

# Cathedral anniversary celebration honors Church 'builders'



By DAVID MYERS

*Southwest Kansas Register*

*Editor's Note: The Feb. 12, 2012 issue of the Southwest Kansas Register will be devoted to the 10th anniversary of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and the celebration of the retirement of the debt on its construction.*

Ten years ago, Catholics representing every parish in southwest Kansas gathered on a windswept prairie covered in wheat and scrub brush, and broke ground for what would become the Cathedral of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Among those attending, shovel in hand, was Nellie Esquibel, then 87, who 50 years earlier had taken part in the ground breaking for Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, on the east side of Dodge City. Nellie had helped build the older church, carrying bricks to the site during its construction.

It was for Nellie, who died this year, and a multitude of others past and present, for whom the anniversary Mass -- celebrating the birthday of the cathedral on the plains -- was offered Dec. 9.

"We thank the generous and sacrificial people of the diocese, many of you right here tonight, who gave of your time, talent, and treasure to build this cathedral 10 years ago," said the Most

Rev. John B. Brungardt.

As he began his homily on the 10th anniversary of the dedication of the new cathedral, the bishop called forward the children in the church, including servers Matthew Haselhorst and Leah Stein.

"Children, I need some help to build a church!" he said as several children came forward, some shyly and others with zeal.

"We need a back wall ... and a roof," he said. Stein and Haselhorst stood near the altar, their arms uplifted to form a steeple.

"We need the doors," the bishop continued, directing a few smiling children to "swing" open like a large door.

"Thank you," he said to applause, looking over his 'church'. "We have a beautiful church. But it is not made with bricks, stone, iron, wood, and glass! Of what is it made?"

"People!

"... We thank the priests, sisters, and laity who have ministered here for many years, to offer the sacraments, teach the children, serve the needy, and the many other ministries for the people of God. You have surely been 'the temple of God, which you are' as St. Paul teaches in his first letter to the Corinthians."

And as Nellie's daughter, Patty Rent-

eria, stood within the congregation, the bishop said, "We thank the past saints, blessed, our ancestors, and all who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith."

Amid the bricks and mortar that support a church -- enveloping the people who offered their time, treasure and talent -- is something even deeper, the bishop said.

"Who is the foundation of this extraordinary gift to us? That's right, Jesus Christ is our foundation. 'For no one can lay a foundation other than the one that is there, namely, Jesus Christ,' St. Paul teaches. This is not a fraternal or social organization, it is the Catholic Church of Jesus Christ, one, holy, and apostolic. Jesus is there to teach us, sanctify us, forgive us, heal us, and comfort us. Let us thank Him for His gift of our faith, our family, our parish, our diocese, and our beautiful cathedral."

The anniversary fell on the Feast of St. Juan Diego, the native convert who, on Dec. 9, 1531, encountered the Blessed Mother -- the cathedral's namesake -- on a hillside near what is now Mexico City. Bishop Brungardt thanked the unlikely saint, as well as the Holy Mother, Our Lady of Guadalupe, "for her intercession as our patroness of our Cathedral, and of our diocese."

"Jesus is there to teach us, sanctify us, forgive us, heal us, and comfort us. Let us thank Him for His gift of our faith, our family, our parish, our diocese, and our beautiful cathedral." -- Most Rev. John B. Brungardt



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*Merry Christmas*



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# A detective story

I was sitting in my office on 57th Street in midtown Bethlehem when they came walking in. There were three of them and they were dressed like a living room – all purple drapes and throw rugs.

Each wore a crown, gold by the looks of it, inlaid with gems. The sparkly kind. The kind my wife, Bathsheba, keeps begging for. It was late. I was tired and wanted to go home. Bathsheba had lamb kabobs waiting.

“Nice begonia,” said the man with the grey beard. Said his name was Melchior.

“That’s not a begonia,” I said. “That’s my secretary, Celia. She just had her hair done.”

I invited them to have a seat. My name’s Friday; son of Wednesday; nephew of Pugsly. I’m a private eye.

They took a seat. I heard the bleating of their camels parked outside. They asked if I validate. I didn’t.

“So, what can a lowly private eye such as myself help three kings with, if you don’t mind my asking?”

They said they didn’t – mind, I mean. “We’ve been charged by God to follow a star, a star that will lead us to the King of all kings, a babe, a savior, the Christ-child.”

“Come again?”

His name was Casper. He was as big as a water buffalo. He had a bushy, black beard and a serious look on his face.

“I said we’ve been charged by God to follow...”

“No -- I heard what you said. I just don’t get it. Called by God?”

“Don’t you ever read the *Post*?” This was Balthasar, the third king. “It’s right there in the prophesy section.... Isaiah? ... Micah? Oh, come on! *Jeremiah*? Surely you’ve read *Jeremiah*! It’s right there on papyrus for all to read: ‘Messiah coming. Star to lead way. No RSVP necessary.’”

I had heard the rumors, but like any rumor of good news, I dismissed it. Funny how it’s easier to accept the possibility of bad news than good. And this was about as good as it gets.

As a private eye, I had dealt with the ugly side of society; the smelly side; the unhygienic side; the side with dried hummus in their teeth and unkempt beards. The side that hung out in alleyways selling stolen flat bread and counterfeit olives. The side that thought the Laws of Moses were a recipe for cheese steak that had simply been mistranslated.

And yet, even that was easier to believe than the notion that a savior was finally arriving.

The kings saw the cynical look on my face.

“Look, whether you believe the story of the newborn King or not, we need your help,” Casper said in a deep voice. Then he looked over at Melchior. “Are you going to tell him or should I?”

## To Whom it May Concern

By David Myers  
Editor



Melchior shifted uncomfortably in his chair. He cleared his throat. “I couldn’t help it! I just could not envision the newborn King, the Messiah, wanting gold, myrrh, or that franken-stuff. So ... so I talked the guys into ... into taking a detour. Just a little one! There was a toy store on 38th. A Noah’s Ark mobile. That’s all I wanted. Is that too much to ask?”

“So, you got lost, is that it?” I asked.

“We came out of the store,” Balthasar said, “and the star? Total cloud cover. We’re like, ‘What do we do now?’ That’s when we saw your advert in the *Post*.”

Hmmmm. I pulled open a drawer and took out a large map of the greater Bethlehem metropolitan area.

The five of us stood around my desk peering down at the map. Celia asked from what direction they came.

“Afar, afaraways,” Melchior said. “Really afar. We’re talkin’ days, here. But to answer your question, east.”

“East? That’s it? East?”

“Really afar east!”

I felt bad for the kings, I really did. I wanted the good news to come true as much as anyone. I wanted to believe our savior was soon to be born. But we had to face facts. If Moses could part the Red Sea, surely God could clear a few clouds. But He hadn’t. It was a sign. It was late. I was hungry. I wanted to go home and have lamb kabobs.

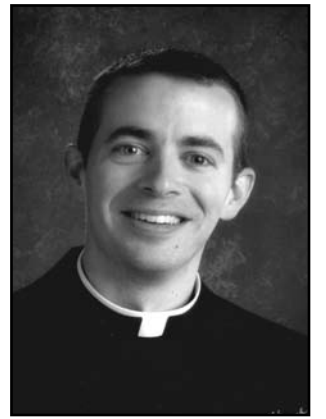
“I’m sorry,” I said. “I truly am.” I began to roll up the map when suddenly a light shown in my window as bright as the sun. The three kings shot out the door and down the stairs. I watched them run out the building. I watched them climb up onto their camels. And with a star as bright as a midnight sun shining a shaft of light downward, the three went quickly on their way, only Casper turning to wave goodbye.

I locked up and stepped out into the clear night, wondering what they would find. I stopped then, and looked at that strange beam of light shining down from a star. I felt a chill, followed by a warm embrace, and then I knew. God never promised days without clouds, laughter without tears, but with the Christ child, he had brought light to show the way. I smiled and went home to my lamb kabobs.



By Father Wesley Schawe

Director,  
Priestly  
Vocations



## What color were the swaddling clothes?

Okay — sing it along with me...

“*Away in a manger no crib for a bed, the little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head.*”

“*Because of His priesthood we all can look back, and know in that manger He was dressed in black.*”

When Mary looked down and saw her beautiful baby boy, it’s unlikely that she thought of Jesus as a priest. Scholars even debate when Jesus began to think of Himself as a priest, to think of Himself as the messiah. But while on Christmas morning Jesus may not have been thought of as a priest (nor dressed like one), He was already the man ordained by God to offer Himself as victim for the salvation of the world.

It would be 30-some years before the world would see Jesus heal the sick and forgive sins. Not until His adulthood did Jesus preach the Gospel and teach young and old alike about the Kingdom of Heaven. Only the night before He died did Jesus give Himself as food in what was formerly bread and wine. All of those acts that are associated with His priesthood (and my priesthood) were distant dreams on that first Christmas. Yet even then—in His weakness, His infancy—Jesus was already established as the one who would be the

fulfillment of the Old Testament priesthood.

Then again, could we not say that His first priestly act—His first sacrifice on our behalf—was the humbling of Himself to become one of us? This baby, who could do nothing but cry, had already given a first witness to what it means to be a priest. Just like every priest in the Diocese of Dodge City, the priesthood of Jesus Christ was defined not so much by what He did as by who He was. While always called to holiness and effective ministry, a priest’s sacramental character is not diminished or extinguished based on his health, or his ability, or even his moral flaws.

When you gather together with your family this Christmas, look around the table at your young grandsons, your nephews, the boys and single men in your family. Is one of them called from birth (from conception, really) to be a priest, to lead others to salvation? You may not know it—he may not know it—but that doesn’t mean that he’s not called. If God wants you or a young man you know to be a priest in southwest Kansas, then we can be sure that God has always wanted it, and always *will* want it.



Campbell

“They won’t let you pray in school, but they sure expect you to have the wisdom of Solomon.”

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#### The Southwest Kansas Register

P.O. Box 137, Dodge City, KS 67801

Phone: (620) 227-1519

Facsimile: (620) 227-1570

e.mail: skregister@dcdioocese.org

website: www.dcdioocese.org/swkregister

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## Christmas was on the way home

By KATHY NEAL  
Catholic News Service

As a fallen away Catholic, Christmases without Mass were empty. I recall longing to go to Midnight Mass during that time.

One cold wintry Christmas Eve a snow-fall covered the ground with a heavy coat of ice, making travel almost impossible. I had started my journey back to full communion with my faith, and I felt compelled to attend Midnight Mass. My daughter and her husband had traveled more than 200 miles over the ice-packed interstate to arrive at our home for Christmas.

That evening my husband, son, daughter and son-in-law had our usual Christmas Eve family celebration, which consisted of dinner and opening gifts. We sang carols, and I persuaded my son-in-law to read the daily readings from a short version of the breviary I recently had added to my prayers.

Perhaps that is what set the mood on that special Christmas Eve.

When we discussed the danger of driving five miles to the church over the snow-packed highway, my husband cautioned us. "You know we are taking a risk," he insisted. "The weatherman said not to get out unless it was absolutely necessary."

His advice did not stop any of us, including him. But rarely did we see another car traveling through the icy stillness.

The congregation of the church had outgrown the original structure, which was being renovated to seat 1,200 parishioners. Mass, held in the family-life center, did not look like church or feel like Christmas -- even with the poinsettias surrounding the altar.

Since the organist could not get there, the choir, sparse as it was, did its best to sing a cappella. As my family and I sang familiar carols led by the choir. "Silent Night" set the mood of Midnight Mass in the makeshift conditions.

Still going through the process of being reunited with the church, I could not receive the Eucharist, but that night I felt a keen awareness of God. I was grateful to have my family together to celebrate the incarnation.

Although the congregation was a small intimate group, the sign of peace was warm. Hugs took the place of handshakes. I felt more welcome in my Catholic home than I had in a long time.

Following Mass, the priest stood at the back of the room greeting everyone with a firm handshake and a "Merry Christmas," and cautioning them to please be careful

going home.

"Father," I said, "this was one of the most beautiful Masses I've ever been to on Christmas Eve."

Rather startled, he looked at me, then grinned. He knew I was on my journey back and saw the anticipation in my eyes. In three months, I would be receiving the Eucharist again.

"Amazing what the Spirit of God can do when we open ourselves to it," he said.

Christmas arrived in our hearts that beautiful wintry night, knitting our family closely to God. The next year my husband converted. Later my son-in-law converted too.

When we discussed the danger of driving five miles to the church over the snow-packed highway, my husband cautioned us. "You know we are taking a risk," he insisted. "The weatherman said not to get out unless it was absolutely necessary."



## Naming things

Every now and then I think back to my childhood—growing up, as we did, my brothers and I, back in the day when entertainment came from shared imagination and not from battery operated toys with pre-programmed monologue and automated actions.

In our backyard, beyond the grass and the shiny red swing set beneath the Douglas fir, was an acre of woods. A fallen redwood log was our sailing ship, and the trunk of a young dogwood served as the mast. We would look off into the distance, a hand above our brow, to survey the expanse of ocean. We were voyagers on the high seas.

We named a reality that was not obvious to others, a shared reality, an expression of life that my brothers and I held in common. To any other observer the woods beyond the backyard was just the woods. To us it was a mystery in which we participated.

Jesus, too, named a reality that was not obvious to others. In the earliest account of the Lord's Supper, Jesus took bread, broke it, and said, "This is my body that is for you" (1 Corinthians 11:24). *This is bread,*

### Awakening Vocations

By Mary Sharon Moore



our senses tell us. *This is my body,* Jesus declares. On the night before he died Jesus was naming things, the divine imagination proclaiming the redeemed order of reality.

Likewise he did with the cup of the Passover, when he announced, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." This was no make-believe naming as a child might do, but an intentional renaming of the ordinary and the known into a "new and everlasting" reality of the divinely reclaimed and rightly restored order of things. Jesus took the ordinary and renamed it into the reign of God.

Vocationally, what do these words mean

for your life? *Jesus took the ordinary and renamed it into the reign of God.* What is your life if not ordinary? I recall one priest who was an airline baggage handler in his earlier days. Another priest recently pointed to the rich farmlands and rolling hillsides surrounding his parish. "I farmed that far field for my dad, and this small field here, and beyond the railroad tracks, I farmed that whole hillside for my uncle."

Vocation, in essence, is Jesus' renaming of your life. You do not do the renaming; Jesus does. In fact, he was quite clear about this. "It was not you who chose me," Jesus told his disciples; "it was I who chose you and appointed you to go ..." (John 15:16). Only with a purifying humility can we allow ourselves to be renamed, by Jesus, into our true identity and our greater reality.

These words come as both an admonition and a relief. We do not do the choosing; our language must be clear about this when we speak of vocation. But what a relief to know that the Lord's naming and calling of us will indeed bear fruit.

Jesus begins this renaming of our lives in Baptism. It comes as an anointing which,

as we mature, becomes an appointing. We experience a "right fit"—perhaps even in the midst of what may appear to others to be a very ordinary life. You may find yourself saying, "I am living the life that really has my name on it." Or, conversely, you may realize that the life you are living or the work you are doing does not have your name on it, and discover that it's time to lean into the Lord and listen.

It is not by accident that Jesus' naming of things forms the core expression of Eucharist. In naming things he conferred the dignity of their ultimate identity. This bread becomes real food indeed, the divine mystery in which we participate. We eat this food in anticipation of our own lives being named into their ultimate identity—everlasting identity in the living Christ.

Mary Sharon Moore, founder of *Awakening Vocations*, writes and speaks frequently on vocation and the nature of God's calling. Her 13-part mp3-CD "Awakening Vocations: Vocation discernment for a 21st century world" is available at [www.awakeningvocations.com/store](http://www.awakeningvocations.com/store). Or call 1.888.687.2046 (Pacific).

Fail not to call to mind, in the course of the twenty-fifth of this month, that the Divinest Heart that ever walked the earth was born on that day; and then smile and enjoy yourselves for the rest of it; for mirth is also of Heaven's making.

~Leigh Hunt





Courtesy photo

## Busy Bee Quilters make baby- and child-sized casket palls

In 2008, Father Warren Stecklein requested that the Busy Bee Quilters sew palls for baby- and child-sized caskets for the use of St. Joseph Church, Scott City. The baby-size pall pictured above was made from a blanket given by Cindy Unrein.

On Dec. 7, the quilters presented the child-size pall to Father Bernard Felix. Pictured with Father Felix are Busy Bee Quilters Teresa Radnor, Lil Francisco, Blorencia Daubert and Elvira Billinger. Jeanne Peter and Marilyn Waters also helped with the quilting.

## ‘An angel, Our Lady and our angels’



An Advent Day of Recollection was held at Liebenthal’s “Liebenhaus” on Wednesday, Dec. 7. Nine women attended from La Crosse, McCracken, Rush Center, and Liebenthal. The day was presented by Judy Hoffman, OPA (Dominican Associate); Louise Dechant helped facilitate.

The first of two themes presented examined the role of angels in salvation history and in our lives. The second looked at the impact of having to move, both near and far. Participants pondered how the Holy Family had to move from place to place, focusing on the journey to Bethlehem, then the hurried escape to Egypt, then their return to Nazareth.

The women were then invited to share their “moving” experiences.

Interestingly, some had never moved far from where they were born, always remain-

ing in this area. Others moved far away, only to eventually return here.

Much laughter accompanied Maggie Dechant’s description of the various locations in which she has lived. Born and raised in Vermont, her first big change was to go to college in Indiana. She recalled thinking how flat the land was. Then, when she came to La Crosse as a new bride, she exclaimed Kansas was “really flat!”

The day was filled with prayer, song, and sharing, remembering especially the victims and survivors of the attack on Pearl Harbor, and all the sick and shut-ins in the three parishes.

Those attending were: Maggie Dechant, Rita Oborny, Twila Herrman, Viola Deperschmidt, Rose Pfeifer, Louise Dechant, Carolyn Thompson, Elenora Moeder, and Judy Hoffman OPA.



# Rejoice!

*For a child is born to us...*

*Upon his Shoulder, dominion rests.*

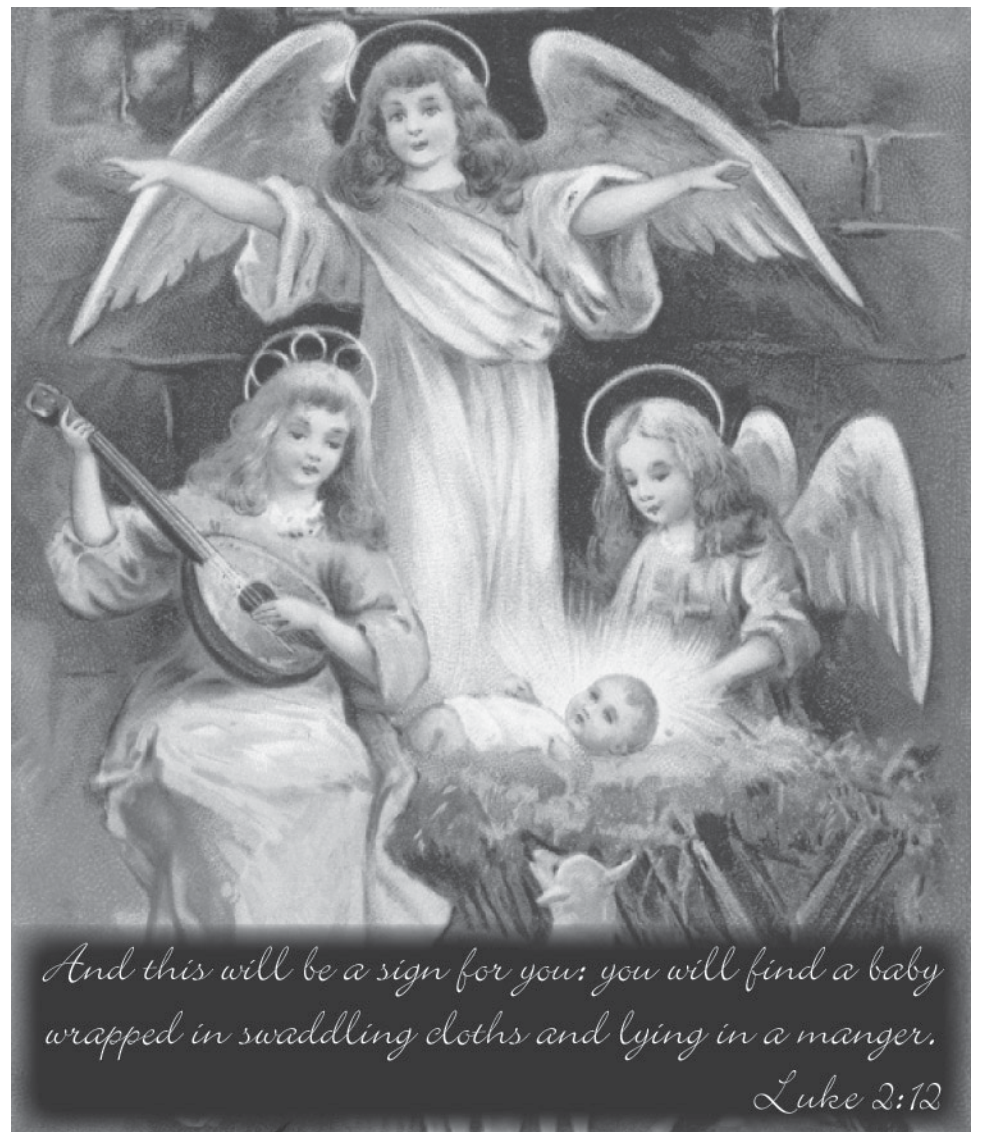
*They name him Wonder-Counselor,*

*God-Hero, Father-Forever,*

*Prince of Peace.*

*Isaiah 9:5*

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*And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.*

*Luke 2:12*

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