

September 22, 2022

Family

CATHOLIC HERALD



Classes are back in session for the 2022-23 school year at Catholic schools around the archdiocese, including St. Monica in Whitefish Bay. (Photo by Mike Miller)

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Grandparents Play Special Role in Catholic Upbringing

COLLEEN JURKIEWICZ
CATHOLIC HERALD STAFF

If you walked into Jean Kelly's house in Elm Grove today, you would likely think that small children lived there. There's the toys and puzzles in the living room, and the table in the kitchen used for crafts. Her oven is covered in saint magnets that her three young granddaughters love to play with, and she is making space in her yard to plant a Marian garden with them.

"I know probably most people would want all the toys and craft supplies put away, but I just love it," Kelly said.

Amid the din of the mid-morning bustle at the Stein Campus of the St. Ann Center for Intergenerational Care in Milwaukee, Gabriel Rodriguez gazes silently at a photograph on his phone. It depicts an elderly woman with light brown hair and a warm smile, holding a potted seedling. It's his grandmother, Antonia. She passed away only a few weeks ago, and the wound of the loss is still raw for Rodriguez.

He reaches around his neck and pulls from beneath his shirt a Marian medal, kissing it.

When Fr. Jonathan Schmeckel's grandmother assists at a Mass he is celebrating, he can often see her weeping tears of joy. It may be that she is remembering the many Wednesday nights she collected him and his sister from their father's house to take him to religious education classes, and the many Sunday mornings she brought him to Mass at St. John the Baptist Parish in Union Grove.

But it is just as likely that Fr. Schmeckel, when he utters the words "This is my body, given up for you," is recalling the years in his childhood when he witnessed his grandmother's sacrificial love for those around her. It was a love that took shape not only in her efforts to form her grandchildren in the faith, but in her tireless care for her husband as he died



▲ Gabriel Rodriguez displays a photo of his grandmother, Antonia, which he carries with him on his phone. (Submitted photo)

of Parkinson's disease.

"She lived her faith," Fr. Schmeckel said.

Through the sacrament of marriage, says the catechism, parents accept the privilege and responsibility of evangelizing their children. (CCC 2225) But as Jean Kelly, Gabriel Rodriguez and Fr. Schmeckel can attest, grandparents have an important role, too.

Pope Francis has often declared the influence of grandparents to be an antidote to the self-centeredness of the modern world's "throwaway culture."

"Grandparents need young people and young people need grandparents: they must talk to each other, they must encounter one another," said the Holy Father on July 25, 2021, the feast of Ss. Joachim and Anne, and the Church's first World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly. "Grandparents have the sap of history that rises up and gives strength to the growing tree."

For Rodriguez, the memory of Antonia is intertwined with the meaning behind the medal around his neck. His grandmother

was a deeply devout Catholic, a parishioner at St. Patrick Parish in Milwaukee. She was originally from Puerto Rico, said Rodriguez, and she forced herself to learn English so that she could talk with her grandson.

"She was very spiritual. She always went to Mass. Always," he said. "Every time (we talked) it was — 'Go to church. Take communion.'"

She urged him to undergo religious education. "I'm like, OK, I'll do it for my grandma," said Rodriguez, smiling and rolling his eyes as he discusses his grandmother in the atrium of the Stein Center, where he is a client of the adult day services. But the lessons remain with him, and provide comfort amidst the deep grief he now feels at Antonia's passing.

"I know she's sitting by the Lord," he said. "I know I have to be strong."

Strength. Of all the many fruits born in her life by an abiding faith in God, it is this one that Jean Kelly wishes her granddaughters remember most when they think of the time they spent baking, reading and gardening with "Boppy," as they call her. In the span of the last few years, Kelly has lost her husband and her mother. Her beloved dog also recently passed away.

"I'm sure there are more things coming my way," she said. "I want them to know that I couldn't have gotten through all of that without my faith."

When Kelly's grandmother died many years ago, she and her cousins were each allowed to select one of their grandmother's belongings to keep as a remembrance of her. Kelly chose a small cross. Sixty years later, it is still in her possession.

"I don't remember her coming to Mass, even though they were very religious. When I think back now, I didn't really know a lot of their relationship with Jesus," said Kelly. "But it's funny — I

picked that. And sixty years later, I still have it."

She is grateful that it can be different for her and her granddaughters. She attends Mass with them and their parents every week, bringing a big bag of religious books to help keep the little ones occupied and prayerful.

She knows she is also lucky that her son and daughter-in-law are raising the children in the Catholic faith, and that her role is one of support to their efforts at home.

For Fr. Schmeckel, it was a little different — his grandmother was the one taking the lead in his formation, as his parents were not practicing Catholics. In his ministry as a priest, he encounters many parents who are deeply concerned that their adult children have fallen away from the faith, and not raising their own children in its teachings and traditions.

In these common occurrences, Fr. Schmeckel emphasizes the impact of prayer and sacrifice.

"Fasting does something — prayer and fasting. The scriptures tell us that, our faith tells us that. It's not nothing," he said. "Grandparents tend to have a lot of suffering as they get older, and have aches and pains and troubles with loss and sadness. They have a lot that they can offer up. I think when they really can offer that up for something productive, it doesn't take away that suffering, but it gives some meaning to those things."

He also urges grandparents to remember "the power of invitation" and to pray to the Holy Spirit for the prudence to know when the right time is to extend that invitation — and to remember that oftentimes, extending it does not call for words but actions.

After all, it is his grandmother's motto that "if you live a good life and believe in your faith, your children and people around you will know God because they know you."

Retreats Available to Help Marriages Harmed by Pandemic

KATE KELLEHER JUNK
SPECIAL TO THE CATHOLIC HERALD

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a dramatic shift in the lives of all. Though married couples did not experience the total isolation their single peers felt during lockdowns, many problems unique to pandemic living still arose over the last two and a half years.

Differences in opinions on appropriate levels of COVID risk were a wedge in many relationships. Should we see family and friends? Do we sit in our usual place at Mass? How do we celebrate the holidays? Do we shop in person or use drive-up? The risks taken by one spouse were effectively taken by the other, and each decision was a risk calculation taken against the person's individual and the couple's shared values.

Forced constant togetherness was a stressor for even the most solid of relationships. Unstructured time, amplified by the uncertainty of when a return to "normal" would occur, could turn even the minor annoyances and disagreements of day-to-day life into fights.

For couples raising young and school-age children, the loss of daycare, in-person learning and extra-curricular activities was tough, forcing many parents to juggle in ways they had never previously done.

Supply chain headaches and financial woes did not help matters. The Bureau of Labor Statistics showed that the U.S. economy lost 22 million jobs from February to April 2020, and the cost of most necessities remains high.

With all these stressors stacked against couples, it is not surprising that multiple news outlets reported an increase in divorce rates after the onset of the pandemic. Two Catholic ministries stand prepared to help couples thrive as we enter a new "normal."



▲ *Worldwide Marriage Encounter is offering a residential retreat from Oct. 21-23 in Brookfield. (Submitted photo)*

Retrouvaille

The Retrouvaille website (helpourmarriage.org) explains, "Most people whose marriages end in divorce are not bad people. Rather, they are often people who never learned the proper tools for a happy marriage ... there are certain learnable skills, attitudes and tools that they can use to deal with the inevitable problems of the real world and the difficult struggles that a marriage will face."

Retrouvaille does not end when the retreat is over. Post-weekend sessions over six to 12 weeks help couples to continue the healing they began on their weekend. Monthly small group support meetings, called CORE (Continuing Our Retrouvaille Experience), provide couples with a positive and welcoming place to continue working on the communication skills they have learned.

A couple from Wauwatosa shared, "We were in misery when we went on our Retrouvaille weekend. We could not talk without arguing. Our three teenagers lived in a war zone. At the Retrouvaille weekend, we were able to reconnect and found hope. Eventually, our marriage

entered a second honeymoon. We are able to live in harmony thanks to the skills we learned in the Retrouvaille program."

In 2023, Lakeshore Retrouvaille, which serves southeastern Wisconsin, is holding in-person retreats in Green Lake on Jan. 27 and Sept. 15, 2023, in Wausau on Feb. 3 and Aug. 18, and Milwaukee on Feb. 17 and July 28.

Call 920-288-2043 or email lakeshore@helpourmarriage.org for more information.

There are also virtual options available online.

Worldwide Marriage Encounter

The Marriage Encounter (wwme.org) experience is a skill-building enrichment program — either over a weekend or in seven three-hour sessions — where together, as husband and wife, couples learn how to be the best couple they can be.

WWME explains that a Marriage Encounter is not couples therapy. There is no counseling. The experience consists of presentations followed by private time between husband and wife.

WWME offers its experience in several formats to accommodate various schedules. Weekend (residential) experiences are coming up in Brookfield from Oct. 21-23 or in Geneva, Illinois, from Nov. 11-13. To register, contact Tim and Doris Trout at 888-574-5653.

Parishes or schools can host non-residential weekend experiences for their families. They follow a similar schedule to the residential weekends, beginning on Friday evening or Saturday morning and continuing through Sunday afternoon.

If an entire weekend is not feasible for your parish, 3RE Experiences are the same Marriage Encounter experience offered in seven sessions of two to three hours each. These are typically weeknight meetings held at a parish or school premises.

WWME also offers virtual versions of both residential and 3RE formats.

A mother of five, Liz Hammetter went on the Worldwide Marriage Encounter with her husband, Nick, years ago and explained, "WWME helped bring God and our faith to the center of our marriage. It helped us realize the blessings, big and small, that we receive each day. Inviting God to the forefront of our marriage and being able to recognize our blessings helped us work through the difficulties of the pandemic."

The Hammetters have turned their pandemic pivots into permanent lifestyle changes. Liz now homeschools their children on their farm in Grafton, and the joy they have found in their added togetherness radiates through the family.

"We were blessed by the extra time together, the extra time with our children and a slower schedule for our family," she said. "We realize how blessed we were to have each other."

Back to School 2022



▲ Move-in day for Marquette University was Wednesday, Aug. 24. (Photo by David Bernacchi)



▲ Seton Catholic Schools held its welcome back pep rally for all staff Monday, Aug. 22, at St. Charles Borromeo Parish School. (Submitted photo)



▲ The first day of school at St. Mary's Visitation in Elm Grove was Monday, Aug. 29. (Submitted photo)



▲ Seminarist Dcn. Joseph Heit blessed the classrooms on the first day of school at Christ King in Wauwatosa. (Submitted photo)

Back to School 2022



▲ Students posed for "framed photos" at St. Charles Borromeo School. (Submitted photo)



▲ The first day of school at St. Eugene was Monday, Aug. 29. (Submitted photo)



▲ After Mass, students at St. Matthew School in Campbellsport started settling in for the first day of classes. (Submitted photo)



▲ Before entering the building for the first day of school at St. Gabriel in Hubertus, students stopped for a little fun. (Submitted photo)

Waukesha Family Experiences Year of Sacraments

COLLEEN JURKIEWICZ
CATHOLIC HERALD STAFF

The best relationships are distinguished by a couple who, together, seem to create something greater than the sum of their parts. That's Miguel and Michelle Monterrey, who know that if they join forces, they can achieve anything — whether it's running a triathlon, buying a house or growing in their Catholic faith.

This has been a milestone year for the Waukesha couple. Not only did they welcome their second child in July, but this spring saw Michelle received into full communion with the Catholic Church, followed soon by Miguel's Confirmation on Pentecost. Their two children, Mirko and Misha, were baptized together in early August at St. Joseph Church in Waukesha.

Reflecting on a year of sacramental graces, Miguel Monterrey said, "It's been amazing."

"It's a whole other way for us to talk to each other, about each other, for each other," he said. "It's really awesome."

The Monterreys first met in 2014, when Miguel returned to his native Wisconsin after living for a time in Miami. The couple was paired as sparring partners at a kickboxing class.

"It was love at first strike, I guess you could say," quipped Miguel. They were close friends for some time before they became an item, encouraging each other in their career goals, their physical fitness and their personal growth. "I knew when I asked her to be my girlfriend, I was really asking her to be my wife," Miguel added. They married in November 2017 and welcomed their first child in 2019.

Miguel was born and raised Catholic and has deep roots in the Waukesha Catholic community, where his uncle is a permanent deacon. However, he had decided against receiving the sacrament of Confirmation as an adolescent. "For



▲ The Monterrey family (from left: Miguel Monterrey, Mirko Monterrey, Michelle Monterrey and Misha Monterrey) along with Fr. Matthew Widder at the baptism of Mirko and Misha earlier this month at St. Joseph in Waukesha. The family has participated in a number of sacraments this year. (Submitted photo)

a long time, I stepped away. I never lost my faith, but I stopped practicing," he said. Michelle was raised Methodist, attending church every Sunday. When the two married civilly, Miguel didn't want Michelle to feel pressured into converting, even as he began to feel drawn back to the practice of his Catholic faith following a family health crisis.

But Michelle was feeling pulled in her own way, too. Becoming Catholic "made sense," she said. "I like how everything seems very encompassing in the Catholic Church. It seemed more involved; it didn't seem like I was just going through the motions." She reached out to Peggy Lanser, adult and family ministry coordinator at the Catholic Community of Waukesha, to begin RCIA.

Lanser said it was "fulfilling" and "a great

joy" to accompany the Monterrey family on this "journey of deepening faith."

"They were both so committed to learning about the Catholic faith, and their hearts were open and full of desire for God and receiving all of these sacraments together as a family," she said. "It is never too late and you are never too old to reawaken your faith. By being intentional about making personal prayer a part of your daily life, God will guide you to the people and places that will help you in the process of practicing your faith in its fullness."

RCIA was a chance for Michelle to discover things she didn't even realize she needed in her life. "I told Peggy, I don't know what I don't know," she said. Two-year-old Misha would accompany her mom to the classes and began asking

faith questions of her own, and the family found a community in the parish's Tiny Tots program.

"Everything is 'Baby Jesus' with Misha, unless it's Papa Jesus — Baby Jesus is Christmas, Papa Jesus is everything else. And Mama Mary, of course," said Miguel with a laugh.

The couple's marriage was convalidated this spring, and just days later at the Easter Vigil, Michelle came into the Catholic Church. "It was really moving to stand up in front of everybody and say, 'Yeah, this is my calling, this is really what I want,'" she said.

Miguel received the sacrament of confirmation a few weeks later on Pentecost. He credits Michelle with inspiring him to take that important step. "She really motivated me to be a better person and to embrace my faith and say, 'I can uphold this contract now,'" he said. "I've been Catholic my whole life but Michelle was a fully confirmed Catholic before I was. It was awesome to see her asking questions and getting to discuss things that we had previously discussed, but through a whole new lens."

After the arrival of baby Mirko this summer, the couple's two children were baptized in a joint ceremony in early August.

"Seeing my babies being baptized together was something special," said Michelle. "It filled me with great joy to see them get their sacraments and be welcomed into the Church."

As they look to the future, the Monterreys say they are excited to embark on this new chapter of their faith — together.

"She's seen my full transformation, and she's shown me that I can be better, that we can be better," said Miguel. "Because anything we've ever worked on together as a team, we've just knocked it out of the park."

Facing the Fear of The Call

When Fr. Chakrit Micaphitak approached Rory with a child sized Redemptorist-like vestment and special rosary for altar serving training, Rory did what any wise person would do when called to serve God. He ran away crying and hid under a pew. The parishioners who know Rory and welcome him to Mass every day responded by rallying around him to offer comfort and support. After his mom dug him out from under the pew and reassured him as only mothers can, Fr. Micaphitak came back and talked to Rory. After Mass, Rory and his mom prayed to St. Peter for his intercession. The next morning found Rory dressed in his special vestment and eager to serve. Rory has never looked back and is eager to serve every day with his mom. He says that his favorite part of altar serving is “handing the chalice to Father.”

Rory’s response to the call to serve the Lord strikingly resembles the response of Jonah. And if we are honest with ourselves, our reactions usually do, too. In the story of Jonah, God called Jonah to go serve in Nineveh. Nineveh was a city of violence, sexual perversion and horror. Unlike Rory, Jonah had good reasons to fear for his life amidst the horrors of the city. So, sensibly, he ran and hid. As both Rory and Jonah



CATHOLIC PARENTING

ANDI BOCHTE

learned, God will find those he called. But just as for Rory and Jonah, God sends people to support them. The people on the boat with Jonah were his supporters; their role was to suffer the storm with him. Their appointed role was to obey God’s prophet himself, and so to throw Jonah overboard. The people on the boat did not know what they were getting into when Jonah joined them on the boat. But nevertheless, God used them as well. God may call us to places that are terrifying, scary, lonely and stressful. Fr. Micaphitak and Fr. Rafael Rodriguez at St. Michael were both called from their home countries of Laos and Venezuela, respectively. They were called to this foreign country to serve in downtown Milwaukee and to conduct Mass in



▲ Fr. Chakrit Micaphitak helped make Rory feel comfortable being an altar server. (Submitted photo)

languages that are not their own. They were called away from their friends and family. Their support and the support of the parishioners at daily Mass allowed Rory to respond to God’s call and to face his fears.

We are all called to support one another in this life, and the support we provide can look different for each person. Sometimes we are the ones taking a more direct support role, but sometimes we may have a more indirect support role. It can be easy to forget how important those indirect serving roles are. A smile, a word of encouragement and a prayer are essential supporting roles that can so easily be overlooked.

When we are in the position of responding to a call from God, we should not take this call lightly, and we ought to humble ourselves at the task.

It is an honor to receive a call of service from God, but when we encounter trials within that call, we sometimes grumble and complain. We can feel that God is being unfair. But these complaints come from our human fear and our human weakness. When we try to rely on our own human strength, we will fail. When we are called to service, we can expect trials, we can expect suffering and we can expect to be uncomfortable. We can point to any of Jesus’ followers as examples for this. But we can also see that God was with them throughout all these trials. When Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:24, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me,” he means we need to deny ourselves the façade of earthly comforts. We need to let go not only of being comfortable and getting what we want, but we also need to deny ourselves when we indulge in our fear.

When Jonah was swallowed by the great fish, he finally turned to prayer. And when we find ourselves running away or boasting of our own strength, we need to turn to prayer. We can join with Jonah in saying, “The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit.”

No matter where we are, what gender, race or age, when God calls us, we might be afraid. But we should allow others to support us, and we should firstly, not lastly, turn to God in prayer. For “God is our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in distress.” (Psalm 46:1) Like the loving and supportive parishioners and pastors at St. Michael, let us love and support one another in our callings.

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