The memories of seeing or otherwise experiencing the devastation wrought by Hurricane Harvey are all relatively fresh for everyone in Texas and around the world. Who can forget the images of the wind, water and aftermath on television or the Internet. The images of the damage caused by the storm and the conditions it created made quite an impression. The first reaction most of us had to the tragedy was to be overwhelmed. Thankfully, that was only an initial reaction. The Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Austin sprang into action as soon as they reconvened and began to help. The students and families at St. Mary’s Catholic School in Taylor partnered with Catholic Charities of Central Texas to gather gift cards and hygiene packets with necessities to send to the coast as quickly as possible. Students and faculty at St. Dominic Savio Catholic School High School and St. Michael Catholic Academy, both in Austin, were organizing drives for personal hygiene items and cleaning supplies almost before there were directions on where to take them. The Catholic schools in Temple, Holy Trinity Catholic High School and St. Mary’s Catholic School, had personal connections to Sacred Heart Catholic School in Rockport. Both schools raised money and collected supplies to rush to the coast. Their first effort allowed them to give a combined $4,700 to Sacred Heart Catholic School. St. Austin Catholic School in Austin hosted multiple drives for the victims, including a student-led drive to collect stuffed animals. Sacred Heart Catholic School in LaGrange concentrated its efforts on those families in its own community that were directly affected by the storm.
Schools throughout the diocese opened their doors to refugees from the storm. There was a heartwarming story of two students from the Rockport area taken in by St. Mary’s Catholic School in West. The students only stayed several days, but said it was a great experience and they hope to return to St. Mary’s Catholic School one day to attend on a more permanent basis.

As that first week passed and some of the long-term effects of the storm became more obvious, the school communities throughout the diocese began to recognize the reality that offering true assistance would require a long-term commitment. In order to accomplish this our Catholic schools are participating in a program through the Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops Education Department that pairs schools wanting to help with those in need. Holy Family Catholic School in Austin partnered with St. John Paul II Catholic School in Houston. Holy Family has just signed a new laptop agreement and has decided to donate their current laptops to families from their partner school who can use these in their homes. St. Mary’s Catholic School in Temple will be loading a semi-truck with surplus furniture to send down to Rockport soon. Santa Cruz Catholic School in Buda delivered 50 handmade quilts and $10,000 to True Cross Catholic School in Dickinson and an additional $2,000 to Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School in Texas City.

Our Catholic school communities have all demonstrated their huge hearts and are committed to remain in solidarity with their brothers and sisters in Christ who live along the Gulf coast. The loving responses of these Catholic schools is a source of hope for us all.

For information on Catholic schools in the Diocese of Austin, visit csdatx.org
Faith and Sacrament intersect

Catholic schools inspire children to evangelize their parents, ultimately bringing families back into the church and, most importantly, to their faith.

A parent stopped me in the hall at school one day with something important to tell me. With a smile on her face, she said her children had been attending Cathedral of St. Mary for two years and there had been some unbelievable changes in their lives. For years, she confessed that as a family, they didn't pray much. The father of her children did not attend Mass and although they had a strong partnership, in their 13-year relationship, there was never a reason to get married.

As the children started coming home and asking their parents if they could pray before eating dinner, the parents agreed. This led to the children asking if the parents would pray with them before going to sleep at night and they agreed to that, too. Before long, the children asked their father if he would go to Mass with them - something he rarely did. To their mother's delight, he agreed to that too.

On this very special day, the mother had big news to share. The father of her children had asked her to marry him—in the church.

“My eyes filled with tears to see this mom so incredibly blessed by her life. It was the kind of crying that happens when you are really, really happy for someone,” LeGros said.

LeGros revels in the thought that Catholic schools inspire children to evangelize their parents, ultimately bringing families back into the church and, most importantly, to their faith.
The Catholic Charities of Central Texas “no wrong door” approach means every person receives the support they need to thrive with their God-given gifts and dignity. With about 450 calls for assistance each week, CCCTX relies on the time and talent of volunteers working alongside our staff to make sure no call for help goes unanswered.

Anne Klock is one of the Charity of Choice volunteers who compassionately responds to those in the midst of life’s greatest challenges – the loss of a job, a serious illness, domestic abuse. Charity of Choice volunteers are those who dedicate 40 or more hours to the mission of Catholic Charities each year. Every Thursday afternoon Anne spends time in central intake listening to each client’s unique story, identifying their needs and connecting them to specific Catholic Charities programs or to community partners.

When Hurricane Harvey hit and devastated the Texas coast, Catholic Charities was on the ground to provide assistance and Anne immediately responded to the call to action. She and her husband Bill deployed to Wharton where they met with individuals for intake. Anne also assisted with collecting and delivering supplies to the Victoria distribution center to help meet the immediate needs of families in the aftermath of the disaster. She has contributed more than 140 hours of service to Catholic Charities in 2017, a value of $3,500 to the organization.

Volunteers such as Anne are the lifeblood of Catholic Charities. Their “yes” to give generously of themselves enables us to say “yes” to thousands of Central Texans who seek help and hope for their families.

To volunteer, call (512) 651-6159 or visit ccctx.org/volunteer

Every diocese exists to encourage and support individual Christians, and parish communities, in their stewardship journeys. A stewardship diocese, therefore, is one that encourages, supports and enables its clergy, religious and lay members in their understanding and practice of stewardship.

In order to be good stewards of the resources trusted to us, all parishes use the same cloud-based accounting platform. The same chart of accounts is used by all parishes for consistency and comparability. In addition, the diocesan Finance Office provides regular training to parish administrators and bookkeepers that cover a range of topics from creating financial reports and budgets to how to be better stewards of parish funds by implementing strong internal controls.

An internal review is performed for parishes when a new pastor is assigned. The purpose of the review is to attest that the financial statements are fairly stated, the parish is in compliance with federal and diocesan policies and the parish has adequate internal controls. The findings and recommendations on the report are discussed and given to the pastor and shared with the business administrator.
When a friend approached St. Vincent de Paul parishioner Dan Hurlimann with the opportunity to become a Seedling mentor, he was intrigued, humbled and a bit nervous. He heard how incarceration could affect families and felt called to help, but he wondered how best to approach a child of an imprisoned or deported parent. “What should I say?” he thought to himself. “What shouldn’t I say?”

After passing a background check and going through Seedling’s mentor training, the Austin-based nonprofit matched Dan with James, a shy, artistic boy in second grade. Though their meetings were short—only 30 minutes during James’s school lunch period—they were effective. With each weekly mentoring visit, James let his guard down, and Dan’s apprehension faded. Dan realized that his commitment to show up weekly for James was more valuable than his ability to find the “perfect” thing to say.

Over the course of their four years together, Dan became a confidant to James but also a friend who cared about James’s wellbeing and supported him without judgment.

“Being a Seedling mentor is not a huge time commitment—I can leave the office, drive to the school, spend time with my mentee and get back within an hour,” Dan said. “Over time, that half hour can add up and make a difference in a child’s life. It’s incredibly meaningful.”

Indeed, Seedling’s program evaluation consistently shows students who participate more than 3 months tend to have better attendance, discipline and achievement, with approximately 7 out of 10 elementary teachers citing mentoring as the stand-alone factor that most improved students’ academic efforts and overall disposition.

At the end of their fourth year together, James moved away, and Dan was matched with another young boy affected by parental incarceration. Now in his eighth year volunteering with Seedling’s school-based program, Dan has his third match, an athletic third-grader named Paul.

Dan’s visits with James would often include creative projects and introspective conversations in the library — “I still have some of his artwork in my office,” Dan said proudly — visits with Paul often involve competitive sports and conversations about family. To help Paul develop a relationship with his dad, who has been imprisoned since Paul was 2, Dan has helped Paul write letters to his father.

“Before becoming a Seedling mentor, I knew intellectually that I had a blessed lifestyle,” Dan said. “But now it’s not just an intellectual knowing. I also know from the heart that I am blessed and I feel that giving back to the community is giving back to God.”

The Criminal Justice Ministry of the Diocese of Austin collaborates with the Seedling Foundation in its efforts to provide support to family members of the incarcerated, particularly their children.

Seedling oversees more than 600 school-based mentoring matches in the Austin area and is seeking 100 new mentors to complete training by mid-January. For more information about the nonprofit or to apply to become a Seedling mentor, visit www.seedlingfoundation.org.
Celebrating Saints

John Bosco

(1815-1888), PRIEST—MEMORIAL

Born to poor parents in northern Italy, St. John Bosco began his ministry by providing shelter and religious instruction for neglected boys. His own education was made possible by the gift of a generous benefactor, and St. John Bosco was not too proud to seek the support of other wealthy and powerful patrons to expand his work. With others drawn to this ministry, he provided religious and vocational training to hundreds of young men and formulated a system of education based on “reason, religion, and kindness.” “Let us regard those boys over whom we have some authority as our own sons,” he wrote. “There must be no hostility in our minds, no contempt in our eyes, no insult on our lips. We must use mercy for the present and have hope for the future, as is fitting for true fathers who are eager for real correction and improvement.” St. John Bosco used his personal history, his love for young people, and his gift for teaching to educate, inspire, and improve the lives of many. May his example prompt us to prayerfully re-assess who we are and what we have—and how we can use those gifts for others.

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