We know that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ spoke to His disciples and followers through parables, and during the past few weeks during the celebration of Holy Mass we have been hearing many of these parables concerning the Kingdom of God. Our Lord tells His followers that He speaks in parables in fulfillment of prophecy: “I will open my mouth in parables, I will announce what has lain hidden since the creation of the world.” (Matthew 13:35) But also know that Jesus tells His followers that, in part, parables are also told to reveal the truth to those who seek it, while obscuring it from the rest. “For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their hearts and turn – and I would heal them.” (Matthew 13:15)

So the first part of persevering that we encounter is, that in order to be able to open up to the teaching of our Lord given to us in these parables, we need to have open eyes, open ears and understanding hearts. This may seem like it is an easy minimum requirement, but I really don’t think that it is. There are very many ways in which we, even as those who believe in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, close ourselves off:

Sometimes we believe that these things don’t really matter. We say to ourselves, at least internally, that we went to catechism classes when we were young and learned all that is needed in religious life. I am always struck by people who have this attitude, and I usually respond by mentioning that then religion is the only place where this is true. It seems that no matter what sort of occupation one has today, there is always some sort of continuing education. Many have requirements that a certain number of classes be taken every few years, and many more will offer opportunities to learn new skills and new ways of doing things just so that the individual can become a more efficient and better worker. We can certainly see that for something so important as our religious and spiritual life, certainly some continuing education is exactly what would be needed and required to make us more efficient and better Christians.

Others have their eyes and ears closed because they have a wrong view of what faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is all about. Especially since the time of the enlightenment, there has arisen the concept of faith being solely about one’s mental assent. We might ask a person if they are a Christian, and they might answer resoundingly “yes.” But when we dig a little deeper, we might find that the extent of their being a Christian lies only in the mental assent of their belief in Jesus as the Son of God. We might ask if they have faith, and the answer would be given saying, “Yes, I believe in Jesus Christ.”

It is here that another encounter with perseverance takes place. We are not called to only give mental assent to Jesus, but rather to dedicate our entire lives to Christ. St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” (Romans 12:1) This goes far beyond just what we think and believe to offering

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ourselves and all that we are to God. We must persevere beyond our thinking to giving all of our actions to Christ. Likewise St. John, in his first letter, shows how the love of God must expand beyond our thinking to our entire life: “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s good and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.” (1 John 3:17-18) St. John is telling us that if the love of God abides in us, then we will be transformed, not just in our thinking, but in our entire way of life, to serve God and others in truth and action.

We also know that, unlike our mental assent, these good works in “truth and action” are not one time events. We see that we cannot rely on the good deeds of the past as proof of our faith in Christ and our love of God. The letter of St. James reminds us: “Be doers of the word and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, in going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act – they will be blessed in their doing.” (James 1:22-25)

In this persevering as doers who act, we see the meaning behind the Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat given by our Lord concerning the Kingdom of Heaven from Matthew’s Gospel. “The Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No, for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’” (Matthew 13:24-30)

In this parable we are called to persevere in growing in good and holy ways just as the wheat does until the time of harvest. We see that the ultimate decisions regarding us won’t be made at any intermediate time. The householder tells the slaves not to go out into the field to remedy any imbalance, but rather to wait and let the wheat continue to grow and mature. They will let the good wheat grow alongside the useless weeds, so that at the end, the time of harvest, the good wheat can be seen, recognized and gathered, while the useless weeds are thrown away. And while some may see within the concept of the weeds being burned an image of the fires of hell, rather the driving concept should be that they are useless to the work of the householder, useless to the work of God for the Kingdom.

In persevering, the wheat matures and therefore becomes a part of the storehouse of the householder. Our good works in the world, our persevering in being “doers who act” will be a vital part of the building up of the Kingdom of God on earth.

We see in this that our entire Christian life and journey of faith is one that leads us into union with God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ, not just in what we believe, what we mentally assent to, but more importantly by the dedication of our entire life given to Almighty God. In this persevering in works of faith and love, for God and for others, we grow closer and closer to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Again, as St. Paul said in his letter to the Romans: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:2) And in this renewing of our minds we grow to know the will of God and then to persevere in accomplishing it.

So my brothers and sisters, during this Ordinary Time when we reflect on these parables that have been given to us concerning the Kingdom of Heaven, let us strive to follow our Lord in every thought, word and action in our lives. Let us persevere in doing good that we may be counted with the wheat and not the weeds. Let us strive to live by the motto: “Whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31b)
Welcome to summer.
Dealing with the ravages of COVID-19 may be cutting down on our summer activities, but we are finding new ways to stay connected and to visit.

Through these months our parishes have innovated at a remarkable pace, broadcasting Holy Mass, conducting School of Christian Living sessions and holding meetings virtually. The men of the Church just came together for a virtual retreat. What a fantastic, uplifting way to visit. Many graces were indeed received because we did not let barriers of illness get in the way of our visiting. I have been to virtual graduations. My friends on Facebook are having small, properly distanced, backyard visits. In a few short days, the youth of the Church will come together and visit with each other during for the first ever virtual Kurs encampment.

In all of these ways we maintain connection and spend time visiting with the Lord and with each other as we must. We are doing what Christians are called to do, to be one in body and family.

Summer is marked by visiting and spending time with each other. Of note, at the start of July, we celebrate the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Ok, now take a breath, this is not when the Archangel Gabriel visited Mary to offer her the option of being the Mother of God (well, he did visit). That is the Annunciation, celebrated typically in March - nine months before Jesus was born. Rather, the Visitation commemorates Mary’s visit to her cousin Elizabeth.

After the Annunciation, Mary set out to visit and stay with her cousin through the remainder of her pregnancy. Mary visited to be with and to serve. Mary once again sets out an example for us. As the people of God, we are called upon to visit, to be present to each other and to serve one another. Mary’s example has particular import for the Church’s clergy and for those called to the diaconate and priesthood.

For those in Holy Orders, visiting is the greater share of our time, more so than even serving the liturgies of the Church. It takes many forms, from the Kolędy visits we make to parishioners’ homes in the Epiphany season, to time spent in counseling, teaching, outreach to the local community, the binding of wounds in the Christian community, bringing the sacraments to the sick, going to celebrations and being there in times of sadness and tragedy. It is the ministry of “being there” as a particular expression of Jesus among us. In those visits we represent the rock that is Jesus, Who both celebrated and cried with His people.

For those called, this is indeed what you are called to. This is what you are called to respond to: Will you go and visit? Will you bear Me to those so need Me? Will you leave them hanging, with nothing to hold onto, or will you be their rock? 2nd Corinthians 4 tells us that the Lord has placed a treasure within us, “we have this treasure in earthen vessels.” He has invested in us so that we might overcome obstacles and be the one who visits. We are not crushed, driven to despair, forsaken, or destroyed regardless of what we encounter. We are called to be those who visit so that so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. Jesus’ life is manifested in our time and in us so that His transcendent power is shown, not by our doing, but by His grace. Our visiting makes that grace real and present.

You are called to be that visitor, to respond to the Holy Spirit’s call in you. The time to get on the road toward those who need the particular grace evidenced by a visit from you as Jesus’ minister is now. Warm up the car, make the call and start today. Do it by calling or texting me at 518-522-0944 or E-mail me at frjim@holynamencc.org.
A call went out for a men’s retreat within the Polish National Catholic Church some years ago and it took a few strokes of luck, solid leadership, and tremendous lay and clerical support to allow it to form and grow.

The 3rd iteration of said retreat took place June 18-20 on the grounds of Spójnia Farm, emanating from the Bishop Hodur Retreat and Recreation Center. Newly renovated, the Center allowed for the few in-person attendees and support staff to enjoy Wi-Fi, new mattresses, shiny floors and a fresh coat of paint. With promises of more positive change to come, it is encouraging to say the least to note that the future of this facility is in good hands.

The sub-committee that planned the retreat had a solid plan in the months ahead of the start date. Already adjusted from May to June (when the P.N.C.C. calendar clears out a bit), we were dealt a tremendous blow, as did the world, with the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Resolute to not throw work in the trash for a year, the planning committee immediately began tailoring the retreat for the possibility that it might take place virtually. As parishes and the world began to warm up to digital meeting places, the opportunity was there. With the blessing of Spójnia, Inc. as well as a very supportive Prime Bishop, the final weeks of preparation featured a video campaign from our sub-committee and National President, encouraging people to attend.

Needless to say, the plan was successful, and the plan was indeed prayed over incessantly and blessed by God. With a pie-in-the-sky goal to double attendance for a second straight year, indeed we did, with a total of 38 men, 9 in-person, who registered and attended portions of the retreat.

It was decided to tailor the retreat for the online crowd, via the Zoom app. Those who registered and offered the $25 support donation gained access to everything we did. The United Y.M.S. of R. also made the decision to offer portions of the retreat, such as Holy Mass and prayers, live on Facebook for anyone to see.

On Wednesday evening, the 17th, we had an orientation, allowing those unfamiliar with the Zoom app to figure out how to comment, use different views…and for our set-up at the Retreat Center to come to fruition. There would only be 2 major technical hiccups during our retreat, and our Prime Bishop, later in his closing remarks, offered his observation of how hectic the in-between time of retreat events really was.

Thursday was spent syncing sound and video feeds, setting up the hall to be socially-distanced for worship and meeting, and to process last-minute registrations. The men were comfortable enough in the process to even hop in the pool for 45 minutes or so before it was showtime.

At 5pm, the welcome session began, with Fr. Jason Soltysiak (St. Mary’s- Parma, OH), retreat master, opening with prayer. He gave an overview on the theme for the retreat, which was based on the first part of Galatians 5:13: Called to be Free. As it was everyone’s first virtual retreat, icebreakers were in order. Andrew Humphreys (St. Adalbert’s- Dickson City, PA) led them, inviting everyone to participate in an online scavenger hunt and having everyone give a quick introduction after showing off each item. We are still unclear how our Prime Bishop produced an Ace of Spades in less than 5 seconds!

Evening brought about our first session, led by Fr. Charles Zawistowski (St. Mary’s- South Bend, IN).

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After our first technical hiccup, he expanded on the words of St. Paul, not only to the Galatians but to others. Noting that he wrote most of the New Testament, he assigned the group Chapter 5 to the Romans as a study, looking at the theology of Christ as 2nd Adam as well as bringing to the forefront that, perhaps, we are never really free.

Fr. Carmen Bolock (St. Mary’s Parish, Duryea, PA) led the opening of the Exposition of the Most Blessed Sacrament, as well as the Litany of the Blessed Sacrament. Our cameras followed a mini-procession to the room where the Sacrament was displayed for the weekend for private adoration.

Following up on this act of prayer was Fr. Sr. Zbigniew Dawid (Holy Mother of Sorrows- Dupont, PA) who led our evening prayer and offered the evening’s benediction.

Our big 12-1/2 hour Friday began with Holy Mass at 8am, celebrated by Fr. Carmen Bolock, chaplain of the United Y.M.S. of R. on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. We brought in live, via the Zoom app, Fr. Scott Lill (Our Lady of Mt. Carmel-Lilly, PA) to be our homilist. There, we learned about Fr. Scott’s affinity for “Heartburn Jesus” and the need to keep our lives of prayer with the proper upkeep.

After a large breakfast, Deacon Jim Ploskonka (St. Mary’s- Parma, OH) led our second session, on Financial Freedom. Through dozens upon dozens of scriptural quotes, Deacon Jim brought forth to us a number of teachings on money in scripture. His presentation was just a portion of a much longer one, but it made people think about investment, borrowing, lending…and being under the bondage of owing.

Before lunch, we welcomed Bishop-Elect Jaroslaw (Jerry) Rafalko (Holy Trinity-Kewanee, IL/All Saints-Chicago, IL) who led the afternoon Angelus prayer for us. He also offered a reflection and some words of encouragement to all who were taking the time to retreat a bit from the world. Following prayer was lunch, and then our third session, led by Fr. Sr. Rob Nemkovich (Blessed Trinity Parish, Fall River, MA). Father Senior Rob had a multi-media presentation prepared for us, focusing on the freedom we desire from sin, how God continually works to mold and chisel us in His image, and the terror that is….Pinterest!

With a few hours off, some men on-site took time to fish, hop in the pool, or, as many saw, record a video from “Ustronie”, “The Secluded Place”…or, Bishop Hodur’s House. There, Deacon Jim gave a short tour for anyone who had never been inside or hadn’t been in some years. It ended up being the most-watched video from the Retreat, at least on our Facebook feed.
Our fourth session was in the evening and led by Fr. Jason Soltysiak, in the midst of an aggressive short thunderstorm as well as audio from a famous wrestler approaching the ring—whoops! He provided a multi-branched presentation that provided details on the growing-of and breaking-down of the Christian Church. From its perfect, Christ-established beginnings to synods/councils held to build up to synods/councils held to divide the church, he noted how different denominations and jurisdictions took different turns. He concluded with the Union of Scranton convocations, and how their sole focus was to build-up.

Evening Prayer on Friday was led remotely by Bishop Paul Sobiechowski (Eastern Diocese P.N.C.C./Holy Trinity Cathedral Parish, Manchester, NH). He put together a power-point prayer for the evening of the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart that included songs played and sung by his wonderful wife, Karen as well as one of the retreat highlights: a previously-recorded Bishop Paul offering evening benediction under the scrutinizing eye of the real-life Bishop Paul!

Saturday morning began bright and early, with Fr. Michal Gitner (All Saints-Sterling Heights, MI) remotely leading our morning prayer. He caught everyone in the feels by telling of the resolve of his father in Poland, who refused to join the Communist party, delaying any sort of promotion or raise at work, but maintaining what he thought was right... maintaining his freedom.

After breakfast, we welcomed on-site his Grace, the Most Rev. Anthony Mikovsky. We really were honored by his presence and support of our retreat. He gave the fifth and final session of our retreat, focusing on the main question of: are we working for something or for freedom from something. His presentation included quotes from scripture as well as Savonarola, who worked and lived for his city of Florence, Italy—allowing them to be free, for a time and for a price.

As Prime Bishop concluded, we rearranged our camera set-up one last time, preparing for Holy Mass celebrated by Bishop Bernard Nowicki (Central Diocese P.N.C.C./St. Stanislaus Cathedral Parish, Scranton, PA). He came well-prepared and was excited to celebrate Mass for a combination of people in-person as well as live on Facebook and Zoom. The homily was preached remotely by Fr. Mark Niznik (St. Paul Parish, Bellevue, FL), as he focused on the Catholic view of the letter of St. James—the importance of good works in our lives of faith.

As the final blessing was offered by Bishop Nowicki, we closed the Benediction and Exposition of the Most Blessed Sacrament that was opened on Thursday night, led by Fr. Carmen Bolock. Fr. Jason led the closing exercise, with President Kazinetz and Prime Bishop Mikovsky offering closing remarks.

Fr. Jim Konicki (Holy Name of Jesus Parish, Schenectady, NY) offered the final prayer and the benediction. He is serving as the chaplain of the virtual children’s camp “Kurs” taking place beginning July 4 weekend. His words encouraged those gathered to bring to light the availability of the camp to all children of the P.N.C.C.

And it was over! With a round of applause at that. The work to make a dual in-person and virtual experience was enlightening…and arduous. Experienced, the group could lead it again in a heartbeat, and will, as many are on the “Kurs” staff. Many thanks to all fifteen (15!!!) of the aforementioned participating clergy, to all who attended virtually or watched on Facebook, to Adam Konicki (Schenectady, NY), Mike Mludzik (Wallington, NJ), Bob Giczkowski (Buffalo, NY), Kevin McConlogue (Scranton, PA) and Charlie Prothero (Scranton, PA) for their in-person participation, prayers, table-and-camera moving, cooking, clean-up, preparation and more.

Let’s do it again next year!
Meditations - Being Church

Rev. Canon Geoffrey Neal
Nordic Catholic Church
UK Administration

Fathers Geoffrey Neal and Edward Bryant are preparing a number of meditations on the Church, the images and marks that have underpinned an orthodox vision. Other meditations can be viewed at nordiccatholic-uk.com.

One of the casualties for our faith has come from the gender wars which have weakened images we have traditionally relied upon to communicate the deepest meaning of being Church. In the Pentecost season, we reflect upon, a number of vital images to help this self-understanding. Bride of Christ and Mother Church are two such images vital if we are to be “deep church.” When understood they can reveal for us the deepest possible meaning of our communion with Christ and also the great gift and vision of human married love. Bride and Mother are both imbedded in Scripture and Tradition, but today have virtually been abandoned and replaced by a bureaucratic model of a church as simply a human organisation. New thinking has resulted in the Church which Christ founded descending into triviality and irrelevance, and also with the loss of the gift of feminine dignity and feminine beauty. To recover this deeper church; the gift of Christ that he delivered to the world by the Holy Spirit, let us look afresh at the two images of “bride and mother” as used over the past in two separate meditations and apply them to the present.

First, the Church as Bride

The two sources we turn to are Holy Scripture and the Fathers where the Bride image begins to emerge.

The image of Israel as bride was already used frequently by the prophets of the Old Testament and Jesus too applied this image to himself as the bridegroom of his Church, the new Israel. [Mark 2:19 records the words, “can the bride fast while the bridegroom is with them?”]. The first three synoptic Gospels seem to suggest that just being with Jesus was like being with the groom before the wedding. [Matthew 9:15]. St. Paul, speaking directly to the Church in Ephesus, also uses the marriage image in his memorable passage “be imitators of God...husbands ought to love their wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for her”[Eph 5:25].

But this spousal image in the New Testament is taken to a mystical level in chapter 2 of the 4th Gospel, where St John records the first sign of the Lord’s ministry in Cana. The episode seems to be deliberately pointing to all the events that would follow. It takes place significantly on the third day, the day of resurrection, and then in the next chapter [John 3:29] goes on to the meeting with the Baptist who greets Jesus with these words; "I said, 'I am not the Christ;’ but, 'I have been sent before Him. He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.” Although at Cana, apparently on the surface it is a social gathering where the Lord is quietly prevailed upon to replenish the wine by transforming the contents of 6 stone water pots, the earliest commentators can see that Cana is also an anticipation and sign of the transforming of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist.

The Cana wedding therefore points beyond itself to the meaning of the Christ as the groom and the messianic age with the wedding banquet of the kingdom. It is a sign that marriage on earth can become a prototype in the Church for all the sacraments that unite Christ the bridegroom to his people in an indissoluble union of love. This connection between marriage and the Eucharist was made by many of the Church Fathers, but nowhere better than the later mystic Nicholas Cabasilas in the 14th century who said the Eucharist was “the most praised wedding to which the groom leads the Church as a bride and we become flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone.” Here was the most excellent image from creation to signify the mystical union between Christ and the Church as his bride. The image increasingly grows in importance as the sacramental life within the church becomes more and more central to the self understanding of being the church in communion with the Lord. The wedding at Cana is a sign, because it points to the deepest possible spousal communion with Christ and reveals the reason for his coming into the world as a man, and that is why it has long been associated with the season of Epiphany.
Tragically this wonderful spousal image has become lost or damaged today both in the world and also in the Church because of the constant attack on male and female, wife and husband and the sanctity of marriage and gender over many decades. Pope John Paul II was so concerned about these threats to human relationships that he wrote a public letter to families in 1994, showing that in the spousal communion with Christ, the Church offers the deepest meaning of being the Church and for human relationships in married life.

Increasingly today there are now secular writers and scholars such as Joanna Williams, a senior lecturer in the University of Kent, coming forward to say that notwithstanding some very important achievements for women, the subsequent developments and the enforced agenda of feminisms, have gone too far, and have become harmful to both men and women and to the stability of the whole community.

This is the positive mystery of the true feminine as well as the true masculine that dwells in the heart and mind of the Church. That is why Irenaeus of Lyons [130-200] was able to see clearly that this aspect of the Christian faith was a gift to the world when he says, “she feeds the flock with the milk of the scriptures of the Lord...for the Church has been planted in the world as a paradise.” The more we are aware that this nuptial image is hard wired into the relationship between Christ and his people, the more other images such as “I am the vine and you are the branches” which appears in the 4th Gospel at a point when Jesus is himself teaching about this grafting bond or important communion with him. Of this Origen was to comment “In truth before Jesus the scriptures were as water but after it has become for us, wine.”

But the words of Origen of Alexandria [185-254 AD] have always helped me, for he said when meditating on the bridal image in very difficult times “from the wound of Christ’s side comes forth the Church and he has made her his bride.” We are right to treasure the beauty of the nuptial relationship with Christ because it is the most powerful and natural way to convey the essence of communion. The same image is present in the final words of the New Testament as the Church and bride bound to God together with the Spirit both waiting for the return of Christ in glory in harmony say, Come!”And let him who hears say, Come!”And let him who thirsts come”. [Rev 22:17] All of this we will treasure especially as we seek to become the true body of Christ, who exist not for ourselves but for the world. In doing this we may be putting ourselves on a collision course with the modernists, but if this nuptial image is true and of God, then we have no other alternative than to uphold what must be part of the good news and truth of the unique faith and life of the Church.

The Church as Mother

If the bridal image is what we, the people are in our relation to Christ, then the Mother image is what the Church is for us the people of God in the world. It would be all too easy to dismiss this mother image as sentimental and out of date. It is far from that!

The realisation that for the Church as mother was a strong image dawned on me listening to the composer John Tavener at a talk he gave before the performance of his composition “The Protecting Veil”. He said for him the Mother of God was like a battleship leading the people through the roughest storms. This protecting image has real power and it is strongly present in the Tavener composition. It is present too in Scripture and Tradition where the image is both strong and yet tender.

Anyone who deals with animals will know just how innate the mothering instinct to protect and feed her young really is. Both Jesus and St. Paul use the mother image in this way. The Apostle explains his apostolic ministry as one who brings children into the protection of the family, [1 Thess 2:7 – 13 and Gal 4:19] Our Lord also uses the same example of a mother hen gathering her chicks as an image for his own ministry. [O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! [Matt. 23:37]

The most startling passage is, however, from the Apocalypse chapter 12 which portrays the Church as “the woman clothed with the Sun, and the moon under her feet”. This is the vision of a woman who in protecting her child from Satan, is so hated by the devil, just as Christ and his people are also hated. Unable to defeat the woman the devil then turns to the fledgling gentile church which we know was struggling at that time to sur-
vive the raw evil and persecution by the Roman state. This passage is clearly a warning to the gentile churches and especially it is read alongside the letters of John the Elder to the same churches of Asia Minor who find themselves in the dangerous world of predators. From his exile in Patmos, John tries to warn the little flock saying “I the elder to the chosen lady and her children” a clear reference to the Church as a protecting mother.

The Church Fathers are for the most part, in the early days, dealing with errors and heresies regarding the nature of God, the Holy Trinity, rather than the Church itself. There is little formal teaching on the Church because in their day it was self evidently everywhere. However, as the threat of persecution increases, the need to defend the people of God became crucial. Then a strong protective image of the Church as Mother becomes more important. In difficult times like today, the Church is required to be defender of the faith and the flock.

It was the Council of Ephesus [431 AD] that declared the Virgin Mary to be “Theotokos” (bearer of God) and the person who embodied the properties of “being the Church”. Mary as mother of Jesus Christ contains and personifies concepts that were gradually to help grasp the importance of Mother Church. A decade before the council, St. Augustine who had depended so much upon his own mother Monica’s protection had also been pondering the role of the Virgin Mary in the conflict between the faith and the powers of evil, and gradually realising that the Church must have both an outward structure and an interior mystical core to cope with life in the real world. He saw the love of the virgin towards her beloved son was that feminine part needed at the heart and soul of the Church, if it was to be a living organism. Using this image we may today be able to correct the descent into the worst aspects of institutional Christianity that appears to be one of our greatest problems. This must have been true for St. Methodius the patron saint of Europe who was able to say “the church stands upon our faith and adoption....she labours to bring forth ordinary man as spiritual men and for this reason she is our mother”.

Thus through meditation, the important concept of the Church as mother began to evolve in association with the piety surrounding the Blessed Virgin Mary who became the image for all who were called to be bearers of Christ.

John Tavener’s 1987 choral work “The Protecting Veil” that influenced my own thoughts is based upon the siege of Constantinople in the tenth century when the Greek Christians experienced in history a mirror of the vision of St John, and how they were delivered from the Saracen siege by the protecting prayers of the Mother of God. The protecting veil of Mother Church still is crucial today. This mother aspect is so clearly conveyed by the icon of Our Lady of Vladimir pointing to her son the Christos. For this reason Holy Mary as Mother, increasingly stands at the centre of our ecclesiology as the sign of the human “yes” to God the Father. “If Christ is the icon of the Father, Mary is the icon of the new creation as the new Eve fulfilling the mystery of love” were the wise words of Alexander Schmemann.

The feminine element in both bride and mother are essential images within the Church but there is also no avoiding the conflicts that have arisen in recent times. The Christian tradition upholds a deep tradition, that our Mother the Church is there to provide everything needed for those who are growing in the faith, and today it is protection, leadership and courage, together with regular true and nutritious feeding that is needed in the storms of life.

How significant that the very final words of the New Testament bring together the Church as Bride and the Holy Spirit in harmony to call for the return of Christ in glory; [Rev. 22:17] “The Spirit and the bride say, Come!!And let him who hears say, Come!!And let him who thirsts come!” It is within this traditional mind of the Church as bride and mother that the positive mystery of the true feminine still dwells, rather than adopting, as some are doing, the contemporary political models all of which we have been warned to avoid. “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” [Romans 12:2 ]This was understood by Irenaeus of Lyons [130 -200 AD] who was able to say of the Church, “she feeds the flock with the milk of the scriptures of the Lord...for the Church has been planted in the world as a paradise.” Whatever else the Church is, she must never cease to manifest Christ to the world as the way of goodness, truth, beauty and life.
What Has Happened at the P.N.C.C Archives from 1987 to June 2020

Short History

The P.N.C.C. Archives has never been a high participation activity. Anthony J. Mikovsky, Prime Bishop’s father, and I became interested in the Archives after listening to a passionate plea by Mrs. Zurowska-Hudak at a Philadelphia Seniorate meeting in 1985 asking for support. We talked about what she said several times. At the 17th General Synod in Manchester, New Hampshire in 1986, he and I put our names on the list for joining the P.N.C.C. Archives Commission. He and I worked together at the P.N.C.C. Archives until his death nine years ago, traveling to Scranton once per month spending 2 or 3 days per month. Since his death, I have been spending 4 to 6 days per month at the P.N.C.C. Archives.

When Anthony J. Mikovsky and I became members of the Commission, the collection of documents was located on the third floor of the Savonarola Seminary contained in 100 boxes. At our first meeting, held in Savonarola Seminary, it was decided that the documents in one of the boxes would be catalogued. The plan was that the documents donated by a person be kept together. After a days work by the five people at the meeting, the box was only half catalogued. It became clear to all of us that our plan was not going to be very effective. Many of the people who devoted their time to helping the Church served on various committees and we would have a difficult time knowing where to store their donations. I suggested that in order to make the collection useful for research in a short time that we should catalog and store by topic. After a lengthy discussion, it was agreed that we would indeed catalog and store by topic. The first topic would be parish anniversary books because it was thought that they would be the most useful to researchers. On the next day, we started to go through many boxes and filled a few with parish anniversary books. That became our first catalogued topic and sheets of those we had on hand were distributed at the next General Synod. A plea was made to the attendees at the next General Synod for other anniversary books. Many donations added to the anniversary books that we had. A cataloging sheet with a list of topics to be checked off to reduce the time spent writing.

After the opening of the National Church Center, Prime Bishop Swantek allowed us to move into the basement vault area and also be able to use the small room on the second floor adjacent to the meeting room. The basement room had two vaults, one for the P.N.C.C. Archives and one for the PNU Archives. The 100 boxes were brought from the third floor of Savonarola Seminary to the National Church Center and placed in the vault. It quickly became obvious that shelving was needed. Fifty-one industrial grade racks, most with seven shelves, were purchased and erected. The P.N.C.C. Archives Vault is now completely filled with shelving. The cataloguing method was also changed from the cataloging sheets to one where the information was typed onto a computer file. EXCEL, a flat file data base was selected as the computer software. This allowed the cataloguing to be by topic or organization with different sheets.


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At a later time, two racks, with seven shelves, were also installed in the outer office area. These will hold incoming material waiting to be processed and empty archival boxes ready for use by the Commission.

A location guide is in preparation which will show the numbers of the racks and letters of the shelves where the information can be found. This guide will be posted on the P.N.C.C. Website.

The initial storage plan was to catalogue each document and then store it on the appropriate shelf. This continued for some time. Eventually, it was realized that this was not going to work, because of the lack of people power. Only one person was cataloguing the documents and other items and preparing Excel files of the donations.

The plan was changed so that some documents and other items are catalogued and others are just stored on the appropriate shelves for later cataloguing. Before being placed in the archive, metal paper clips and staples are removed and discarded because they rust and damage the document. The paper clips and staples are replaced with plastic clips. The documents are catalogued by Joseph Seliga both at the National Archives and at his home as time permits. Those catalogued include acquisitions by the Prime Bishop and donations by long time members of the P.N.C.C. Jack Ostroski joined the Commission and has been instrumental in preparing readable labels for the racks and boxes in the vault and storing all of the items donated to the archive, catalogued and uncatalogued. He also has organized items on the shelves. The shelves that have documents which have yet to be catalogued are in need of someone who has knowledge of the topic to classify these documents so that anyone looking for information would know where to search.

**Equipment Acquisitions:**

The equipment acquisitions since the move to the National Church Center are: industrial grade shelving, [51 racks: 44 with 7 shelves, 2 with 4 shelves, 2 with 5 shelves, and 3 with 8 shelves], a four shelf moving rack and a 4 wheel cart, both used to transport items and as a work table in the archives aisles, five (5) bookcases, a computer donated by Dr. Alba, a document scanner and a small document shredder. The Commission purchased the industrial grade shelving and the 4 wheel cart from Grainger, Inc. Martin Wachna was able to arrange a discount for these items. The shelving is used in the vault for
document, photograph and memorabilia storage. The shelves in the front room are used for intermediate storage of incoming donations and for archival box supplies in the outer office. The small shredder was given to the Archives by the St. Stanislaus Cathedral Parish Flea Market. As more documents were donated, additional archival boxes and plastic paper clips are purchased.

**Future Equipment Acquisitions:**

We have a substantial quantity of photographs of many sizes; some of very large size, some panoramic. Consequently the archives are looking for a storage medium for these photographs. A map case file, used in libraries, architectural and engineering offices would be suitable for this purpose.

The Commission would also like either to purchase or rent a microfilm scanner to complete the digitization of the Rola Boża [God's Field]. Digitization would make the information more readily accessible for researchers.

**Document Acquisitions**

The Commission has received numerous documents and memorabilia during its operation. Some were from non-members of the church. Each donation was put on the appropriate shelf in the vault. Some were catalogued immediately. Thank you letters are sent to donors. The Commission received electronic copies of the minutes of the Liturgical Commission from its secretary, Very Rev. Robert M. Nemkovich and the electronic copies of the minutes and records of the Scouting Committee, scanned by Richard Daum and stored onto a DVD. The Commission received forty-three boxes from Prime Bishop Nemkovich and nine boxes of documents, memorabilia, newspapers and photographs from the family of Sonia Gruszecki.

**Accomplishments:**

- 16,750 documents, artifacts and memorabilia donations have been catalogued. These were received from 25 lay members of the Polish National Catholic Church, three Prime Bishops, two Bishops, four Priests, five Parishes, and the Polish National Union.

- The documents of the Supreme Council were separated into meeting agendas, minutes, and reports. They have not yet been completely catalogued.

- The Ustronie building was prepared as a museum for Bishop Hodur and the Polish National Catholic Church.

- A book was written for the July 4, 2004 celebration at Spójnia Farm at Waymart. The book had four purposes. 1. It was a souvenir for the celebration and the opening of the museum, 2. It provided information about Ustronie, 3. It provided information about Bishop Hodur, and 4. It is an Exhibit Guide of the museum.

- ABBYY Optical Character Reader software was purchased and used to prepare CDs of digitized versions of the Synod Proceedings, which are word and phrase searchable. This software recognizes many languages, including Polish and Lithuanian. The digital files of 7 general synod proceedings, 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st, and 22nd; 3 general synod advertisement books 21st, 22nd and 23rd; and the 1999 Special Synod; (2) the book entitled “33;” (3) the book “The Sacraments”, a study published by The Society for the Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament, (4) the book “The Growth of a Church: A Historical Documentary” written by Deacon Robert W. Janowski. Copies were sent to each member of the Constitution Commission and also to every member of the Supreme Council.

- Microfilms of 16 years of Rola Boża (God’s Field) were digitzed by a commercial company. The years digitized were 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1971, 1972, 1973, and 1974. The files can be searched by word or phrase in both English and Polish. Because of the cost, scanning of the paper copies of God’s Field in the P.N.C.C. Archives has begun. As the copies are scanned they are being made into searchable files in both Polish and English by the use of ABBYY software.

- The 20 issues of P.N.C.C. Studies have been scanned. Copies of these documents will eventually be available in electronic form.

- The Archives Commission of the Eastern Diocese was assisted in developing a document retention program for their Diocesan Archives by a week on-site at Holy Trinity Cathedral, Manchester, New Hampshire.

- Articles were written for each of the issues of the God’s Field published from 2015 through 2020 about the archives and summaries of the documents it has.

- An article was prepared about martyr Bishop Joseph Padewski and photograph of him was sent to the Victims of Communism Foundation for their exhibit.

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• A Finders Aid, which identifies the location of the documents and artifacts stored on each shelf is in draft form. It will be put on the P.N.C.C. website when complete.

• The P.N.C.C. Conferences will be restarted with a Scholars Conference to be held on October 23, 2021. This will be virtual Conference, using ZOOM software. Announcements of the conference and solicitation of papers to be presented has been sent to the academic community.

• Plans are underway to prepare P.N.C.C. Studies to include the papers presented at the five conferences held after number twenty: 2000, National Church Center, Scranton, PA; 2001, National Church Center, Scranton, PA; 2003, Heart of Jesus Parish, Bayonne, NJ; 2004, National Church Center, Scranton, PA; and 2005, Blessed Trinity Parish, Fall River, MA.

• Preparations for the development of a History and Archives section of the P.N.C.C. Website are underway. The Commission wants to make sure that a visitor can easily search the site and that no document installed on the website could be modified or changed by any visitor to the site. The first step in the process was a Penn State-Scranton campus student class production of a concept for producing these desired results. This program was arranged by Professor Fred Aebli.

EDUCATION AND YOUTH COMMISSION
Polish National Union of America
Fraternal and Benefit Society
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Scranton, PA 18505
Website: www.pnu.org
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Summer 2020

2020 has not unfolded in the way and manner anyone had planned. Things have changed significantly. As we begin to reopen various places in our society and adapt to a “new normal” the PNU Education and Youth Commission is adapting as well. The past several years we have held a raffle to support our annual stipend program that benefits our PNU college students who meet the requirements. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic this year, in place of our annual raffle we are issuing an appeal letter for donations to help support this important fraternal effort.

The three great cardinal virtues are faith, hope and love. Charity as an act of genuine heart-felt love is so closely related that it is sometimes employed in the sense of love and is regarded as one of the three great virtues. Charity in its various implications and forms of action must hold a high place in the life of every Christian.

The members of the Education and Youth Commission of the Polish National Union of America ask you to prayerfully consider giving a gift that will be used, appreciated and always remembered by our younger members going to college or schools of higher learning.

Over the past years, thousands of deserving students have received stipends from our Commission. Last year more than 30 students received stipends. On behalf of these grateful recipients, we thank you for taking to heart the words: “And now faith, hope, and charity abide, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” 1 Corinthians 13:13

Please make your charitable donation to the PNU Education and Youth Commission and send it to the above address. May God bless you; your family and we again thank you for your prayerful consideration of this appeal.
Buffalo-Pittsburgh Diocese

St. Barbara Parish Confirmation Class
Houtzdale, PA

On Sunday, June 7, 2020, the Solemnity of the Holy Trinity, Rt. Rev. John Mack, Bishop of the Buffalo-Pittsburgh Diocese of the P.N.C.C., conferred the Sacrament of Confirmation on five young people during the Sunday Mass. Following Mass a brief celebration was had, in which the confirmands each received a special gift and everyone enjoyed some fellowship as they partook in cake, cupcakes and coffee. Congratulations to Quinten, Kobie, Emily, Trace and Ben.

Rev. Sleczkowski Celebrates 48 Year Anniversary of First Mass at His Home Parish
Holy Cross Parish, Central Falls, RI

On Sunday, June 21, 2020, Rev. Bruce Sleczkowski, pastor of Holy Family Parish in Pittsburgh, PA, celebrated Mass at Holy Cross Parish in Central Falls, RI, just as he did for the first time 48 years ago on the very same date.

Fr. Bruce is a beloved son of Holy Cross Parish, and the parishioners were thrilled as he again celebrated Holy Mass and preached God’s Word for them in his home parish.

God bless you Fr. Bruce and Marian! It was wonderful to have you with the parishioners at Holy Cross on that very special day, which was also Father’s Day this year!

Fr. Bruce celebrated 48 years as a priest on June 6th.
Eastern Diocese

Discipleship at the 2020 Eastern Diocesan Altar Server Retreat in Person!

Very Rev. Robert Nemkovich, Diocesan Youth Chaplain

On June 25th, Altar Servers from four of the Eastern Diocesan parishes gathered for the 9th annual Diocesan Altar Server Retreat at Our Saviour’s Parish in Woonsocket, RI. The theme of this retreat followed the ongoing efforts of the P.N.C.C. Future Direction Committee, focusing on Discipleship 2020 and specifically Saints Peter, Paul and Andrew.

Bishop Paul Sobiechowski celebrated Mass for the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul (which is June 29th) and Fr. Sr. Joe Soltysiak preached the sermon.

Fr. Sr. Rob Nemkovich provided a session, with a video, on St. Peter and he then shared Karen Sobiechowski’s May Future Direction message with the servers. Fr. Sr. Rob encouraged the servers to always follow our Lord and reminded them that Jesus is always there for us, He loves us and continues to forgive and strength us.

Joanne Olivera from Blessed Trinity Parish, Fall River, MA, led the servers in a discipleship activity of helping others based on the book “Same Kind of Different as Me: Everybody can help Somebody.” After their discussion and overview of this book the servers from each parish created a bubble graphic illustrating ways they personally can help others - living as disciples of Jesus today.

Fr. Bob Koerber presented a talk on St. Paul and how he changed from a persecutor of the early Christians to perhaps the greatest Christian missionary of the Church. Following the session, PNU District 3 provided a delicious lunch of local pizza.

Fr. Henryk Wos then spoke on St. Andrew and how he is considered by many the First Disciple. Fr. Sr. taught about the life of St. Andrew, his missionary efforts, martyrdom on the cross and the saint’s great place in the Orthodox Church.

Bishop Paul then gave everyone his Apostolic Blessing and it was off for swimming and a great time of fellowship, fun and catching up at Lincoln Woods Park!

The servers had a great time; and you know that the day went well when they didn’t want to leave and are excited for next year and the 10th Annual Diocesan Altar Server retreat!

A big thank you to Fr. Sr. Wos and Our Saviour’s Parish in Woonsocket for hosting this retreat! Thanks to the altar servers from Blessed Trinity Parish in Fall River, Holy Cross Parish in Central Falls, RI, St. Joseph’s of Stratford Parish in Stratford, CT, and Our Saviour’s Parish for making the time to learn and grow in the Apostolic and Catholic Faith.
During the June 14th Sunday Mass at Blessed Trinity Parish in Fall River, MA, two altar servers, Peyton and Dylan, were presented with silver crosses to commemorate their 5 years as parish altar servers.

After Holy Mass, School of Christian Living Certificates were presented to the youth that were present at Mass.

We also thanked our amazing Sunday School teachers for their time and dedication to teach the faith - especially during these past months with the Covid Pandemic. Thank you Jessica, Kathy, Pam and Joanne.

It was great to add chairs for folks to attend Holy Mass and keep our social distancing. Let us continue to be Jesus to our communities and our world as we need His healing presence in so many ways.
Western Diocese

Western Diocese Prepares for Diocesan Synod

The XXIII Synod of the Western Diocese of the Polish National Catholic Church will be held August 12-13, 2020 as convened by Bishop-elect Jarosław (Jerry) Rafalko. Employing conferencing technology with a traditional in-person meeting format creates a new opportunity for a blended format, enabling up to 30 delegates to be present at All Saints Cathedral and all other delegates to participate virtually in all synodal proceedings and liturgical services.

A blended synod is a great opportunity to engage more attendees as well as add a new dimension to the experience of being in the protection and care of His heavenly arms. The opening Mass of the Synod on the morning of August 12th will be provided to delegates via Zoom and live streamed via Facebook, during which everyone is encouraged to enter into prayer with the delegates. It will be pleasing to God to have Holy Mass celebrated by a congregation comprised of every Western Diocese parish and throughout the P.N.C.C., worldwide.

Registration

Registration forms are being sent to all parishes and organizations of the diocese. Each delegate or guest will complete a registration form and include the synod registration fee. Registration includes access to all proceedings, documents, and materials. We are grateful to the Young Men’s Society of Resurrection, who are providing expert assistance in providing guidance and in-person technologists to ensure virtual delegates and guests the highest audiovisual quality. The Y.M.S. of R. in June offered the III Annual Bishop Stanley Bilinski Men’s Spiritual Retreat in a similar format with over 40 participants from across the P.N.C.C. Their recent positive experience with a blended format and their commitment to the work of the P.N.C.C. is a blessing for our synod.

Mandates

Mandates are also in the process of being sent to all delegates and parishes. Clergy delegates, lay parish delegates, members of the diocesan council and diocesan organizations will receive their Mandates from the Office of Bishop-elect.

Reports

Reports to the XXIII Synod were sent to the diocesan council secretary, Cathy Bilinski, with a deadline of July 10, 2020. It is our intention that by the end of July we will begin to electronically send out these reports to all the delegates. It is the responsibility of all delegates to read and be prepared to address any questions or comments. Reports can be printed by delegates.

Agenda

In addition to reviewing the past four years, the Synod delegates will be spending significant time in exploring the future work of the Western Diocese, with specific emphasis on the six months following the synod.

Commissions/Committees

Members of the Polish National Catholic Church are reminded that during the Synod the membership of Diocesan Commissions and Committees will be appointed by Bishop-elect. Service to these entities is voluntary and interested persons should indicate their desire to serve to the Office of Bishop-elect Jerry Rafalko.

Please pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the work of Bishop-elect, the priests, deacons, and all delegates of the Western Diocese of the Polish National Catholic Church.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, Grant us Your grace and blessing, as we prepare to gather in Holy Synod to seek the Lord Jesus through Your Holy Church. Send Your Holy Spirit upon our Holy Church, that we may be guided by Your Holy Will. Strengthen our bishops, clergy, and laity who will gather, so that their decisions at Holy Synod may help lead others to Your Son Jesus Christ. We ask this through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen. Submitted by Deacon Jim Ploskanka
Western Diocese Chancery Update
Park Ridge, IL

Prior to moving in permanently to the Chancery of the Western Diocese on July 5th, Bishop-elect Jerry and Leslie Rafalko spruced up the outside front of their new office and residence with some beautiful landscaping. Bishop-elect gives much of the credit to his wife, Leslie, for a job well done!

Submitted by Bishop-elect Jerry Rafalko

Prayer for the Parish

My Lord and my God, hear my prayers for the well-being of my parish family. Grant us Your grace and all that is necessary for the spiritual growth and welfare of our congregation. Enlighten and guide my pastor and all who minister to the needs of Your people. Strengthen and awaken in us a living faith; comfort and heal the sic, lonely and brokenhearted; soften those who are contentious or stubborn; awaken the indifferent, and rescue the fallen. Lord, help us to continue to proclaim Your truth. Unite us with Christ I like-mindedness of purpose. I ask this through Jesus Christ. Amen.

A Book of Devotions and Prayers — Polish National Catholic Church
Honor Your Father
July 2020

Rt. Rev. Stanley Bilinski, husband and father, remembered by Deb, Joshua and Hannah Bilinski
Joseph Pyzowski, father, remembered by Rev. Felix Pyzowski
John Hassay, father, remembered by Mary Ann Pyzowski
Edwards Goralczyk, Sr., father, remembered by Edward Goralczyk, Jr.