



Bishop Provost's Easter Message to the Faithful of the Diocese of Lake Charles

As we joyfully arise to greet a new day in celebration of the Resurrection, I am reminded of something written by one of our greatest popes. Pope St. Leo the Great in the 5th century once wrote, "No one, however weak, is denied a share in the victory of the cross. No one is beyond the help of the prayer of Christ. His prayer brought benefit to the multitude that raged against him. How much more does it bring to those who turn to him in repentance."

Some of our Lord's last words, as He hung dying on the cross, were to forgive His persecutors (cf. Luke 23:34). As

St. Leo the Great instructs us, if the Lord brings Himself to forgive even those crucifying Him, how much more will He forgive those who repent.

Lent reminds us of the need to repent. Lent moves the Cross to center stage in our lives, and if we remain with our attention fixed on the reality of that Cross, then Christ's sufferings call us



to consider our own sins and failings. This is a matter of identifying with the Lord, of embracing His sufferings as our own, of realizing that He endured this excruciating pain for the purpose of redeeming us from our sins.

Oh, what a wondrous mystery! That while we were still sinners, He died for us (cf. Romans 5:8).

That when all seemed lost, the apostles found an empty tomb. Christ is risen. "No one, however weak, is denied a share in the victory of the cross."

May our hearts be moved to repentance. May we see in Christ's sufferings a share in our own. When the hardships of life overwhelm us, may we always remember what Christ endured and take courage, for Mary Magdalen found an empty tomb. The apostles with uncontrollable joy and overwhelming wonder proclaimed, "We have seen the Lord" (John 20:25). Take courage! Christ lives! Happy Easter!

Hunter LaRocca ordained to the Sacred Order of Deacon

By Pamela Seal
Diocese of Lake Charles

LAKE CHARLES — Immense joy filled the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception as Hunter Thomas LaRocca was ordained to the Sacred Order of Deacon on Saturday, March 29, 2025, by His Excellency Bishop Glen John Provost.

To mark the very special event during this Jubilee Year of Hope, the Cathedral bells tolled for 15 minutes leading up to the grand entrance of seminarians, deacons, and priests from the Diocese of Lake Charles as well as Notre Dame Seminary.

It was a fitting occasion as the ordination took place on the weekend of Laetare Sunday, a time of joyful celebration within the penitential season of Lent. Laetare is Latin for "Rejoice."

This break in the otherwise somber tone of Lent brought about an exuberant hope in anticipation of Easter. There is also great anticipation as Deacon LaRocca advances closer to the priesthood. He will spend his Diaconate Internship at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.

When asked what he was looking most forward to during his time as a transitional deacon, without hesitation Hunter exclaimed, "Baptisms!"

Transitional deacons become more involved in service as they assist the priest with sacraments. Their duties may include presiding over funerals, witnessing weddings, and performing baptisms. They will also begin to preach homilies.

LaRocca was beaming as he stood in the pew alongside his mother and stepfather, Kurt and Kara Smith; his grandmother, Betty LaRocca, and his aunt, Jessica LaRocca. Several other relatives also were

in attendance to show their support.

A parishioner of Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic Church in Lake Charles, LaRocca now transitions to the clerical state, meaning he becomes a member of the clergy. With that, comes three promises made for the first time: obedience to the bishop, celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven, and an obligation to pray daily the Liturgy of the Hours, also known as the "Breviary."

As Bishop Provost shared in his homily, "Ordination is about being set apart, but set apart for a purpose which is not of this world but very much lived in the world of people who will be served."

He went on to say, "Deacons must hold 'fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience' (1 Timothy 3:9). Shouldn't we all be doing this? Of course, but a deacon is set aside, ordained, to lead by example, not just words, although he must preach, but by deeds. His very person must exude the life of service."

With encouragement as he directed his comments to Deacon LaRocca, Bishop Provost said, " '[Holding] fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience' is the Lord's admonition to you on this day of your ordination. Keep that mystery of faith close to your heart. Preach it faithfully by word and example. Grow in intimacy with the Lord Jesus who is our only true friend. Maintain a clear conscience focused on our eternal goal. Only in these ways will you live the life of service to which the Master of the Harvest is calling you. May these qualities resound to the praise of God and the benefit of those you serve."

After the homily, LaRocca made a



Rev. Mr. Hunter Thomas LaRocca is joined by Bishop Glen John Provost outside the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception following the Rite of Ordination to the Diaconate on Saturday, March 29, 2025.

promise to be consecrated for the ministry of the Church and to conform his life to the example of Christ, who came to serve and not be served.

As the congregation sang the Litany of Supplication (also known as the Litany of Saints), LaRocca prostrated himself before the altar. Then he knelt before Bishop Provost who laid hands on him and prayed the Prayer of Ordination over him.

The newly ordained deacon was vested by Deacon Paul Gregory of Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic Church. The stole is a sign of the deacon's office of service, and the dalmatic is the outer garment used in liturgy.

Following the Sign of Peace with his fellow deacons, LaRocca took his seat at the right hand of Bishop Provost as the Mass continued with the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

During a reception that followed in the Ave Maria Hall, Seminarians for the Diocese of Lake Charles gathered to give their friend, and now deacon, a desktop crucifix. It would be the first religious item LaRocca would bless as a newly ordained deacon.

LaRocca also spent most of the nearly two-hour reception blessing individuals, couples, and families as they knelt before him.

As the crowd dwindled to a handful of relatives, LaRocca shared what was on his heart on such a momentous day: "What a gift the Lord has given me to live out this life of service to His Church. I pray that He may give me the grace to do this faithfully and well for the Kingdom of God."

LaRocca assisted at his first Mass as Deacon on Laetare Sunday, March 30, at 9:30 a.m. in the Cathedral with Very Reverend Ruben J. Buller, Vicar General and Pastor. Please keep Deacon LaRocca in your prayers as he continues his path to the priesthood.



Deacon Hunter LaRocca is joined by his fellow seminarians and Rev. Michael Caraway, Director of Vocations (far right), during a reception that followed LaRocca's diaconate ordination on Saturday, March 29, in the Ave Maria Hall. Seminarians for the Diocese of Lake Charles gathered to give their friend, and now deacon, a desktop crucifix. It would be the first religious item LaRocca would bless as a newly ordained deacon.

CATHOLIC CHARITIES JAZZ BRUNCH

Community supports growing ministry for the poor

By Pamela Seal
Diocese of Lake Charles

LAKE CHARLES — The return of the Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana *Jazz Brunch* was welcomed by 240 supporters on *Laetare* Sunday, March 30, at the Historic Cash & Carry, generously donated by Rick and Donna Richard. *Laetare* is Latin for rejoice, and there was plenty of rejoicing going on.

From a silent auction with competitive bidding, a delicious brunch provided by Roderick Stutes and Occasions, to entertainment by professional saxophonist Marcus Davis and His Excellency Bishop Glen John Provost on the keyboard, the joyful event was a huge success in large part to the charitable support of many.

This was the first time since 2019 for Catholic Charities to host the *Jazz Brunch* because of delays brought on by COVID, back-to-back hurricanes, and other natural disasters.

Sister Marie Josepha Kluczny, RSM, Executive Director, told the guests that Catholic Charities is not simply a social service agency.

“We are an arm of the Catholic Church by which we reach out to embrace and gather a people to our Lord,” she said. “Our work is ultimately to be an instrument of God’s mercy through which people experience the love of Christ and come to love Him more fully in return.”

The theme of this year’s brunch was “Hope – A Sure and Steadfast Anchor of the Soul.” (Hebrews 6:29)

“We can certainly agree that the world is in need of hope right now,” Sister Marie Josepha remarked. “Pope Francis has called for this to be a Jubilee Year of Hope. At Catholic Charities, we often work in the realm of the passion of hope. People come to us hoping to find housing or assistance with their rent, hoping to receive food, hoping to make their funds stretch to the next month.”

Among the services provided by Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana is its monthly food distributions, a total of 12 in all — two at the Catholic Charities site in Lake Charles, and 10 sites spread out over the five-parish region in Big Lake, Bell City, Creole, DeRidder, Elton, Jennings, Kinder, Ragley, Sulphur, and Vinton.

A total of 994,251 pounds of food was distributed to 9,030 individuals throughout Southwest Louisiana, according to the agency’s 2023-2024 Impact/Annual Report.

Calling attention to one of the newer programs, Sister shared the much-needed service of its mobile laundry / shower trailer that launched in November 2023. From January to December 2024, a total of 436 showers and 796 loads of laundry were provided.

“It is so easy for us to take for granted the blessing of being able to take a shower, but for those whose only shower each month is at our trailer, they tell us that these services make them feel human again,” said Sister Marie Josepha. “It is not just a shower. It is about their dignity.”

On the day of the brunch, the talented saxophonist is a regular volunteer of the laundry / shower trailer.

Sister praised the work of her dedicated staff of 11 and of the many volunteers.

“The Lord is the backbone of our organization, but the staff and volunteers are the boots on the ground, working with clients day in and day out throughout the year and just do what needs to be done,” she said.

Some of those good works include rent and utilities assistance, help with prescription and funeral costs, SNAP applications, food bank, prisoner re-entry services, homeless outreach and the laundry/shower trailer.

SPECIAL HONOREES

The highlight of the brunch was the recognition of Rick and Donna Richard, and Sandy Gay for their years of service and generosity to Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana.

Caritas Award
This year’s *Caritas Award* was presented to **Sandy Gay** for exemplifying a life of selfless giving.

“Sandy Gay has served as mentor and friend to thousands of people from her work as a volunteer that began as a teenager,” Sister Marie Josepha said as she began her remarks. “She has brought comfort and hope to many through her roles within the Diocese of Lake Charles and Catholic Charities, not least of which being her work in disaster preparedness and response.

“When the first director of Catholic Charities, Sister Mary Vianney Walsh, RSM, arrived, Sandy mentored her, helping her learn the ropes of the organization,” Sister shared. “Sandy had already helped the community recover from hurricanes Rita (2005) and Ike (2008), and when the Sabine River floods of 2016 and 2017 and Hurricane Harvey hit (2017), she was an invaluable resource.

“Not only did she continue to mentor Catholic Charities staff, but she stayed on to help our organization with the application and management of one of the largest disaster relief grants Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana has ever received. This grant was used to purchase ‘Big Joe,’ the 26-foot refrigerated food distribution truck which continues to serve the needs of the poor throughout our five-parish region,” Sister said. The truck is affectionately named after St. Joseph, patron saint of the poor.

Saint Peter Claver Award

This year’s recipients of the *Saint Peter Claver Award* are **Oliver “Rick” and Donna Richard**. The award, named for the patron saint of the Diocese of Lake Charles, honors service to the least among us.

“Rick and Donna Richard were some of the first people I met in Lake Charles,” Sister Marie Josepha recalled. “I learned of Rick and Donna’s support for opening a facility to shelter the homeless. I can see that these two people have a heart for making Southwest Louisiana a better place for every member of this community,” she pointed out.

“When Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana was looking for a warehouse or some land on which to build a garage to house our Catholic Charities vehicles and trailer, I reached out to Rick hoping he would know of some properties available,” she explained.

Fighting back her tears, Sister Marie Josepha said, “Rick graciously agreed to a meeting, and to my surprise, offered to donate some land. He is choked up and I am, too,” she noticed as her recollection stirred up emotions in Rick.

“In all my interactions with Rick and Donna, I have found them remarkably free and creative in the ways they benefit our community. Whatever they feel would truly provide a needed service, whatever would promote the continued growth of our community, and of those who live in it, is of interest to them,” Sister emphasized.

Immediately following the presentation of Richards’ awards, Bishop Provost bestowed on each of them a Medal for the Order of St. Charles in the Member class to express gratitude for all that they have done for the Diocese of Lake Charles saying, “Know of our deep, deep gratitude.”

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For more information on the amazing work of Catholic Charities, visit <https://www.catholiccharitiesswla.com/impact-report>

If you are interested in helping with the ministry of Catholic Charities, email volunteer@catholiccharitiesswla.org. Individuals and groups are welcome.



The St. Peter Claver Award was bestowed on Oliver “Rick” and Donna Richard, from right, for the particular care and concern for the homeless population of Southwest Louisiana, and for the flourishing of the community. Presenting the award are Bishop Glen John Provost and Sister Marie Josepha, Kluczny, RSM, Executive Director of Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana. (Photo credit: Morris LeBleu / Diocese of Lake Charles)



The Caritas Award was bestowed on Sandy Gay for her example of selfless giving through staff mentorship and hurricane response and recovery efforts in Southwest Louisiana. Presenting the award are Bishop Glen John Provost and Sister Marie Josepha, Kluczny, RSM, Executive Director of Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana. (Photo credit: Morris LeBleu / Diocese of Lake Charles)

The road to Catholic Charities leads to Religious Sisters of Mercy

By Pamela Seal
Diocese of Lake Charles

An invitation by Bishop Glen John Provost more than 10 years ago was just the beginning of expanding the essential ministry of serving the poor through Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana.

It was not long after His Excellency was assigned to lead the Diocese of Lake Charles as its third shepherd (2007) that he realized the wonderful work that Catholic Charities was doing. With the variety of services it provides, he knew that it must have a stable atmosphere to continue its long-term mission of service to the most vulnerable.

To accomplish this goal, Bishop Provost reached out to Mother Mary McGreevy, the Superior (at the time) for the Religious Sisters of Mercy of Alma, Michigan.

“Only bishops are allowed to request religious orders to come to their diocese,” he explained.

“After my invitation, Mother McGreevy and I had a conversation, at which time I was told that they would love to come to the Diocese of Lake Charles, but we would be on a waiting list.”

Bishop Provost was not dismayed by this response in the least.

“I told Mother McGreevy that I would put the matter in the hands of Our Lady of Lourdes, to which she responded, ‘Oh, my, you are pulling out the big guns!’,” Bishop Provost shared lightheartedly. “I have always relied on Our Lady of Lourdes for special intercessions.”

Two months later, Mother McGreevy informed Bishop Provost that she would be sending two religious sisters to assist in the Diocese of Lake Charles.

“Specifically, I wanted the Religious Sisters of Mercy to do two things in our diocese,” said the bishop. “I wanted one sister to run Catholic Charities, and I wanted one sister to oversee religious education in the diocese.”

Bishop Provost announced their arrival in September 2013, giving initial credit to Sister Mary Vianney Walsh, RSM, who paved the way at Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana.

“When I first invited the Sisters of Mercy of Alma to our diocese, Sister Mary Vianney and Sister Miriam MacLean, who we remember with great affection, were the Sisters of Mercy to come and establish a convent,” Bishop Provost recalled. “They began what has become, so far, a nearly 12-year service in our diocese.”

Sister Miriam would take the reins of Catholic Charities in 2018, expanding its food distribution program from three sites to 11 in five civil parishes across the diocese. She helped the people of Southwest Louisiana through many difficulties, especially those affected by COVID-19, and the aftermath of the 2020 hurricanes, flooding, and ice storms.

Sister Marie Josepha Kluczny, RSM, assumed the role of Executive Director on September 25, 2023, and continues the mission of bringing people to Christ in their moment of need.