

Engage in Productive Boredom

Boredom is often viewed in a negative way. For instance, there's the old adage that "an idle mind is the devil's workshop." But sometimes, boredom can be God's workshop instead.

At *Aleteia*, Daniel Esparza notes that "productive boredom" can be a good thing from a Catholic perspective. It allows us to slow down, look inward, and contemplate our lives and the world around us. Isaac Newton discovered the law of gravity, for instance, not when he was actively looking for it, but when an apple fell on his head. For him, stillness led to discovery.

Esparza writes, "Allowing oneself time for unstructured exploration, even unstructured prayer, or simply gazing at the clouds affirms this fundamental truth. It is in these moments of seemingly unproductive time that we can reconnect with ourselves, with God, and rediscover the value in the ordinary."

"When faced with a seemingly unproductive stretch of time, it is advisable to embrace it. Allow your mind to wander, be present in the moment, and trust that even in the quiet, something positive might emerge."

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

Help me find moments of quiet contemplation, Lord, and may they lead to the discovery of important truths.

A Safe Haven for Kids

“A safe haven for kids to stay off the streets and out of trouble.” That’s how *CBS New York* describes New Jersey’s Salvation Army Newark Westside Corps Books and Basketball Program. Run by Muhammad Oliver, the program provides young people with opportunities for tutoring, learning, and fun.

Oliver explained, “Programs like this save lives. If you give a kid an option and let them know what they could be doing, it keeps them off the streets. The more kids we keep off the streets, keep active and in positive situations and positive environments, the more kids we can save.”

Malachi Thomas, age 18, finds that Books and Basketball offers a sheltering and nurturing environment. He said, “Newark is not really safe. You come and play basketball, and you just get a lot off your mind.”

The program runs on donations, and no child is turned away. Oliver concluded, “I was a kid who needed help growing up, and a lot of people were a part of...my story, so I just try to be that helping hand for anybody who needs it.”

**He brought them to their desired haven. Let them thank the Lord for His steadfast love.
(Psalm 107:30-31)**

Guide children toward havens of love and safety, Lord.

To Do Some Good for Someone Else

Jim Cava, a Vietnam veteran, was badly injured when his helicopter was shot down. He lost an arm, his legs were crushed, and his back was fractured in three places. He spent eight months in a hospital.

It took four years of therapy before he was able to walk. Yet he was so determined that he constantly pushed himself. He began jogging and got to the point where he could run in the New York City Marathon. But he didn't run for himself.

Cava obtained hundreds of sponsors so he could raise funds for a residence for homeless youngsters. He did it, he said, "to do some good for someone else."

Cava learned an important lesson in all this: namely, that thinking of others is what makes life worthwhile. Good advice for all of us.

**Of how much more value is a human being!...
So it is lawful to do good. (Matthew 12:12)**

*Jesus, how can we do good to those who need
our caring?*

The House I Live In

In 1945, after World War II had ended, a short film titled *The House I Live In* was released to combat antisemitism in the U.S. Starring Frank Sinatra, it showed the singer coming out of a recording session and witnessing 10 kids chasing one boy in order to beat him up.

Sinatra intervenes and asks what's going on. "We don't like his religion," one boy answers, suggesting their intended victim is Jewish. Sinatra is appalled, but decides to take a more tactful approach with the kids.

"People all over the world worship God in many different ways," Sinatra explains. "God created everybody. He didn't create one people better than another. Your blood's the same as mine, and mine's the same as his."

Sinatra goes on to sing the film's title song, which begins: "What is America to me?/A name, a map, or a flag I see./A certain word: democracy./What is America to me?/The house I live in./A plot of earth, a street, the grocer and the butcher, and the people that I meet,/The children in the playground, the faces that I see,/All races and religions, that's America to me."

**God created humankind in His image.
(Genesis 1:27)**

*God, continue shedding Your grace on these
United States.*

A Plant Assassin's Hope and Prayer, Part 1

Simcha Fisher calls herself a “plant assassin.” As much as she loves house plants, she rarely succeeds at keeping them alive. As an example, she pointed to her “little fig tree,” which she forgot to bring inside before the first frost.

Writing at *Our Sunday Visitor*, Fisher explained, “The poor thing turned brown, all the leaves fell off, and it went from a luxurious, broad-leaved beauty to a dry stick in a pot.”

After plants had died in the past, Fisher would simply throw them out. But she had grown attached to this fig tree, so she took a different approach.

She wrote, “I kept watering it and letting it get some sunlight and warm air, and after a week or two, lo and behold! It wasn’t dead after all. It wasn’t in great shape, but it was very willing to make an effort. So I kept caring for it, and there are now eight little tender baby leaves budding out of the dry stem, and it is a delight to see.”

While this seems like a lesson on plant care, Fisher relates it to a withered prayer life. That part of the story tomorrow.

**From the fig tree learn its lesson.
(Matthew 24:32)**

God, remind us all good things are worth the effort.

A Plant Assassin's Hope and Prayer, Part 2

Simcha Fisher succeeded in nurturing her seemingly dead fig tree back to life. She noted that metaphorically watering and nurturing your prayer life—or rather, lack of a prayer life if that's the case—can also restore you spiritually.

If you haven't prayed for a while, you might start by sticking with the basics, Fisher advised in *Our Sunday Visitor*: "There's a reason people like the Rosary or grace before meals or the Angelus or the mercy chaplet. They're basic and achievable, and it's really pretty easy to keep them going."

Fisher also recommended establishing a routine based on your strengths and weaknesses. Since her phone is her weakness, she makes it a point not to turn it on until she says her morning prayers. In addition, people should put reminders to pray where they will be most noticed, depending on their daily lives.

Finally, if your attempts at prayer are initially unsuccessful, just start over. God is a great granter of second (and third and fourth) chances because He wants you to bloom to your full potential.

**They are like trees planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season. (Psalm 1:3)**

*Guide me in building a spiritually fruitful
life, Holy Spirit.*

A Blue Sky Attitude

Our attitudes and outlook can affect the atmosphere around us. We might compare the situation to the way the earth's atmosphere colors the sunlight. Sunlight is made up of all colors. But the particles of the air scatter the blue light waves (which are short) more than the red and other colors (which are longer). And since it is mostly blue light waves that bounce off the particles and reach our eyes, the sky looks blue.

In somewhat the same way, everyday events impact our lives and bounce off in the way we react to them, coloring other people's views of life. Have you ever noticed how individuals who show enthusiasm have an encouraging effect on those around them, just as those who react with pessimism tend to dishearten others?

Psychologists have observed that kind, loving parents produce an atmosphere conducive to trust, affection, and self-confidence. Those who are harsh or uncaring produce an atmosphere that stunts the emotional growth of their children. So, let's try to reflect positive, constructive attitudes that will help others see life's blue skies.

**A cheerful heart is a good medicine.
(Proverbs 17:22)**

May I be a source of light and kindness to others, Lord.

Black Belts Save the Day

It was a typical summer afternoon at the family-owned Yong-In Tae Kwon Do Academy, located in Katy, Texas. Han and Hong An, and their children, Hannah, Simon, and Christian, were going about their business when they heard a woman's piercing scream coming from the adjacent cell phone store.

Simon, age 21, and his father, an "eighth-degree black belt...and veteran of the South Korean military," raced next door to find a man assaulting a woman.

Using their taekwondo skills, Simon and Grandmaster Han were able to subdue and hold the perpetrator for 10 minutes until the police arrived. In the meantime, Hong and her daughter took the woman to the safety of their dojo to recover.

The media called them heroes, but Simon just hoped, along with his parents, that "anyone—regardless of their black belt status," would do the same to "help the person in need."

"My life is taekwondo," patriarch Han An humbly concluded to *KHOU News*. "I'm very proud of my family."

Defend...the...needy. (Proverbs 31:9)

Abba, inspire our youth to stand up for those in need.

Catch of the Day

When 14-year-old Connor Halsa felt a giant tug on his fishing pole in the middle of Minnesota's Lake of the Woods, his first thought was that he had hooked one massive fish. Instead, with his cousin's help, Connor proved to have netted a thick billfold with an even tidier haul: \$2,000, to be exact. "My dad said we should give it to the person [who lost it]," Halsa told *WDAY TV News*, "and I said we should, too."

As it happened, there was a business card uncovered with this stack of money, identifying the owner of the wallet as "Jim Denney, a farmer from Iowa who had done fishing on the lake a year before." Denney had intended to use this money as the final payment for his stay at a local resort, but while he was out on the water, it slipped out of the pocket of his overalls.

Connor refused the cash reward Denney offered him, so the farmer gifted the teen with a customized cooler and family dinner to show his gratitude. "I would take Connor as a grandson any day," Denney declared.

"We didn't work hard for the money," Connor humbly concluded, "[Mr. Denney] did. Be nice to everyone and give back."

Give, and it will be given to you. (Luke 6:38)

Abba, may we remember a good deed is its own reward.

Community Clean Up a Family Affair

“About five years ago, I was in a really dark place, and...about to take my own life at a riverside,” 33-year-old Scottish father of three Mike Scotland told *The Mirror*. “I was saved by a phone call that stopped me then and there—but after that, whenever I’d walk past that area where I’d wanted to end my life, I felt like a dark shadow was haunting me.”

To vanquish his gloomy feeling, Mike started doing something positive by the riverside: picking up litter. One day, he and a helpful bystander collected “three full black bags of litter together.” Their joint efforts ended with Mike telling his new friend he “was going to start a litter-picking group.”

He dubbed his organization Community Clean Up, and after meeting on a weekly basis for a few months, the group had “collected over 13,500 kg [29,762 lbs.] and a whopping 2,500 kg [5,511.5 lbs.] of metal from the river itself.” Six years later, they are still going strong. In addition, Mike and his six-year-old son, Lucio, sometimes dress up as Batman to go out and “fight the litter” together. Mike noted that he is excited to see all his children so willing to “make a difference.”

Let us work for the good of all. (Galatians 6:10)

Lord, may we remember that in unity, there is strength.

Tell Me a Story

CBS News sent correspondent David Begnaud to San Antonio, Texas, to find a story. So, Begnaud sat himself down in Pearl Park with a sign that read, “I’m looking for a story.” People were more than willing to share.

A woman named Denise approached him and revealed she was on vacation from Minnesota, accompanied by her husband, who has Alzheimer’s, and their grandchildren. Though her husband was a little more confused than usual, being with his grandchildren was a balm. Denise said, “We went to a doctor, and we talked about meds. And [the doctor] said, ‘I cannot prescribe for you a medication that will do anymore for him than being with the family’...And it’s true because he lights up.”

Begnaud also met Bethany, who runs a local business providing virtual homeschooling for kids. She noted a lesson she has learned the last few years that would apply to anyone: “There’s more than just work, sleep, repeat. There’s more to life than that. You only have 24 hours in a day. Your family, your spiritual health—that’s the most important thing.”

Teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart. (Psalm 90:12)

Help me cherish life’s most important elements, Paraclete.

A TV Legend's Kindness

Dick Van Dyke is a legendary entertainer and comedian. He is also known for having a kind heart. Consider this story shared on social media by actor Mark Hamill, best known for playing Luke Skywalker in the *Star Wars* series.

In 1974, several years before making *Star Wars*, Hamill was at CBS Television Studios working on a series. One day, his mother came to visit him, and they went for lunch in the commissary. That's when they spotted Van Dyke eating alone at a nearby table.

Hamill wrote, "He had no idea who I was, but when I went to his table to ask if I could bring [my mom] over to meet him because we were both longtime fans, I got a real shock. He asked me to point her out, and when I did, without asking, he immediately walked over to our table, sat down & proceeded to charm the socks off the both of us for almost 20 minutes, until I was due back on set. Needless to say, it was an experience we both treasured forever!"

Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility. (Colossians 3:12)

Help me go out of my way to show kindness to others, Paraclete.

Sawyer Swims for St. Jude

In 2016, five-year-old Sawyer Hansen was sitting on his parents' bed, watching TV with them. Suddenly, a commercial for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital appeared onscreen. Sawyer innocently asked if children really did "die from cancer," as the announcer on the television said.

Determined to be honest with their children, Sawyer's mother, Rebecca, answered, "Yes." From that moment on, Sawyer was inspired to help the kids at St. Jude. And on the advice of his parents, he decided to use his "talent for swimming" to do so, reported *stjudeinspire.org*. Thus, the Sawyer Swims for St. Jude fundraising page was born.

"It started off as, 'I want to raise \$500 and swim 100 lengths of the pool,'" Sawyer's father, Jay, recalled. "And he ended up that year at \$3,400, and swimming 100 lengths."

Since then, Sawyer has made it an ongoing goal to swim farther every year for the sake of these youngsters. "These kids, they deserve a life like I have," he concluded, "and that's what just sparked me to do this. I just believe that everyone deserves an equal chance."

**I have finished the race...kept the faith.
(2 Timothy 4:7)**

*Lord, may we be motivated by the selflessness
of our youth.*

What We Remember Will Be Saved, Part 1

In 2004, Texas-born Stephanie Saldaña moved to Syria to study as a Fulbright Scholar. She learned Arabic, met the man who would become her husband, and made many Christian and Muslim friends.

When Syria's civil war broke out in 2011, Stephanie was no longer living in the country, but knew many people who were.

"It was not a story about strangers," she explained during a *Christopher Closeup* interview. "It was a story about my friends, former neighbors, and former teachers, so I was personally invested."

"I'm also a member of the Syriac Catholic Church. And so, when Daesh, what we call ISIS, moved into northern Iraq [in 2014], and hundreds of thousands of people were displaced, many of them were from my church community... [I] wanted to figure out how to share some of those stories with the world."

Stephanie has now shared those stories in the Christopher Award-winning book *What We Remember Will Be Saved*. More tomorrow...

You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. (Exodus 22:21)

*Open my heart to the plight of refugees,
Creator.*

What We Remember Will Be Saved, Part 2

In order to escape the terrorist group ISIS, Syriac Catholics from Iraq's city of Qaraqosh (also known as Baghdeda) fled to Amman, Jordan, to resettle. Author Stephanie Saldaña traveled there to meet them and learn about their experiences as refugees.

She met Father Elian, the priest from Qaraqosh, who now ministered to his flock in this new country. Stephanie also attended the Mass he celebrated and was moved by the beauty of the choir singing in their homeland's language of Syriac, "a liturgical form of Aramaic."

During an interview about her Christopher Award-winning book *What We Remember Will Be Saved*, Stephanie described the Mass this way: "It was as if the space began to slowly be lit from the inside. One person after another began to sing along in Aramaic, first softly and then with more confidence, until the church was alive with the song of a people who—for a very brief moment—were home again."

**By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down
and there we wept when we remembered Zion.
(Psalm 137:1)**

*Lord, may displaced people around the world
find comfort and strength in Your presence
and love.*

What We Remember Will Be Saved, Part 3

Following the Syriac Catholic Mass in Amman, Jordan, Stephanie Saldaña met many refugees from Iraq, including Hana, who had created a dress unlike any that Stephanie had ever seen.

With bright colors, Hana had extensively embroidered her home city of Qaraqosh's history, traditions, and people into an article of clothing that could have hung in a museum as a work of art. It was her way of keeping her town's history alive for herself and others.

Stephanie explained, "So many people I'm writing about, they see themselves as part of a community. They're realizing that their communities are fragmenting, and so they're trying to find ways of holding their communities together. For [Hana], this is a dress for her, but also somehow for everyone she knows, for her town, for her family. It's an act of memory.

"ISIS was engaged in the project of destroying memory, targeting religious shrines of Muslims, of Christians, of Yazidis. And so, the people who were affected also set out on this incredible act of...resistance...saying, 'You don't have the power of destroying our memories, of destroying our pasts.'"

May their memory be blessed! (Sirach 46:11)

*Help us find ways to keep good memories alive,
Creator.*

What We Remember Will Be Saved, Part 4

Another aspect of Middle Eastern life featured in Stephanie Saldaña's Christopher Award-winning book about refugees, *What We Remember Will Be Saved*, is the prominence of interfaith friendships. Stephanie noted, "When people were displaced, one of the things they spoke to me the most often about was their devastation at losing their interfaith friendships."

"I have lived in the Middle East for nearly two decades, and that's certainly a deep part of my life: my relationships with people of other faiths, how we take care of each other during holidays, how we give each other gifts [and] greetings."

Stephanie recalled meeting Munir in the refugee camp Moria in Greece. He had lived in a Muslim and Christian neighborhood in Mosul, and protected his Christian neighbors when they were targeted for persecution in 2003.

"By putting these stories next to each other in one book," Stephanie said, "I wanted to preserve the feeling of what it was for us to be neighbors. Unfortunately, this migration that's happening means many of those friendships are now dispersed."

Love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 19:19)

God, may we seek to mend the fabric of broken friendships.

What We Remember Will Be Saved, Part 5

Despite the hardships and the horrors of war and genocide depicted in *What We Remember Will Be Saved*, author Stephanie Saldaña believes it is ultimately a hopeful book filled with “extraordinary human beings” who have managed “to remain good, and to remain kind, and to love.”

“I often think about the Dorothy Day quote,” Stephanie continued, “where she says... something about a single act of grace is more powerful than a cobalt bomb.”

Stephanie hopes the book helps readers put a human face on the stories of displaced people all over the world. She concluded, “I hope that they’ll come to understand this issue better. I hope that they’ll come to see refugees not as victims or as threats, but as gifts, as people who have a lot to teach us.

“Migration is really the issue of our times. I think a lot of people don’t want to talk about it, don’t want to think about it, and I hope that these people with their beautiful stories are offering a way in.”

Show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor. (Zechariah 7:9-10)

Lord, guide refugees on their journeys to belonging.

Camp No Limits

Santino Iamunno feels hesitant about meeting new people. It's not because the 11-year-old is antisocial, but rather because he always has to explain the noticeable fact that he was born without the majority of his right hand. At Camp No Limits, however, Santino feels comfortable because he fits right in.

As reported by Pat Eaton-Robb for the *Associated Press*, Camp No Limits was founded by physical therapist Mary Leighton in 2004 for children dealing “with limb loss or limb differences.” Though these kinds of programs exist in many states, Connecticut's group uses physical and occupational therapy students from Quinnipiac University as counselors.

Eaton-Robb writes, “[Campers] attend physical therapy sessions, learn about prosthetics and other equipment, and are taught life hacks such as how to tie their shoes, put their hair in a ponytail or climb stairs.” Campers—and their parents—also get to meet other families who are dealing with similar issues, making them feel like part of a greater community. Parent Rosanne Keep observed, “It's just good mentally.”

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)

Father, may children with limb differences find acceptance.

Sports Can Offer Religious Lessons

Sports and religion have numerous things in common. For instance, there's chanting, praying, and singing in stadiums, as well as churches. In an article for *Columbia Magazine*, Paul Hond writes about alumnus Gotham Chopra and his belief in the "power and profundity of sports."

Chopra, a writer and documentary maker, developed a project called Religion of Sports. He has interviewed top athletes and elicited their thoughts about their high achievements. They share what sports teach about life, such as the value of discipline and how to cope with loss.

Consider tennis icon Serena Williams, who has won 23 Grand Slam finals in her career. When Chopra asked her what quality most contributed to her success, she replied, "Showing up and doing the work. I can't tell you how many times I woke up and didn't want to go to the court to practice. But I did—I showed up, and I did the ritual even when I didn't want to."

Religion can be approached the same way. Even when we don't feel like praying or attending Mass or a church service, we can do it anyway because it strengthens our foundation of faith.

**The hand of the diligent will rule.
(Proverbs 12:24)**

Increase my commitment to practicing my faith, Yahweh.

A Model of Grit, Humor, and Loyalty

John, a longtime supporter of The Christophers from Valhalla, New York, recently sent a copy of an obituary to our office because the story behind it touched him.

The obit from *LoHud* briefly chronicled the life of George Berridge Jr., who had spent 49 years as a quadriplegic after suffering a diving accident at age 19. His injury might suggest George had a sad life, but this perception would be way off the mark. In fact, he is described as “displaying a remarkable combination of grit, humor, and loyalty,” and always entertaining those around him.

Professionally, George developed his skills as a writer and became a published humorist. On the personal front, family, friends, and strangers were drawn to his positive nature. His siblings, stepdaughter, and step-grandchildren relished his presence, as did his caregivers.

Alfred Attram was George’s caregiver every weeknight for 25 years. He noted in admiration, “George was just an amazing human being...We would all benefit by following his advice to ‘enjoy every sandwich.’”

**A cheerful heart is a good medicine.
(Proverbs 17:22)**

Help me endure challenges with grace, Savior.

Student Adopted by Principal

When Jason Smith, a Kentucky school principal, stepped outside his office in 2015, he saw 11-year-old Raven, who had just been suspended from the sixth grade for misbehaving. Little did he know that this encounter would change both of their lives.

“She was just this sweet looking, little innocent child sitting there, kind of defeated,” Smith told *Good Morning America*.

Smith uncovered that Raven was living in a group home after being bounced around in the foster care system for most of her life. Smith and his wife, Marybeth, agreed to foster Raven, and despite a rocky beginning, they grew into a loving family. They adopted Raven as their daughter in 2017.

Now, at age 20, Raven is a student at the University of Kentucky, where she is studying social work, a passion inspired by her own life. And Smith is so proud of the woman Raven has become. He said, “Given the proper support, love and affection, all children can be successful.”

Whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith. (Galatians 6:10)

Jesus, watch over all children in the foster care system and provide them with love and support.

A Real Lifesaver

Because Andrew Dibner remembered an incident from his youth, shut-ins and the aged can live a more independent life today.

Dibner once knew an elderly woman who lived alone. She had a stroke, but no one knew it, and she was left unattended for four days. Dibner couldn't forget what happened to her.

So, as a psychologist with an interest in electronics, he devised a system that automatically dials a hospital or other agency when a shut-in is unable to reset a small timing device they carry with them. It meant no one had to fear a blackout or accident anymore.

These are the medical alert systems that have become so well-known today. If you've ever seen the "I've fallen, and I can't get up" commercial, you know Dibner's legacy.

Independence is important for the aged and convalescent. Is there a way you can help one person feel more independent?

**The Lord is compassionate and merciful; He...
saves in time of affliction. (Sirach 2:11)**

*May we reflect Your compassion and mercy,
Lord, and help the afflicted.*

Loose Ends: A Good Thing

Masey Kaplan and Jennifer Simonik were visiting a grieving friend who asked them if they could finish crocheting the two blankets her late mother had started, but never finished.

Kaplan and Simonik were knitters, however, not crocheters, so they tried to think of another solution.

One idea led to another, and they started a website and nonprofit named Loose Ends, “that matches unfinished craft projects with volunteer finishers.” It’s not only for bereaved families but for crafters themselves, who are no longer able to finish their projects.

During a joint interview, the women told Robin Westen of AARP that they now have 18,000 volunteers in every state and 61 different countries signed up for a project.

Flyers go up in places such as yarn shops, nursing homes, and libraries. Kaplan said, “For me, helping complete someone’s gesture of love is a way to spread that love even farther.”

**The God of all consolation...consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction.
(2 Corinthians 1:3-4)**

Encourage us, Jesus, to be generous with our time.

Retiree Helps Feed the Hungry

Five years ago, Mark Moreland moved to New York post-retirement and wanted to give back to the community. He never expected he would find himself in the middle of a pandemic, but through his volunteerism at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, he helped launch the house of God's food distributions in 2020.

Now, years later, the need hasn't diminished, and Moreland continues to help his fellow New Yorkers by handing out food and clothing—and even setting up medical and social services at the church. “It feels like I’m doing something important, very important in their lives, too, to really make a difference for them,” Moreland told *NYI News*.

Moreland is estimated to have helped tens of thousands of New Yorkers. Scott Black Johnston, the senior pastor at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian, said, “He’s an exemplary human being who gives and gives and gives back to the community where he lives.”

**I would feed you with the finest of wheat, and
with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.
(Psalm 81:16)**

*Loving Lord, bless all those who hunger and
thirst, and show me the way to help those less
fortunate.*

America's Cobbler, Part 1

Nowadays, you might associate the word “cobbler” more with a pie-like dessert than the profession of mending shoes. But Jim McFarland, a fourth-generation cobbler in Lakeland, Florida, is hoping to change this perception.

In an interview with *NBC News's* Sam Brock, McFarland recalled that he had no plans of following in his father's footsteps and running his shoe repair shop. But when his father's health declined, he stepped in to help and eventually took over the business in 1986 when his dad passed away.

The year 2025 marks the 125th anniversary of McFarland's Shoe Repair. In order to promote the shop and highlight the work that cobblers do, Jim's daughter, Tori, started creating videos of him on the job and posting them on TikTok under the handle “America's Cobbler.”

The videos garnered millions of views from people fascinated by this disappearing craft. Some viewers even expressed interest in learning to cobble themselves. But perhaps most important to Jim is the emotional connection his work produces with his customers. That part of the story tomorrow.

I have given skill to all the skillful. (Exodus 31:6)

*May we appreciate the skills of craftspeople,
Lord.*

America's Cobbler, Part 2

In an era when everything seems disposable, cobbler Jim McFarland knows that some items are irreplaceable. When he receives footwear for repair at his Lakeland, Florida shop, it is often accompanied by a letter explaining its importance.

During an interview with *NBC News's* Sam Brock, McFarland recalled getting a pair of boots from a father whose 16-year-old son had recently died. The boots had belonged to his son, so the father, who wore the same size, wanted to get them repaired so he could wear them himself in memory of his boy.

Tearfully, McFarland reflected, "You read the whole letter, and you grab the boots, and you take every ounce of love you have inside, and you put them into those boots, and you ship them back. And you hope that when he puts those on, it gives him some kind of band aid on his heart."

"You have no idea how valuable this shoe may be," McFarland explained about the emotional connection. "And it's not about money. To hold that shoe can be like holding that person one more time."

You will walk on your way securely and your foot will not stumble. (Proverbs 3:23)

May my work bring comfort to others, Father.

The Ties that Bind

World Youth Day is described in *The Tablet* as an “international celebration of faith,” a universal reminder by Pope Francis for young adult Catholic Christians everywhere to band together to “pray for one another...in fellowship.”

In 2023, at St. Bernard of Clairvaux Church in Bergen Beach, Brooklyn, more than 60 young people gathered, along with other parishioners, to make 400 friendship bracelets that also serve as prayer aids. The volunteers were not able to attend World Youth Day themselves, held in Lisbon, Portugal that year, but their beaded creations were donated to the Pontifical Mission Societies of the United States and distributed at their fair booth.

Isabella Wagner, a St. Bernard’s parishioner and Pontifical Mission Societies member, said, “We really, truly hope that we are inspiring these young people that there are people out there in the missions...that need our help...and...support.”

“The bracelets are representative of so much more than the people who made them,” Danielle Zito, a St. John’s University senior and fellow St. Bernard’s parishioner, concurred. “Through the bracelets, you...show...a sign of faith.”

**We are...created...for good works.
(Ephesians 2:10)**

Abba, may we seek to establish an eternal legacy of faith.

Front Yard Becomes Field of Dreams

Eleven-year-old Blake Foley loves playing catch in the front yard of his Houston, Texas home with his mom, Hope. But he never expected a player from Major League Baseball's Houston Astros to pull up next to his house and ask to play, too!

That's exactly what happened to Blake when Astros relief pitcher Ryan Pressly, who lives nearby, pulled over and asked if he could borrow Hope's glove to play catch with her son.

Blake told *ABC 13* that he was in shock that the All-Star and top relief pitcher wanted to play catch with him, thinking, "Holy cow, this is crazy!"

Pressly stayed for a few minutes not only to catch, but also to give Blake a chance to try to hit a whiffle ball off him. Hope is beyond grateful to Pressly for taking the time to do that for her son: "The whole city should know how amazing Ryan Pressly is and what he did to spend time with a huge Astros fan."

It truly was a "Field of Dreams" moment that Blake will never forget.

Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life and honor. (Proverbs 21:21)

Lord God, what can I do to help brighten someone's day today?

The Blessed Doorkeeper

Beatified in 2017, Father Solanus Casey's spiritual path during his life included some interesting twists. Casey was born in Wisconsin in 1870, the son of Irish immigrants. At age 26, he entered a seminary in Detroit and joined the Franciscan order. His superiors didn't think he understood theology well, so they made him a simplex priest, meaning he couldn't hear confessions or preach homilies.

While working at parishes in New York, Father Casey was assigned the job of doorkeeper. As recounted by Catherine Odell for *OSV News*, "Parishioners were soon drawn to Father Solanus—finding that the doorkeeper was compassionate, wise and patient—and sought his pastoral care... Within a year or two, the lines of visitors wanting to talk with the doorkeeper about their family, medical and financial problems were long."

Upon his death in 1957, thousands attended Father Casey's wake and funeral. Odell concluded, "Today, people come from all over the world to see his tomb...He is a model for the value of caring and continues to teach us the power of listening."

**When you call upon Me...I will hear you.
(Jeremiah 29:12)**

Teach me to listen with compassion, Savior.

Praying with the Imagination

In writing his book *Meditations at Midnight: Poetry and Prose*, author Gary Jansen imagined what was going through the mind of Jesus during His Passion. He then composed 14 exquisite poems that correspond to the Stations of the Cross.

This kind of exercise, explained Gary during a *Christopher Closeup* interview, is a regular part of the Ignatian spirituality he has practiced for years: “[It involves] praying with the imagination, and allowing yourself to read a passage of Scripture, and use your imagination to get into the scene.”

“When you think about all the movies that have come out over the years—whether it’s *Passion of the Christ* or TV shows like *The Chosen* or *Jesus of Nazareth*—if you think about it... they’re taking this Ignatian approach: let me imagine what this scene would be like. Let me imagine what Jesus would be like. How would He react? How does Judas react?...I wanted to engage in that and to use...a little bit of creativity to create something that was artistic but also approachable.”

**Hear and see these things being narrated, as though you were hearing with your own ears and seeing with your own eyes.
(Ludolph of Saxony)**

*Guide my imagination to deeper prayer,
Christ.*