



# Awaken

the soul & let your spirit fly

A bimonthly publication of Good Shepherd Catholic Church ~ steadfast in awakening our true being in God.

**P**rayer is the only channel through which God's great graces and favors may flow into the soul; and if this be once closed, I know no other way He can communicate them.

St. Teresa of Avila

St. Teresa's wisdom animates this current **Year of Prayer**.

Announced by Pope Francis on January 21, 2024, the Holy Father envisioned a year dedicated to a great 'symphony' of prayer in preparation for the Church's Jubilee year in 2025.

At once, the symphony metaphor stirs the imagination to consider an orchestra of prayerful people. Their prayers waft upward to heaven just as musical notes fill a concert hall. The large-scale musical work known as a symphony consists of several parts, or movements, often dramatic, emotional, rhythmic and spirited. There is a logical continuity that moves the listener to new heights.

A symphony of prayer also has many parts – many forms and instruments – *capable of fostering continual development and exploration, individually and communally.*

"I think *that* is the gift of what our prayer life can do when we participate well," says Jesuit priest, Father Alex Llanera of the deeper spiritual significance of Pope Francis' invitation to prayer and the vivid musical imagery.

"When we engage in that and allow ourselves to be captivated by God in prayer and contemplation it's an interesting dynamic," he explains of the intimate movement toward God.

"The Holy Spirit, who is conducting this incredible sym-

phony, calling upon different types of prayer and speaking to different people," *invokes* action and response, Father Alex continues turning once again to the musical analogy. Prayer, like music, prompts various responses among listeners, too. The key is listening.

Pursuing doctoral studies in spirituality at the Comillas Pontifical University in Madrid, Spain, and serving as an adjunct professor for University of San Diego students studying abroad, Father Alex speaks the language of prayer and spirituality fluently. His thesis merges spiritual and

sacramental theologies with a specific interest in the Eucharistic theology of Jesuits.

"The Eucharist is very central to our life and very central to the way Jesuits see themselves in relation to God, and how we minister," Father Alex shares indicating his hope to complete his Doctorate by the summer of 2026.

Good Shepherd parishioners see Father Alex's friendly face now and then when he celebrates Mass with us. Most recently, he visited on Father's Day in June, returning home to California and his family's parish. He spends time with

## A Symphony OF PRAYER

(Continue on page 4)





Reflections on  
VIRTUE

## & THE FRUITS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

*The virtues are the blossom on the tree of life... and the fruits are what come from these flowers at the time of ripeness. — Stratford Caldecott*

“I feel **LOVE** chose me,” Augustina Kuen says emphatically, identifying LOVE as THE most important virtue to her. More than a feeling, she *knows* God infused the theological power of love into her soul making it possible for her to participate in God’s divine nature.

For Augustina, that participation means loving as God loves, and being attracted to and desiring a holy, transformative love.

“They wanted me to end his life,” the mother of three young daughters explains of a tragic day when her husband, Aaron, then 37, experienced cardiac arrest at the 26<sup>th</sup> mile of the California International Marathon in December 2022. A runner for over 20 years and an army veteran, the senior financial analyst hoped to qualify for the Boston Marathon.

Augustina remembers the care team’s push to end Aaron’s life. “It was aggressive,” she recalls but her response still rings clear in her memory 19 months later.

“What is our faith if not for this?” she expressed voicing her adamant rejection. Only God’s merciful love made sense. Sacrificial, supernatural love guided Augustina then and now as did the wedding vows made 14 years earlier, “living and breathing” like never before.

There is a “romanticized view of love,” she says describing an outlook that “love is supposed to make you feel good, and when it doesn’t ..., you leave.”

Augustina knew, “He is alive, he is very

in the virtue of love.”

Through suffering, Augustina describes how her understanding of love developed organically. “Going through this tragedy opened the door for this deepening of faith for me and my children,” she insists also believing that Aaron, likewise, is experiencing spiritual transformation.

Facing adversity, Augustina easily lists several “fruits of the spirit,” or perfections, resulting from the Holy Spirit’s action in the Kuen family’s life. She names “**for-giveness**” first and the Holy Spirit’s work to conquer the illusion that “there will be time” to forgive. Augustina responds, “And maybe not,” as she gratefully shares how “relationships in our family have been healed.”

**Faithfulness** relies on the infused virtue of faith but manifests in relationships. Augustina sees how easy it can be to “take it for granted,” and recognizes how “I had faith but not like this... I had not tasted it like this. It is a privilege to participate,” she says anchored in truth and confident in sharing it with those around her. “It makes everything 3-D,” she conveys with clarity on the reality of the supernatural.

Friends, co-workers, and the community have demonstrated **charity** in their loving support and monetary support. “It put a fire in me to do the same,” Augustina expresses, wanting to return the goodness extended to Aaron and their family.

Augustina candidly speaks of her family’s “purification through fire.” Even the

# LOVE

injured, but we are still a family.” Aaron’s severe anoxic brain injury presented an extreme circumstance “and because of this trajectory we were pulled from being very complacent



From top downward: Augustina, Nora (10), Olivia (6) and Amelia (4).

*this is Revival*

slightest gains in Aaron’s progress can be painful reminders of the scope of the injury and incremental improvement. Still, through it all, Augustina finds strength in God’s gift of infused love, animating and informing forgiveness, faithfulness, charity, other virtues and spiritual fruits.

“We have been given the mercy to find HIM. Through suffering, we realize our helplessness. It brought us to our knees,” Augustina says placing her trust in God’s love. “It has rippled through people’s lives,” she adds aware that “God is working” and loving through and beyond them. ✚



# Let's Go

GROW IN FAITH  
& DISCIPLESHIP!

Visit [GSCCEG.org](http://GSCCEG.org) to learn more about upcoming events.

## GO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

### Steve Angrisano

You know his music! Now take this chance to get to know him!

Internationally recognized Catholic composer, presenter, evangelist and music missionary!

This event is FREE.

**Thursday, Sept. 19**  
**6:30 to 8:00 p.m.**

Good Shepherd Catholic Church



#### SAVE THE DATE:

Beginning *Sunday, Sept. 15* and continuing *every Sunday for eight weeks*, Good Shepherd Church will host **The Rescue Project**. This powerful video series offers "a compelling proclamation of the gospel ... a way of seeing reality ... and of making sense of the world, history, and life that is vastly different from the story our modern culture tells." Make plans

now to reserve your Sunday afternoons for this series, conversation and a light meal. More details to follow.



#### **WEEKLY SPANISH MASS AT GOOD SHEPHERD**

Effective July 1, 2024, Good Shepherd Parish will offer a weekly Mass in Spanish every Sunday at 3:00 p.m.! Please share this news!

The monthly Tagalog Mass will occur on the third Sunday of every month at 1:00 p.m.

#### **CATHOLIC FAITH FORMATION REGISTRATION**

Please take note of the registration deadline for Catholic Faith Formation classes and sacrament preparation. **Registration closes July 31, 2024 for the 2024-2025 year.**

The gift of faith is infused at Baptism. Through faith formation, inspire your children to grow in faith and virtue!

#### **FAMILY MOVIE NIGHT FRIDAY, JULY 19**

A summer time favorite! A movie on the plaza! Fun for everyone and especially our parish youth. Bring lawn chairs (and possibly a light blanket in case of cool summer winds) and get ready to enjoy a family movie. A hot dog dinner will be available for purchase. Watch for more details on the parish website.



Look what's  
happening  
with **YOUNG ADULTS**



- [Jukebox Jam](#) (dinner and dance) July 13
- **Gathering with Bishop Soto** August 21 following Adoration (at 7pm)

Visit [GSCCEG.org](http://GSCCEG.org) for details.



# TOWARD A SPIRITUALITY OF LISTENING

Father Alex Llanera, SJ: On the struggle to listen and how the Year of Prayer can help

(Continues from page 1)

his parents and recollects the years of his youth attending Mass in Foulks Ranch Elementary School's multi-purpose center. He attended St. Patrick School on Franklin Blvd., Jesuit High School and Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles before entering the Novitiate for the Society of Jesus and embarking on more than a decade of formation. He was ordained in 2018.

## PRAYER AS PREPARATION FOR JUBILEE

"He's probably drawing from his experience of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola," Father Alex says interpreting the Holy Father's desire for this Year of Prayer before the Jubilee Year. He describes the *format* of the exercises as possible inspiration.

"There are a couple of preparatory points like setting the mood, and centering yourself," Father Alex explains regarding the Exercise's aim to ease one into contemplation. "It's not just automatic," he mentions of

Ignatius' Exercises while drawing a parallel to the Pope's inference that prayer offers an ascent that allows the faithful to set the proper tone and focus for a meaningful Jubilee.

Father Alex emphasizes that this year of prayer is not only about setting a specific amount of time or learning prayers. Moreso, he senses it is meant to be a year to develop a disposition or an attitude.

"What does it mean when I engage in prayer and how does it affect me? How does it shape me?" he asks.

Father Alex notes the Pope's continual work and teachings on a "spirituality of encounter" with God and each other. First, emphasizing God's love and mercy, and now, pointing to the necessity of listening and communicating with God and neighbor.

"I think with this Year of Prayer, Pope Francis sees that we are now living in an environment where people struggle to listen," Father Alex posits commenting on everyday breakdowns in how people "listen to each other, listen to themselves and listen to God."

"Pope Francis is inviting us to a spirituality of listening," Father Alex suggests expounding on the beauty of allowing oneself to enter into a quiet space of silence, meditation and contemplation to experience "the presence of God and to *listen* to what he is trying to tell us."

"This celebration of prayer is inviting all Christians to know what prayer is," he adds stressing that it is "not a chore... it's a privilege that we *get* to be in the presence of God with God rejoicing in us and us rejoicing in God!"

Background image: Fr. Alex with his students at El Escorial, a Spanish royal site outside of Madrid, Spain.





## PRACTICE DIVINE LISTENING

Father Alex offers three points of advice to get started with transforming prayer into divine listening.

- 1. Acknowledge the need to carve out time for prayer and be intentional in your desire to do so.** Intentionality might be telling yourself, *"You know what? I am going to do this now for this amount of time because then God can activate and motivate the will through my prayer."*
- 2. Whatever prayer leads you to God, stick with it but keep it simple.** Many people have specific devotions such as Lectio Divina, praying the Liturgy of the Hours, the rosary, Eucharistic Adoration, or a host of others. Others may not. Reading the daily readings and sitting with one that speaks to you is a way to elevate your prayer life and allow God to meet you where you are.
- 3. Remember, you are not in control.** Prayer is about God interacting with you. Allow yourself to be open without any expectations for a particular grace, or the fruition of a prayer intention. Conduct a humility "self-check" and know you are giving this time and disposition to the Lord.

Reciting the words of St. Ignatius' own practice, Father Alex recommends something similar as an entry point to prayer:

*Lord, I direct all my intentions, my desires, my emotions and my thoughts towards you and your greater service.*



Parishioners Alex and Jesa Llanera with their son, Father Alex, daughter Jessica, son-in-law Carl and baby Caleb.

## LET GOD SURPRISE YOU

Father Alex turns to the phrase coined by Pope Francis to punctuate the importance of prayer; *Missionary Discipleship*.

"It's a compound phrase about being 'sent' and at the same time, being a disciple and being close to Jesus," he professes.

"Being missionary disciples means being honest with ourselves," Father Alex says frankly expanding on how it also means being honest with God and then "being surprised by God."

He hints that naming our desires explicitly in prayer – *without expectation of God's response* – opens a dialogue of the heart. A special kind of freedom blooms that translates into a beautiful indifference toward *how* God showers down grace because however it occurs it will be according to God's perfect will.

"Grace is not magic," he says but in prayerful listening "we may be absolutely surprised in the ways that God actually maximizes (prayer) or even gives us abundantly more than we initially asked for." This is the "sending"... the indifference that makes a difference.

"This is an incredible time that Pope Francis is inviting us to," Father Alex assures. †

## RESOURCE FOR LIVING THE YEAR OF PRAYER

Visit the official Jubilee website and find this resource for living The Year of Prayer. Produced by the Dicastery for Evangelization and entitled, *"Teach Us To Pray,"* this downloadable booklet offers a thorough look at all the movements of the symphony including *Prayer in the Parish Community*, *Prayer in the Family* and *Young People's Prayer*. The availability of additional prayer resources are anticipated as the year progresses.

[www.iubilaeum2025.va](http://www.iubilaeum2025.va)





HERE I AM  
**Lord**  
SEND ME  
ISAIAH 6:8



**Legion of Mary President**  
**Cora Conanan follows the heart of Mary,**  
**establishes OUR LADY OF CHAMPION PRAESIDIUM\***

**“I** feel like I need something to offer to Mama Mary,” says Cora Conanan, President of the Legion of Mary association operating at Good Shepherd Parish.

Cora is the woman behind the post-pandemic re-boot of the parish’s Legion having experienced repeated “send me” moments in her lifetime. In fact, for Cora, the Legion of Mary represents the spirit of the Church’s evangelistic mission. It is also a way for her to express her devotion and gratitude to the Blessed Mother.

**SEND ME!** “I go back to 1992,” Cora says reflecting on the origins of her deep love and appreciation for the graces poured out “when she allowed me to visit her home in Israel for four months.”

At that time, Cora worked at a university in the Philippines. She frequented the nearby Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Church, served as a lector, and prayed to Our Lady with a growing understanding of the church’s namesake.

When Cora received an invitation to apply to be a visiting scholar in Haifa, Israel, she appealed to the Blessed Mother in prayer. It was a “send me” plea of great magnitude one morning.

“I asked her for one white rose near the tabernacle,” Cora explains revealing her earnest message that if the Blessed Mother

would help her “to see her place... help me to be there,” a white rose would signal her approval.

On the Feast of the Visitation, a single white rose near the tabernacle caught Cora’s eye as she lectored.

“I was tearing up,” Cora shares of that emotional instant when she knew “Mama Mary was approving my visit.” There was a minor and short-lived technicality in the fact that the government had not yet approved. But soon enough, on the Feast of St. John the Baptist, Cora received the necessary recommendation to go to Israel.

On her way home, Cora secured a visa and stop over in Paris. Another Ru du Bac visit to the Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal strengthened Cora’s confidence and devotion, empowering her for a future of evangelism.

**A DESIRE TO DO MORE** Cora moved to Elk Grove less than two years ago from Hayward where she was active in St. Bede’s Church and its Legion of Mary, Queen of Angels Praesidium.

Cora spent some time at St. Joseph Church before attending Mass at Good Shepherd on the Feast of the Assumption, August 15, 2023.

“I went to the parish office and I didn’t know anybody,” she remembers but

found herself signing up for lector, Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion and homebound trainings. She also expressed interest in starting a ministry.

“They asked what kind of ministry and I replied, ‘Legion of Mary,’” Cora shares, thrilled that her suggestion was met with enthusiasm. “They were so happy,” Cora adds mentioning how she was immediately introduced to others who might be interested.

Cora’s energy to form a new praesidium no doubt resulted from her summer 2023 trip to Europe to visit the sites of several Marian apparitions. But first, she stopped in Dublin to visit Myra House, the founding location of the Legion of Mary. She saw many historic artifacts and learned about the esteemed founder, Servant of God, Frank Duff (1889-1980).

Her next stop on her self-described solo pilgrimage was to the Knock Shrine and the Basilica of Our Lady of Knock, west of Dublin. Then, a return visit to Rue du Bac and the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal. A visit to Our Lady of Lourdes and Our Lady of Fatima followed. Her trip concluded with the soon-to-be-completed Sagrada Família in Barcelona.

Cora was on fire for her faith. Her travels seemed to be a “sending” of sorts that initiated her work to establish the Our Lady of Champion Praesidium at Good Shepherd, named for the first and only approved North American apparition site in Champion, Wisconsin.

“If you want to be a member you do things for people, and serve,” Cora says echoing the mission of the Legion of Mary. ✚

**\*A Praesidium is the parish-level structure of the Legion’s organization. The Legion of Mary is an international organization noted as the largest apostolic organization of lay Catholics with over 10 million members worldwide.**



# Conversion, Conservation, Consolation:

## The work of the Legion of Mary *Our Lady of Champion Praesidium*

Founded in 1921, the Legion of Mary acted upon the belief that the Church is "missionary" and its laity – the mystical body of Christ – help bring about the Kingdom on earth as apostles sent to spread the Good News.

"We meet every Thursday at 9:45 a.m.," Cora explains of the apostolate's work. Active members take an oath to Mary and the Holy Spirit, committing to the discipline of regular prayer and active service for two or more hours a week. Auxiliary members commit to supporting the praesidium with extensive and regular prayer.

Cora describes their apostolic work as assignments in the areas of conversion, conservation and consolation.

### Conversion

To encourage ongoing conversion of the heart, "every Monday we do Pilgrim Virgin," Cora says of a home visitation program that brings a statue of Mary to a receptive residence. "We pray the rosary, sing and pray together," Cora explains. The statue remains in the home for a week. "We also do the enthronement of the Sacred Heart," she adds expressing the meaningful theology behind their work. "Mama Mary opens the door to welcome her son, Jesus, in the enthronement of the Sacred Heart."

### Conservation

Cora describes conservation work as all about teaching and maintaining the faith. Members support the Religious Education office and volunteer time to help with instruction of parish youth.

The Legion of Mary also engages in "Book Barrows" most easily understood when considering a wheelbarrow. A book barrow is the apostolic work of bearing or carrying forward the faith. Members work with a host venue to display booklets, flyers, rosaries and medals. "We talk and encourage people," Cora says of their street evangelization that aims to stir hearts and help revitalize a faith gone dry or instruct people interested in knowing more.

### Consolation

Visits to care facilities such as Carlton Senior Living, Bruceville Point and The Gardens take place every week. Members go at pre-arranged times to pray and converse. "It is primarily Catholic people who join us but it is open to everyone," Cora says.

And when not engaged in these Spiritual Works of Mercy, members also lend a hand once a month at Loaves and Fishes addressing Corporal Works of Mercy, too. "We go early at 6 a.m. to



**Solemnity of the Assumption of the  
Blessed Virgin Mary, August 15  
Holy Day of Obligation**

help prepare breakfast, make sandwich spread or package other food items for the homeless," Cora shares. Some members also help with the parish Works of Mercy ministry on Monday mornings packaging food to distribute locally to the homeless.

Membership is open to Catholics 18 years and above, men and women, married or single. Inquiries are invited by email to: [c\\_conanan@icloud.com](mailto:c_conanan@icloud.com). The Legion is planning a pilgrimage to Champion, Wisconsin in October to visit the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion.







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Pastor: Rev. Michael Vaughan

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## **IFEOMA CATHERINE OKEKE**

### **Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary**

*Awaken* **Practice the faith ...**  
**THE SOUL**



"My journey of deeper connection with Our Lady started with her role in my inner healing and re-dedication to our Lord, Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit," Ifeoma shares with a profound serenity in her voice. She began a 54-day rosary devotion: 27 days in petition and 27 days in thanksgiving, hoping to make sense of suffering. Our Lady, Queen of the Holy Rosary, blessed her with more.

"I experienced peace and healing and I am more aware of her love and protection," she continues describing a practice that led her further to an act of consecration to Mary. It was on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes," she remembers being grateful for Mary's abiding presence in her life and the abundant online Marian resources such as GabiAfterHours on YouTube.

A wife and mother of six children, working full time, Ifeoma exudes joy as she talks about the distinct graces of wisdom, patience and perseverance guiding her in marriage and family life – graces radiating from Our Lady's hands as depicted on the



Miraculous Medal. She wears the medal around her neck faithfully. "It's a reminder, like a picture or a tattoo," she explains of the Blessed Mother's constancy.

"It is a better way of life," Ifeoma says of her ongoing devotion describing it as "being close to your mother."

Ifeoma sees the past six months of her life as a time when "the Holy Spirit has been preparing my heart." Influenced by the Blessed Mother's own "fiat," Ifeoma sensed Mary's gentle, encouraging words telling her, "You need to start coming out."

Ifeoma felt her interior prayers intensify as she whispered in reply to Mary, "Use me, qualify me." And Mary did. Shortly after Ifeoma's

prayer, she accepted the invitation to lead a small group of parish women journeying closer to Christ using the *Walking with Purpose* study program for women. Most recently, Ifeoma turned to the Novena to Our Lady, Undo-er of Knots. "I belong to Our Lady," Ifeoma vows. "She has been there for me and always will be."

