the ability to pray from one to four rosaries daily, usually while slowly walking the neighborhood. I began to sense that I was entering the Kingdom, meditating daily on the 20 mysteries.

After 13 weeks of treatment, all the tumors were reduced and no new tumors were found. In recalling the various miracles that God has manifested in our lives, we are able to see and to believe more deeply in the spiritual realities of our existence, and to put these realities into practice. I am personally convinced that the many prayers are the major factor involved with both healings. My brother and I continue to pray the rosary for world peace most mornings after breakfast.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the apparitions in Fatima. The angel of peace began appearing to St. Lucia and her cousins in the spring of 1916. The angel led the children into prayer to prepare them to receive the visitations of Our Blessed Mother, the Queen of Heaven and Earth. Our Blessed Mother asked the three children if they would pray and make sacrifices for the salvation of others.

We, too, are clearly asked to pray and to be willing to make sacrifices as we pray for the intentions of our loved ones and especially as we pray for world peace. Where do we start? I encourage families or individuals to begin the process of introducing prayer slowly — five minutes daily for two to three months, then 10 minutes daily for a couple of months, building up to the 15 to 20 minutes we need to pray the rosary daily.

The rosary is a tried and true prayer! I firmly believe that praying the rosary daily will bring peace to our homes and thus to the world. “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.”

Father Robert Becker was ordained a priest of the Austin Diocese in 1979. He is available to give presentations on praying the rosary to parishes. He encourages people first to pray until they have at least 12 people who are interested in the presentation, then to contact their pastor who will know how to get ahold of him in order to arrange a presentation. As presentation dates are set, they will be announced in the Catholic Spirit.
After 12 years as superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Austin, Dr. Ned Vanders is ready to embark on the next chapter of his life. When asked about this milestone, with his usual humor, he simply replies, “It has been a great ride; and now I take my final bow.”

While Vanders is retiring in June, he will remain at the diocese throughout the fall as a consultant for Catholic Schools. A passionate leader of Catholic education, Vanders approached his work as a principal and superintendent as pastoral ministry. A former member of the Lasallian Christian Brothers, Vanders expressed that he could effect “the same work in Catholic education, but without living in a [religious] community.”

Vanders considers his tenure as superintendent “a great experience.” He counted working with principals and teachers as a rewarding aspect of his leadership. When questioned as to what he would miss about this collaboration, he remarked that he will miss the interaction with the people, “the sharing of ideas, the visions, the missions.”

The passion and love he exemplified for education was evident in his leadership as a teacher, principal and superintendent. As a teacher, he enjoyed being in the classroom and witnessing the excitement of students about learning. “Seeing that aha moment that students get when they grasp a concept, or an idea...or can write a good sentence when they can communicate effectively and persuasively.” He recounted a heartwarming moment during his tenure as a principal after his father died. He recalled, “When my father passed away, and I was visiting a pre-k classroom, sitting in a chair at a table a little boy came up to me, put his arm around my shoulder, and said, ‘Dr. Vanders, I lost my dog; my dog died, so I know how you feel.’”

When asked whether he sought out to be an educational administrator, Vanders expressed that he never aspired to be a principal or a superintendent. However, he admitted, “I love school, I love reading, and I love learning and so I’ve always wanted to be a teacher.” Reflecting on when he responded yes to Archbishop Gregory M. Aymond’s (then, the bishop of Austin) invitation to become the superintendent of Catholic schools, he said, “I remember thinking, ‘Oh my gosh! What have I done?’” Looking back on everything, he said it was a decision he never regretted. In fact, he is grateful to Archbishop Aymond for having given him the opportunity.

Reflecting on his career in educational leadership, he talks about having been invited to leadership by School Sisters of Notre Dame Sister Caroleen Hensgen, who first appointed him as a principal. Vanders exclaims, “I owe my career to Sister Caroleen.” Upon his appointment as diocesan superintendent, she called to congratulate him and advised him, “Your principals are your stars, so treat them with a kid glove...so gentle, but firm.” Heeding her advice, Vanders endeavored to empower principals to lead, making decisions regarding their schools.

As an educator, Vanders expressed that he chose to work in Catholic schools instead of public schools not only because the Catholic school is intentionally directed to the growth of the whole person, but also because he could practice his faith. He declares, “Faith is important. So I needed that part in my life and career.” A staunch financial supporter of Catholic schools, Vanders prays that our Catholic Schools “continue to offer strong faith formation and academic excellence, staying true to the core values of Catholic education.”

Vanders is a member of St. Louis Parish in Austin. When not at work, he likes to read, play the piano, exercise and travel. His career in education spans 47 years as a teacher, campus minister, dean of students, principal and superintendent.
Stewardship & Finance

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Ramiro’s Transformation
A San Juan Diego Catholic High School Student’s Success Story

My name is Ramiro, and I am currently a senior at San Juan Diego (SJD) Catholic High School in Austin, where I have attended all four years. The generosity of the SJD community over the last four years has effected many students, but it has especially helped and changed me. The most important and crucial years of my life, I spent at San Juan Diego.

My parents and I made the decision to move my sister and I to a Catholic school after I experienced bullying during middle school. During my freshman year, I was shy and very quiet, almost like a small snail, living in a shell. I would have never imagined that I would have the courage and self esteem that I have today. Slowly but surely, however, I learned that communication and teamwork are the keys to success, and today I am the Student Government president at our school. Being in this position was a dream come true!

One of our school’s coolest features is the Corporate Internship Program. I have been interning at Dell Technologies for four years. I started in the Auditing Department, but then I had the opportunity to transfer to the Engineering Department. This opportunity at Dell became my “Aha!” moment. I am proud to say I will be the first member of my family to attend college, at Texas A&M University in College Station and it was because of my internship experience that I have decided to pursue a degree in engineering. No one in my family has gone to college or a university. SJD has done a great job preparing me for college, but it has also prepared me for life after college. I want to be the first in my family to graduate from a university and serve as a role model for my sister.

The true testament of San Juan Diego is my transformation into a better person, a better son, a better brother and a better human. I will always be thankful for that. There are no words that can express how grateful I am to everyone at SJD for giving me a hand, lifting my spirit when I was down, for enriching my faith, and for guiding me in the right path for a great future. Not only has the school transformed me academically, but it has also transformed me professionally and spiritually.

To everyone who supports Catholic education, I would like to say thank you for your generosity and for providing a shy boy like me the opportunity to become a young man with great confidence and self-esteem, who is strong in faith, who beat the odds and is ready for what the future will bring. May God bless you in keeping our Catholic faith and in keeping education strong.
St. Dominic was born in Spain and began his ministry as the canon of a cathedral. But his focus shifted when he encountered the Albigensians, heretics who denied the truth of the Incarnation and the validity of the sacraments. To counter this heresy, St. Dominic became a preacher and gathered around him a group of like-minded companions. The order of Preachers (or “Dominicans”) practiced personal and community poverty, devoted themselves to preaching the Gospel, and believed in thorough and diligent study of Scriptures. A capable and inspiring preacher, St. Dominic was a living example of the holiness he preached. “Wherever he went he showed himself in word and deed to be a man of the Gospel. During the day no one was more community-minded or pleasant to his brothers and associates. During the night hours no one was more persistent in every kind of vigil and supplication. He seldom spoke unless it was with God, that is, in prayer, or about God.” This steward saint used his talents to combat the heresies of his day. How are we using our gifts to meet the needs of the Church in our time?

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