

## The Church and Mental Illness, Part 1

A personal tragedy led Deacon Ed Shoener to become a founding member of the Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers. His daughter Katie, who suffered from mental illness, committed suicide in 2016. Since then, Deacon Ed has worked to destigmatize conversations about mental health in church circles.

During an interview with Father Dave Dwyer on *Sirius-XM's Busted Halo* radio show, Deacon Ed linked the current attitude on mental illness to the view of leprosy during Jesus's lifetime. He explained, "Leprosy was perceived as something that was the fault of the person that had it, or maybe the fault of their parents. It wasn't understood as an illness."

Deacon Ed noted that Jesus saw through this prejudice and helped those who were isolated and suffering, and we are called to do the same: "The rates of anxiety and depression, suicidal ideation, the deaths by suicide in this country—all of this is on the rise. And I'm absolutely convinced that the Holy Spirit wants the Church to be in the midst of this." More tomorrow...

**Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2)**

*Redeemer, may we seek to comfort and help those struggling with mental illness.*

## The Church and Mental Illness, Part 2

In the wake of his daughter Katie's suicide, Deacon Ed Shoener helped arrange a "suicide remembrance and healing Mass" in his home diocese of Scranton, Pennsylvania, to help other families in need of Christ's comfort in this tragic situation. He hopes this healing practice spreads around the country.

"People long to be able to publicly mourn in a liturgical celebration in the church," Deacon Ed said on the *Busted Halo* radio show. "It was just so moving. You'd see entire families coming up in memory of a loved one."

Deacon Ed also hopes that parishes create their own mental health ministries so that those suffering from these challenges can find prayerful support. However, he notes, prayer alone cannot heal mental illness.

He concluded, "You're not a bad Catholic if you see a therapist. You're not a bad Catholic if you take antidepressants or anxiety meds. It's not like you have a lack of faith in God because you're doing these things. If anything, you can recognize that a lot of these things are in fact gifts from God to you to help you heal."

**The tongue of the wise brings healing.  
(Proverbs 12:18)**

*Guide those with mental illness towards healing, Jesus.*

## A Valedictorian's Secret Life

When he was six years old, Griffin Furlong watched his mother die of cancer. After her passing, his family descended into poverty and homelessness, as his father struggled to find work and then got injured on a job. With the family in and out of homeless shelters and going hungry at times, Griffin and his older brother, Sean, formed a strong bond as they kept their situation secret from their peers at school.

Upon graduating high school, Griffin was named valedictorian. When news stories revealed his family's situation, people were shocked to realize that such a great student had faced so many challenges. He went on to receive a full academic scholarship to Florida State University and eventually achieved his goal of becoming a civil engineer.

Now, as he writes his memoir, he dreams of lifting his entire family out of poverty and finally relieving his father from the burden of working difficult, low-paying jobs. At one point in his youth, Griffin wrote on the bill of his baseball cap, "Just never give up." Those words came to define his life.

**Take courage!...Your work shall be rewarded.  
(2 Chronicles 15:7)**

*Strengthen me to endure my struggles and thrive, Jesus.*

## The Spiritual Discipline of ‘Star Wars’

Growing up, William P. Hyland was a huge fan of the *Star Wars* movies. He felt especially drawn to the Jedi characters, who were like warrior monks that used a mysterious Force to help others. Hyland also held an admiration for medieval Christian monasticism, which offered “a contemplative way of life that would nurture my faith,” he wrote in *Plough* magazine.

As an adult, Hyland has come to see similarities between the Jedi and Christian monastics, noting they both ground themselves in special vows and spiritual discipline. In addition, he pointed out, “Both groups bound themselves by lifelong commitments to personal poverty, possessing nothing except what they needed to fulfill the tasks given to them by their authority figures.”

“Finally, vows of celibacy and chastity are seen as essential to their discipline of devotion to a higher power, be it the Force or God. These vows are not ends in themselves—they facilitate, in the Christian context, love of God and neighbor on the way to salvation, and in the Jedi context, a life of sacrificial service, compassion and justice.”

**Train yourself in godliness. (1 Timothy 4:7)**

*Help me practice spiritual disciplines, Creator.*

## Baseball Star Aaron Judge Walks by Faith

New York Yankees' slugger Aaron Judge achieved an epic 2022 by hitting 62 home runs, thereby breaking the American League record previously held by Roger Maris, who had hit 61 homers in a single season. Though Judge is talented, he also credits his faith with leading him to success.

The 30-year-old praised his parents, Wayne and Patty, who adopted Judge at birth, along with his older biological brother. As reported in the *Daily Citizen*, Judge said, "I feel they kind of picked me. I feel that God was the one that matched us together."

Judge had his family cheering him on when he accomplished his record-breaking feat. He also relied on one particular Bible verse, which builds him up in moments of weakness: "We walk by faith, not by sight."

"It's one of my favorite Bible verses," Judge said. "[I] try to live my life by it, and always trust the Man above and what He's got in store for us. We never know what's around the corner, but if we have faith in Him, He will lead us in the right direction."

**We walk by faith, not by sight.  
(2 Corinthians 5:7)**

*Loving Jesus, help us to walk in faith, even when we can't see the road ahead.*

## Kindness on the Checkout Line

Jason Boudreaux of Breaux Bridge, Louisiana, had just deposited his paycheck in his bank account and assumed the money would be there one hour later when he was ready to pay for his groceries at Cade's Market. But his debit card got declined for insufficient funds. That's when Kevin Jones, a man Boudreaux had chatted with on the checkout line, chimed in to say, "I got you," and paid for his order.

Boudreaux was deeply appreciative and promised to pay Jones back. But the good-hearted truck driver didn't want the money. He told *Today.com*, "Not having the right amount of funds to pay for groceries, I know that feeling. I see a lot of people going through that, and not a lot of people are willing to make a sacrifice and step up and help the next person."

As thanks, Boudreaux invited Jones and his wife over to his home for a celebration. He describes their relationship now as "brothers." Jones added, "I live by a motto: 'If I got it, you got it.' Doesn't matter your color, doesn't matter to me. We brothers and sisters from different people."

**A generous person will be enriched.  
(Proverbs 11:25)**

*Remind me to reach out to a brother or sister in need, Loving Lord.*

## **‘The Sacrament of the Present Moment’**

Some people spend a lot of time either dwelling on the past or obsessing about the future. But Father Bob Colaresi, Spiritual Director for the Society of the Little Flower, recommends, “Be attentive...to the sacrament of the present moment.”

Father Bob has found that contemplative prayer allows him to do this because “when we quiet ourselves, and let the truth of God dwelling deep within us be experienced, we find that He is always and already there.”

Writing in the Society’s *Between Friends* newsletter, Father Bob points to the prophet Elijah as another example of learning to live in the present. Elijah was preoccupied with pursuing both God and success. This pursuit became an obstacle that left him distracted.

“[Not] until God taught him to be still and quiet,” explained Father Bob, “to calm all the noise and expectations within him, was [Elijah] able to experience the gentle breeze, the silent and intimate whisper of God! Then he could see—and be the beloved prophet of God!”

**Be still, and know that I am God! (Psalm 46:10)**

*Creator, help me to shut out the noise around me to focus on Your ever-present love.*

## The Value of a Newspaper

Newspapers—the kind printed on actual paper—seem to be out of fashion in the U.S. However, Rutgers University English literature professor J.T. Barbarese still values them, due partially to his time as a newspaper delivery boy in his youth.

Writing in New York's *Daily News*, Barbarese recalled beginning his day at 6:30 a.m. to pick up that morning's papers in his wagon. He carried three pages of handwritten addresses with him to make sure he fulfilled all his deliveries. One day, however, he came home with an extra newspaper, meaning he had accidentally missed one house.

The youngster might have let things be, but his mother pointed out that people who paid his salary depended on that newspaper for information, and he wouldn't be getting breakfast until he corrected his mistake. And so, Barbarese retraced his steps until he found the home he had skipped.

“I've been in love with newspapers all my life,” Barbarese concluded, “partly because I delivered them and learned early on their necessary place in a democracy...My newspaper is too valuable to permit to disappear.”

**Good news refreshes the body. (Proverbs 15:30)**

*May I value the power of good journalism,  
Divine Wisdom.*



## Short-term Sacrifice for Long-term Goal

Desmond Durham believes in making short-term sacrifices for long-term goals. That's why the 36-year-old single father from New Jersey decided to pursue his Master's degree at Montclair State University while working three jobs.

As reported by *Good Morning America*, Durham has worked as an educator for the past 13 years, but he wants to pursue a job as a principal in order to help the young people in his community and build a better life for his son as well.

In May 2023, Durham graduated with a Master's in arts and educational leadership and was asked to give the Commencement address. He spoke of his mother instilling him with a love for learning—and revealed that his father's murder when he was 11 motivated him to be a good father himself.

Durham concluded by telling his fellow graduates, “Find something that you love that's going to help you ignite that flame to keep going. You have to know why you do what you do, and as long as you know your ‘why,’ it's gonna drive you every single day.”

**The purposes in the human mind are like deep water, but the intelligent will draw them out.  
(Proverbs 20:5)**

*Ignite the flame of purpose inside me, Creator.*

## Helping the Blind Grow in Faith

A degenerative eye disease hasn't kept 20-year-old Zachary Thibodeaux from pursuing an education or growing in his faith, thanks to the Xavier Society for the Blind.

As reported by Joan Kurkowski-Gillen of the *North Texas Catholic*, the Xavier Society was founded in 1900 and began printing books in braille for blind students. That mission continues, aided today by new technologies such as audiobooks and downloadable files that can be read by a braille display device.

The Xavier Society also creates “Mass propers” (the braille equivalent of church missalettes for Mass) and other books about the Catholic faith. Thibodeaux has been using these materials since he studied for his first Communion at age eight.

Now a student at Yale University, he said, “Some people in the blind community can feel helpless—not just in church but in every aspect of their life. It’s crucial for your psychological well-being to build a relationship with God, the Church, and the community. The Xavier Society helps me do that.”

**I will lead the blind by a road they do not know. (Isaiah 42:16)**

*Help me to grow in faith despite obstacles,  
Savior.*

## Interfaith Help for the Hungry

In Newark, New Jersey, two different church traditions joined together to help those in need. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) joined forces with Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Newark to bring more than 40,000 pounds of food from Salt Lake City to the hungry in Bergen County, New Jersey.

The donations came from farms, ranches, and processing facilities run by the LDS Church, which describes itself as having a “covenant commitment to live the two great commandments: to love God and to love our neighbor. We follow Jesus Christ’s call to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, take in the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and afflicted.”

As reported in *Jersey Catholic*, the food was distributed to clients in homeless shelters, mental health programs, and food pantries. “This alignment with another Christian Church feels right,” John Westervelt, CEO of Catholic Charities, said. “I am happy we have this opportunity to work together.”

**Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? (Matthew 7:9)**

*Help me see what unites us, Lord, rather than what divides.*

## Celebrating a Mom's Selflessness

Each year, prior to Mother's Day, *Good Morning America* celebrates a mom somewhere in the U.S. whose love and selflessness are admired by many in her community. In 2023, that honor went to Kristin Jones of Denton, Texas.

The mother of two teenage sons and stepmom to a nine-year-old girl was praised for her deep devotion to her kids and her involvement with the civic organization Jack and Jill of America, which empowers young people, ages two to 19, through education, community, and service projects.

Jones's brother, who has been legally blind all his life, calls Kristin his "protector" because she has walked beside him and encouraged him in all he has been able to accomplish in life.

Jones is also a loving daughter. When her mom was diagnosed with cancer at the start of the COVID pandemic and received a stem cell transplant, Jones traveled to Kansas to clean and sanitize her parent's house. Her mom Janice said, "She makes me so proud that God gave me her to love."

**Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all. (Proverbs 31:29)**

*Guide and strengthen all mothers, Holy Spirit.*

## Parenting a Child with Disabilities, Part 1

When Anitra Rowe Schulte gave birth to her first daughter (whom she calls “Miss E” to preserve her privacy), she wasn’t prepared for a child with a rare chromosomal condition called Wolf-Hirschhorn syndrome. Wolf-Hirschhorn impacts one in 50,000 births, Anitra explained to The Christophers. It manifests itself through low muscle tone, facial differences, congenital heart defects, communication delays, problems ingesting food, seizures, and requiring a wheelchair to get around.

Anitra notes that she and her husband, Dan, felt “isolated and alone, and were really struggling to find resources” during her daughter’s early days. It wasn’t until Anitra was referred to the website *WolfHirschhorn.org* that they found a community of people, who helped guide and support them through issues, such as Miss E’s heart defect and her need for a feeding tube.

With time and prayer, Anitra has built a fulfilling life for Miss E, while also creating a more welcoming and inclusive world for other children and families dealing with disability.

**Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds. (Hebrews 10:24)**

*Paraclete, send families dealing with disability the strength and support they need.*

## Parenting a Child with Disabilities, Part 2

In addition to the community that Anitra Rowe Schulte found to guide her through her daughter Miss E's Wolf-Hirschhorn syndrome, she also found sustenance in her Christian faith. Every day, Anitra would pray, "God, can You please help me through this day? I want to help my girl grow. This is outside of what I feel like I can do. How can You take the wheel here?"

Anitra added, "As a first-time parent, I didn't know about parenthood in general. But when my daughter had seizures in those early years and her life feels like it's in your hands, it was such a relief to know it's not. She was in my hands, but she was also in [God's] hands...It gave us a sense of peace to know that."

As the years passed, Miss E started being fed through a feeding tube. She struggled with speech delays, but has learned to communicate through gestures and the PODD Communication Book. Miss E also uses a wheelchair to get around. Perhaps most importantly, Anitra and her husband went on to have two more daughters, who have become Miss E's biggest supporters and companions.

**Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you. (Psalm 55:22)**

*Lord, may we lift all our worries to Your infinite care.*

## Parenting a Child with Disabilities, Part 3

In order to both educate and entertain children, Anitra Rowe Schulte wrote a book based on her experiences raising her daughter, Miss. E, who has Wolf-Hirschhorn syndrome. The book is called *Dancing with Daddy*, and it earned a 2022 Christopher Award for Anitra and illustrator Ziyue Chen.

The story was inspired by Anitra's husband taking all three of their daughters to a school dance. The book highlights Miss E picking out a dress in the store, eating dinner with her family, and dancing with her father despite being in a wheelchair.

Though Miss E has physical disabilities, the book shows that her mind and imagination are rich. When some people see Miss E's physical challenges, they assume that she is mentally disabled as well. Anitra is working to move society beyond that assumption. Though Miss E is non-verbal, she communicates through gestures and in other ways. When Anitra speaks in schools, this is a message that students are particularly open to.

**Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment. (John 7:24)**

*Holy Spirit, increase my respect for, and understanding of, individuals with disabilities.*

## Parenting a Child with Disabilities, Part 4

To advance her goal of greater acceptance of children with disabilities, Anitra Rowe Schulte works for The Nora Project, which operates primarily in a school setting.

During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, she explained, “They have developed this incredible... curriculum that helps people understand disability culture...Then they use that to create conversations about empathy, understanding, and experiences for kids to be together and learning about each other, fostering friendships.”

When Anitra began taking her daughter, Miss E, to Nora Project events, the youngster experienced the joys of socialization by making friends with other kids her age. The impact of these gatherings was also immense for the community.

Whereas before, people would often be afraid to approach Miss E because they didn’t know how to react to her, The Nora Project taught them to be more welcoming and simply come up to say hello. “That’s exactly how friendships form, when we lean into each other,” Anitra noted.

**Let those who are friendly with you be many.  
(Sirach 6:6)**

*May I befriend people who are different from me, Christ.*



## Parenting a Child with Disabilities, Part 5

Creating a spiritual foundation for Miss E is also a priority for Anitra Rowe Schulte and her husband. Anitra explained, “My husband is Catholic...and we go to Mass. We also go to another church that is non-denominational Christian...that has a program that is supportive of individuals with disabilities and that [offers] support during Sunday school lessons...So, we’ve had this beautiful balance of both.”

“[Miss E] did go through the process to have First Communion and has done her Confession,” Anitra added. “Her augmentative communication has made that possible...We feel very strongly about making sure she has a rich religious life.”

For children and adults who read *Dancing with Daddy*, Anitra hopes they see that disabled children have all the same needs and feelings as non-disabled kids. She concluded, “I hope that kids with Wolf-Hirschhorn and other syndromes that require similar supports see themselves—and that they can celebrate who they are, as they definitely should.”

**Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life. (Proverbs 4:13)**

*May all people grow in the love and knowledge of God and one another.*

## The Sky's the Limit

It's not unusual for high school graduates to take on ever-greater challenges as they move to the next phase of their lives. But Ayden Sanchez, as a sophomore at the University of Southern California, certainly took on a mighty one: climbing Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa.

"I had an incredible opportunity offered to me," the graduate of Kennedy Catholic High School in Somers, New York, told the school's publication, *The Gael*.

What makes this accomplishment even more notable is that when Sanchez was a high school freshman, he learned he had epilepsy. That discovery changed his worldview.

"Ever since my original diagnosis," said Sanchez, "I have strived to not let this define me. If anything, it has been my personal call not to take any moment or opportunity for granted. What should have been a setback had the opposite effect and instilled in me the desire to take on any challenge as an opportunity to prove to myself that I am capable of anything that I put my mind to."

**Those who wait for the Lord...shall mount up with wings like eagles. (Isaiah 40:31)**

*Help those facing adversity live up to their potential, Lord.*

## Grandma Sees Through a Child's Eyes

Since becoming a grandmother, writer Valerie Schultz has come to see the truth in poet Ralph Waldo Emerson's poignant statement, "The world when seen through a little child's eyes, greatly resembles paradise."

Writing at *AmericaMagazine.org*, Schultz said, "From the moment of her birth, my granddaughter has retaught me one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we learn at Confirmation: a sense of wonder and awe."

Schultz admits that adulthood's anxieties and responsibilities have led her to overlook the world's simple joys. Yet her granddaughter takes such delight in the smallest things—from a squashed raspberry to the taste of fresh bread—that Schultz can't help but appreciate them anew herself.

Schultz concludes, "We like to say that God is in the details, but when I look with the wide-open eyes of a child, I understand the stripped-down theology that God **is** the details, and the details are amazing. God's hand winds the lovely cycle of mother-daughter-mother and we turn with it, full of wonder and awe, full of the grace that greatly resembles paradise."

**Tell of all His wonderful works. (Psalm 105:2)**

*Open my eyes to the wonders around me, Holy Spirit.*

## Vacant Lot Changes Lives

Tony Hillery was a successful businessman until a national financial crisis sank his company. His spirits also took a nose dive. “I got more and more isolated and withdrawn,” Hillery told Beth Levine for *AARP: The Magazine*. “My wife would go to work, come home 12 hours later, and I’m still in my pajamas.”

One day, Hillery read about the negative effects that lack of financial means had on some Harlem school children. It was easy to find fast food in their neighborhood, but not healthy food. Hillery contacted the principal and went on to change the course of his own life, as well as many others.

Hillery got the rights to a nearby unused park, enlisted the children, and together learned how to create a garden. It blossomed into Harlem Grown, a nonprofit with several urban farms that annually produce 6,000 pounds of healthy food.

“I came into this thinking that when I had money, I had success,” Hillery concluded. “But these kids truly changed the way I look at the world. I didn’t save them; they saved me.”

**Plant gardens and eat what they produce.  
(Jeremiah 29:5)**

*Creator, inspire us to see possibilities for change, even in places where it seems impossible.*

## Words to Remember

Shortly after his 24th birthday, Peter Martin of Maine was killed in a senseless car accident. His family was deeply saddened. But Peter himself—through his own words—helped them in their grief.

Peter Martin had started to keep a journal as his way of charting his spiritual development. On his 24th birthday, he wrote, “The Lord put us here in this world to make it a better one, not a worse one.”

Peter’s family kept his memory alive by reading his words. And through them, Peter continued to make this world a better place.

Keeping a journal is a good idea, especially if you record your best thoughts. It can be of immediate help in your own spiritual development and a great source of comfort to others who might one day draw strength from your words.

**The memory of the righteous is a blessing.  
(Proverbs 10:7)**

*Holy Spirit, may I be an inspiration, however humble, to those who come after me.*

## Show Your Workers Appreciation

Employees who truly feel appreciated create a positive workplace, according to author and leadership coach Lolly Daskal.

Here are some of her suggestions:

- Recognize hard work and a job well done regularly, even daily.
- Value individual and team growth. This might include team-building activities and outings, as well as providing opportunities for professional development.
- Provide a sense of purpose. Help workers give back to the community through volunteering opportunities.
- Make it heartfelt. “Showing appreciation isn’t just about grand gestures or big awards,” Daskal writes. Even a simple “thank you” lets your workers know you value their contributions.

**With upright heart He tended them, and guided them with skillful hand. (Psalm 78:72)**

*Remind us, Father, that good leaders can contribute to workers feeling appreciated, creating a better environment for all.*

## Sweet Honey in the Convent

The All Saints Sisters of the Poor in Catonsville, Maryland, find themselves in a sticky situation every summer. That's because they spend five hours a day bottling honey that is produced by the bees on their convent's property.

As reported by George P. Matysek Jr. of *Catholic News Service*, this venture began in 2019 when two amateur beekeepers, whose homes border the Sisters' property, asked if they could establish beehives there. These neighbors tend the hives and extract the honey, while the Sisters bottle it for sale.

Superior General Mother Emily Ann Lindsey explained the spiritual dimension behind the Sisters' work: "When you are interacting with creation, you are actually partaking in that creation in a different way. It feeds us spiritually because it brings us closer to our Lord through what He's created."

Sister Deborah Rose Rosado added, "The process of working with nature and having this honey...is very meditative. God created these tiny little creatures that are doing so much and working so hard."

**We came to the land to which You sent us; it flows with milk and honey. (Numbers 13:27)**

*Creator, may we learn to preserve life's sweetness.*

## Retiring Educator Celebrated

After 56 years on the job, Ellen Fox retired as Head of School Emeritus at Montessori Academy of New Jersey in Delran, the school she had founded. She passed the torch to her daughter, Jennie, who organized a special goodbye ceremony for her mother to thank her for all her years of service.

Ellen founded the school in the 1960s. After researching various methods of education, she came across the Montessori method. “It’s a very different approach,” she told *ABC News*. “We provide the stimulus, we provide the guidance, but children, in the long run, educate themselves.”

All seven of Ellen’s children attended the school, including Jennie, the youngest, who is taking over. Jennie arranged a special night to celebrate her mother’s 56-year journey with the school, and the building was dedicated in her mother’s honor.

Ellen says proudly that her daughter will be, “continuing with the same love for children and for Montessori as I experienced.”

**If I have found favor in Your sight, show me Your ways. (Exodus 33:13)**

*God, entrust me to pass the torch after a lifetime of service.*



## Put Me In, Coach

After working for the U.S. Postal Service for nearly 40 years, 56-year-old Jim Fullan needed a new focus for his life. That's when the father of three and grandfather of nine looked to the past in order to determine his future.

During his youth, Fullan had always felt a passion for baseball and would have loved to have played college ball. But when he didn't make the team at Bishop Egan High School in Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania, he gave up on his dream.

This dream resurfaced upon Fullan's retirement, so he explored various schools at which he could earn his college degree—and that would also be open to him joining their baseball team. He found a welcoming atmosphere at Montgomery County Community College.

As reported by the *Today Show*, Fullan's teammates are all more than 30 years younger than him, but they value his presence and wisdom. He concluded, "It's nice to have dreams of doing things, but when you actually do them, it's so fulfilling."

**May He grant you your heart's desire, and fulfill all your plans. (Psalm 20:4)**

*Guide us toward worthwhile goals, regardless of our age, Father.*

## Let Us Do Good Village

Danielle Thornton was devastated by the death of her husband, Army Sergeant Robert Thornton Jr., who collapsed during a training exercise at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. It was later discovered that he had an enlarged heart.

With two children to raise by herself, Danielle needed material, emotional, and spiritual support to get through this dark time. That's when the Tunnel to Towers Foundation stepped in.

The Foundation had already launched an initiative to create "Let Us Do Good Village," a property in Land O' Lakes, Florida, which will eventually consist of 100 mortgage-free homes that will be gifted to wounded veterans, Fallen First Responder families, and Gold Star families like the Thorntons.

In 2022, Danielle and her kids became the first recipients to move in. She said, "I prayed many nights that I would find a way for my children and myself to heal, and I believe this community is just what we need. It won't take the pain away, but it is a starting point in being able to be around families...that understand the daily struggles we endure."

**Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2)**

*Father, bring healing to those walking through grief.*

## **This Day of Remembrance**

In 2023, Deacon Greg Kandra delivered an invocation at his local Memorial Day parade in Forest Hills, New York. Here is an excerpt:

“God of remembrance, give us comfort and consolation on this day of remembrance, as we honor those who have gone before us: men and women, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, those who served this great nation with courage and selflessness and duty. We owe them a debt we can never repay.”

“Gracious God, we ask You to hold them in Your loving embrace, as we bow our heads and pray to be worthy of their sacrifice. We also offer one more humble prayer: a prayer for peace. We pray for swords to become plowshares, for guns to fall silent, for mothers to no longer weep for the children they have lost on battlefields.”

“On this beautiful springtime morning, we look to You with grateful hearts full of hope, and pray for this above all: Teach us to be instruments of peace. Amen.”

**Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His faithful ones. (Psalm 116:15)**

*Welcome the souls of those who died serving their country into Your loving embrace, Creator.*

## Exploring the Real Presence, Part 1

Deacon Dennis Lambert grew up in a very Catholic household. His parents were active volunteers in their church, attended Mass every week, and always invited priests and nuns to celebrations in their home.

In addition, Lambert attended Catholic schools in their Mundelein, Illinois community, where he found his faith growing under the influence of one of his high school teachers, Father Tom Drolet.

During his college years, however, Lambert developed some issues with the Catholic Church and found answers with Christians from Protestant denominations. As he recalled during a *Christopher Closeup* interview, he values the welcome they gave him, as well as all that he learned about Scripture during his two years with them, but he couldn't help but feel unsatisfied with some of their responses to his deep theological questions.

Lambert finally decided to schedule a meeting with someone at his old parish church in Mundelein to discuss his issues. This turned out to be a meeting that changed his life.

**Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. (2 Corinthians 13:5)**

*Jesus, guide me through my doubts to faith in You.*

## Exploring the Real Presence, Part 2

After leaving his Catholic faith for two years to join a Protestant denomination, Dennis Lambert felt unsatisfied. So, he scheduled a meeting with someone at his old parish church to discuss his spiritual questions.

That person turned out to be the new associate pastor, who was none other than Father Tom Drolet, Dennis's old high school teacher who had brought the faith alive to him in his youth. Father Tom did that again, prompting Dennis to return to the fold, which brought great joy to his parents.

Dennis noted that his parents never condemned him for seeking his own spiritual path: "My dad did express that he felt it was an error that I was making, but pretty much you've got to discover this for yourself. He never stopped praying for me."

"I remember the day I returned. I walked down the [church] aisle, there were my parents pretty close up front. I slip into the pew behind them, tap my dad on the shoulder, and I said, 'Dad, I'm back.' He turned to me and said, 'I was just praying for you to return.'...It was an unbelievable moment."

**You have returned to the shepherd. (1 Peter 2:25)**

*Guide parents in dealing with their children's spiritual questions, Father.*

## Exploring the Real Presence, Part 3

After he returned to the Catholic faith, Dennis Lambert struggled with the Church's teaching on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. While he clearly saw the Eucharist as a way of remembering Jesus's sacrifice, accepting that the consecrated host was the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ took a lot more time and effort. His extensive research led him to share his personal story and findings in his book *For Real? Christ's Presence in the Eucharist*.

Lambert uses a "relay race" metaphor in the book. It begins with the words of Jesus. Then, the relay baton is passed to the apostles and what they taught. Next, the baton is handed to the early Church fathers who led the Church after the apostles. Their writings clearly say, "This is Christ's body and blood."

In the final leg, the baton goes to the Church of today. Is what Jesus, the apostles, and the Church fathers taught still taught today? It is, explained Lambert: "In the famous words of the four prophets, the Talking Heads, 'Same as it ever was. Same as it ever was.'"

**The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10:16)**

*Help me understand difficult doctrines, Jesus.*

## Exploring the Real Presence, Part 4

Some of the key points Deacon Dennis Lambert makes in his book *For Real? Christ's Presence in the Eucharist* stem from looking at Scriptural translations from the original Greek and the context in which they were used.

This is true in the case of John 6, where Jesus refers to Himself as “the bread of life,” adding, “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life.” The word Jesus uses for “eat,” when referring to eating His flesh, is “trogon,” which means to “gnaw.” This would be an odd choice if He were speaking metaphorically, noted Deacon Dennis during a *Christopher Closeup* interview.

And when Jesus gives us the Lord's prayer, specifically the line “Give us this day our daily bread,” the original translation of “daily” in this context was “supersubstantial,” an indication that this was something unique and divine.

Revisiting the Last Supper, however, brings an even clearer understanding of Jesus's intention. More tomorrow...

**Give us this day our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11)**

*Feed my body and my soul, Jesus.*