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Dear Friends,

Welcome to our Spring 2026 issue of the IHM Catholic EdNotes!

Next week we joyfully step into the sacred season of Lent, beginning with Ash Wednesday on February 18. These coming weeks invite us on a powerful and transformative journey - one very different from the bright, anticipatory path of Advent that may feel like it ended only moments ago. The Christmas trees and twinkling lights have been gently tucked away, and the world around us seems quieter, dimmer. Yet even within this darkness, God has hidden countless reminders of His unshakeable love for us.

Our Advent pilgrimage to Bethlehem brought us face-to-face with the Light of the World, surrounded by the brilliance of stars and the song of angels. That holy night marked not only Jesus' earthly beginning but also the start of our lifelong spiritual journey with Him.

Now, as we enter Lent, we walk beside Jesus once more—not toward a manger, but toward the profound mystery of His self-giving love. Though the path leads through shadows, we walk with faith-filled hearts, knowing that **from the darkness of death bursts forth the radiant LIGHT who is Jesus!** Together, as a community of love and service, let us embrace this sacred season with open hearts, deep compassion, and a renewed commitment to love God and our neighbor with all we are.

*We hope to inspire and assist you with the sacred work of Catholic education through these engaging, informative and interesting features that can support your best practices, Pre-K through Grade 12, whether in a catechetical parish program or a Catholic school setting.*

*God bless you for your dedication to Catholic education!*

# IHM Charism Connection

## Let Us Glory in the Cross of Christ!



The spirituality of the IHM Sisters is rooted in the Redemptorist spirituality of St. Alphonsus Liguori. St. Alphonsus centered this spirituality around four themes – crib, cross, Eucharist and our Blessed Mother. As we experience the suffering that exists around us, both in our personal lives and the life of the world currently, we look to the Cross of Jesus Christ to give us perspective.

For St. Alphonsus, the Passion and Death of Jesus had everything to do with God’s great and abiding love for each one of us. The mystery of Redemption is revealed in a humble God who emptied Himself of His Godliness, poured Himself out in His ultimate humanness, and laid down His life upon the cross in a wondrous excess of love. On the cross, the precious cost of our Redemption, Jesus experienced the very depths of darkness, fear and distress, and through this experience knows well our own challenges.

St. Alphonsus was deeply aware of the emotional stress involved in all types of human sorrow. He hoped that we would come to know that the God who desires to be so closely involved in our lives, enters our every suffering. Jesus would have us walk through our suffering by His side and in His company, there to experience hope – the hope of newness of life – by virtue of His resurrection. This experience of the Paschal Mystery is an invitation to see the world and ourselves with new eyes: eyes that see life in the midst of death, possibility in the midst of failure, love in the face of lovelessness, and forgiveness in the face of anger and hurt. This is the image and likeness of the crucified God in broken humanity – near and far.

We have a God who understands our own times of distress, fear, darkness, and pain. Pope St. John Paul II wrote in his encyclical on suffering, *Salvifici Doloris*, “the fullest source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering. This answer has been given by God to man in the Cross of Jesus Christ” (# 13).

Here is a brief but powerful explanation of the meaning of the Cross:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hS7XHev5eBI&t=135s>

Learn more about the IHM Sisters:

<https://ihmimmaculata.org/>

# Messages from Pope Francis

Based on  
"Hope- Pope Francis, the Autobiography"

## Part 3/3: Manage Emotions



In his autobiography, **Hope**, Pope Francis shared seven life-experiences that are relevant to tutoring the hearts of school-aged children. They are summarized in a three-part series. This Newsletter, #3, focuses on managing emotional stress. Newsletter #1 focuses on promoting Christian Character, and Newsletter #2 focuses on growing from mistakes.

**Emotions** are *temporary* feelings, internal sensations, or gut-reactions. Emotions attract us toward ideas, things, or persons that we perceive as good; or emotions turn us away from things that we perceive as bad for us.

Emotions are neither moral nor immoral; neither good nor bad. They just are! Emotions surface spontaneously. For instance, joy, sorrow, pleasure, disappointment, fear, guilt, jealousy, resentment, and anger come uninvited to our awareness. In themselves, emotions are not problematic; it is what we do with our emotions that matters. What is important is to learn how to name, claim, and tame our emotions so that they serve life-giving purposes. When we do not control an emotion, it controls us!

**Emotional Skills** are teachable and chosen, like sharing, honesty, empathy, compassion, self-control, appreciation, sensitivity, sympathy, and sorrow. Acquiring such skills leads to forming life-giving relationships. Growth in those virtues lessens negative tendencies. Some children require professional counseling to guide the process.

Virtue formation does not rely on happenstance. Emotional skills are both taught and caught through purposeful and casual exposure to virtues: **purposeful** (planned, deliberate, persistent exposure and repetitive practice over time) and **casual** (observation of life experiences and demonstration by adults who model them with consistency, intention, perseverance, and emotional responsiveness).

**Emotional skills are distinctly different from emotions.**

**Skills are rational and intellectual choices of the will.**

**Emotions are spontaneous outbreaks of feelings and physiological responses.**

## MANAGING FAILURE

*"There is always a hidden wisdom in failure. . . . Wisdom belongs to those who get up again, to those who move forward. It belongs to those who don't spend their time complaining but get back into the game. It belongs to those whose hearts don't harden with resentment and selfishness but who embrace life. Always."* (HOPE, pp 92-93)

- Frequently recite the mantra, "We are winners; not whiners."
- Apply a proactive response ("**PAST**") to failure, disappointment, and hurts. (1) **PRAY** to forgive self and/or others involved. (2) **ACKNOWLEDGE** where and why things "went south." (3) **SUGGEST** what advice would you offer to someone else in this predicament? (4) **TEACHABLE MOMENT**: Let it go! Let it be a learning experience.
- Recall Doctor Sues wisdom:  
"You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose."  
"Sometimes you never know the value of a moment until it becomes a memory."
- Commit to memory the following poems. Teach their life-messages to your children:

### KEEP MOVING FORWARD

Ben Burrows

Keep moving forward, however fast or slow.  
The road ahead is rocky and you have far to go.  
Let every setback be a step toward your chosen goal.  
Remember faith to try again will pay the highest toll.  
Pause only to refresh yourself; don't contemplate defeat.  
Those who have the fortitude will find the challenge sweet.  
True success is never found in a single day  
Hard work for a long time is the only way.

"Slow but sure," the turtle says  
Through the flood and storm  
Every day presents a test  
And you must show good form.  
Heed what I have told you  
And time will tell I'm sure  
That win or lose you're someone  
With the power to endure.

### DON'T QUIT

John Greenleaf Whittier

When things go wrong as they sometimes will,  
When the road you're trudging seems all up hill,  
When the funds are low and the debts are high  
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,  
When care is pressing you down a bit,  
Rest, if you must, but don't you quit.  
  
Life is odd with its twists and turns,  
As everyone of us sometimes learns,  
And many a failure turns about  
When we might have won had we stuck it out.  
Don't give up though the pace seems slow –  
You may succeed with another "go."  
  
Success is failure turned inside out –  
The silver tint in the clouds of doubt,  
And you never can tell how close you are,  
It may be near when it seems so far;  
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit –  
It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.

## THERAPY DURING A TIME OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

*"There were emotional situations that were extremely hard to cope with. For nearly a year I was given a hand by a psychiatrist, a very wise and capable Jewish woman ... I went to her once a week, and her suggestions were always helpful. I still remember them and find them instructive even today."* (HOPE, p. 125)

If the ideas expressed in this newsletter are insufficient to calm a child's emotional distress, seek professional counselling. Therapists are confidential, objective, and trained to ask the "right" questions. Therapy offers new perspectives and tailors coping skills to the client.

# Mensajes del Papa Francisco

Basado en  
"Esperanza - Papa Francisco, la Autobiografía"

## Parte 3/3: Manejar las Emociones



En su autobiografía, **Esperanza**, el Papa Francisco compartió siete experiencias de vida que son relevantes para guiar los corazones de los niños en edad escolar. Se resumen en una serie de tres partes. Este Boletín, el #3, se centra en el manejo del estrés emocional. El Boletín #1 se centra en promover el carácter cristiano, y el Boletín #2 se centra en aprender de los errores.

**Las emociones** son sentimientos temporales, sensaciones internas o reacciones viscerales. Las emociones nos atraen hacia ideas, cosas o personas que percibimos como buenas; o las emociones nos alejan de cosas que percibimos como malas para nosotros.

Las emociones no son ni morales ni inmorales; ni buenas ni malas. ¡Simplemente son! Las emociones afloran espontáneamente. Por ejemplo, la alegría, la tristeza, el placer, la decepción, el miedo, la culpa, los celos, el resentimiento y la ira, llegan sin ser invitadas a nuestra conciencia. En sí mismas, las emociones no son problemáticas; lo que importa es lo que hacemos con nuestras emociones. Lo importante es aprender a nombrar, reivindicar y domar nuestras emociones para que sirvan a propósitos que dan vida. ¡Cuando no controlamos una emoción, ella nos controla a nosotros!

Las **habilidades emocionales** se enseñan y eligen: como compartir, honestidad, empatía, compasión, autocontrol, aprecio, sensibilidad, simpatía y dolor. Adquirir tales habilidades conduce a formar relaciones que dan vida. El crecimiento en esas virtudes reduce las tendencias negativas. Algunos niños requieren asesoramiento profesional para guiar el proceso.

La formación de virtudes no depende del azar. Las habilidades emocionales se enseñan y se adquieren a través de la exposición intencionada y casual a las virtudes: **intencionada** (exposición planificada, deliberada, persistente y práctica repetitiva a lo largo del tiempo) y **casual** (observación de experiencias de vida y demostración por parte de adultos que las modelan con consistencia, intención, perseverancia y sensibilidad emocional).

**Las habilidades emocionales son notablemente diferentes de las emociones.  
Las habilidades son elecciones racionales e intelectuales de la voluntad.  
Las emociones son brotes espontáneos de sentimientos y respuestas fisiológicas.**

## GESTIONANDO EL FRACASO

*" Siempre hay una sabiduría oculta en el fracaso... La sabiduría pertenece a quienes se levantan de nuevo, a quienes avanzan. Pertenece a aquellos que no pasan su tiempo quejándose sino que vuelven a entrar en el juego. Pertenece a aquellos cuyos corazones no se endurecen con el resentimiento y el egoísmo, sino que abrazan la vida. Siempre." (ESPERO, pp 92-93)*

- Recita frecuentemente el mantra: "Somos ganadores; no quejumbrosos."
- Aplica una respuesta proactiva ("**PASADO**") al fracaso, la decepción y los daños. (1) **ORA** para perdonarte a ti mismo y/o a los demás involucrados. (2) **RECONOCE** dónde y por qué las cosas "salieron mal." (3) **SUJERENCIA**: ¿qué consejo le darías a otra persona en esta situación? (4) **MOMENTO DE ENSEÑANZA**: ¡Déjalo ir! Que sea una experiencia de aprendizaje.
- Recuerda la sabiduría de Doctor Seuss:
  - "Tienes cerebro en tu cabeza. Tienes pies en tus zapatos. Puedes dirigirte en cualquier dirección que elijas."
  - "Algunas veces nunca sabes el valor de un momento hasta que se convierte en un recuerdo."

## TERAPIA DURANTE UN PERÍODO DE ANGUSTIA EMOCIONAL

*"Hubo situaciones emocionales que eran extremadamente difíciles de enfrentar. Durante casi un año recibí ayuda de una psiquiatra, una mujer judía muy sabia y capaz... Iba a verla una vez por semana, y sus sugerencias siempre eran útiles. Aún las recuerdo y las encuentro instructivas incluso hoy." (ESPERO, p. 125)*

Si las ideas expresadas en este boletín no son suficientes para calmar el malestar emocional de un niño, busca asesoramiento profesional. Los terapeutas son confidenciales, objetivos y están capacitados para hacer las preguntas "correctas". La terapia ofrece nuevas perspectivas y adapta las habilidades de afrontamiento al cliente.

## Social Justice

### 7<sup>th</sup> Theme of Catholic Social Teaching: Care for God's Creation

by Sister Joyce C. Bell IHM, Coordinator of Social Justice

The Book of Genesis, the very first book in the Bible, tasks human beings with a responsibility for stewarding all of creation. Creation, in this sense, is the whole created world, Mother Earth and all of us, her children. In 2015, the late Pope Francis gifted us with an encyclical entitled: Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home. Pope Francis penned words and wisdom to bring to the world's attention the imposing dangers of climate change which threaten our earth and our life as we know it. Since the publication of Laudato Si' there has been a concerted effort by environmental groups throughout the world to slow down and, in some cases, reverse the warming of the earth and the resulting harm that will come from it. Catholic Climate Covenant is one group in the United States that is raising awareness and providing support for Americans who are addressing these urgent issues. You can learn about Catholic Climate Covenant here: <https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/>

Learn more about this theme of Catholic Social Teaching by viewing this video:  
CST 101: Care for Creation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSnXuCxiHXE>

### **Seven Principles of Catholic Social Teaching**

**Life and Dignity of the Human Person:** All people are sacred and have inherent dignity, regardless of their circumstances.

**Call to Family, Community, and Participation:** People are both social and sacred, and they realize their dignity in community.

**Rights and Responsibilities:** People have a right to life, food, shelter, healthcare, education, and employment.

**Option for the Poor and Vulnerable:** Society is judged by how it treats its most vulnerable members.

**The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers:** Work is a gift from God, and workers have a right to decent wages, safe working conditions, and the right to join unions.

**Care for God's Creation:** People are stewards of the earth and each other.

**Solidarity:** People should work together to achieve the common good, especially for the poor and vulnerable.





*“I Will Lead Her Into the Desert  
and Speak to Her Heart”*

As you know, February is “National Heart Month.” This is an effort to remind people to take good care of their hearts by getting check-ups, eating properly, and getting exercise. Good advise!

We use the word “heart” in our language to express something that is basic and universal, understood by its very use in conversation. Some examples: “wear your heart on your sleeve,” “have a change of heart,” “take it to heart,” “you’re a bleeding heart,” etc. All of that suggests that the HEART is central to our lives.

The Hebrew word for heart is LEVAV or LEV, for short. To the Hebrews, the heart was more than an organ in the body; it was the center of all parts of human existence: emotions, thoughts, choices, wisdom, intelligence. If we imagine the heart and its functions in this way, “heart month” could be a time of examining our own hearts. What better time to do this than during the season of Lent, which begins on Ash Wednesday, February 18? What better time than Lent to get a “spiritual heart” check-up?

Lent is another “heart” experience. The prophet Hosea says, “I will lure her into the desert and speak tenderly to her heart.” Lent, then, is a time for listening to the tender words that God speaks to our hearts. Hosea tells us that this will happen in the desert, a place of **silence, stillness, and aloneness**. It is a place where hearts can be healed, relationships restored, and things put right with God. In short, Lent is a heart-full period of prayer, fasting and charity, all of which can bring our hearts into alignment with God’s own heart.

The journey of Lent begins with the ritual of ashes. I can almost hear the prophets of old pleading with us, God’s people, to turn away from sin and toward God. May this Lenten season fill your heart with an abundance of God’s graces as you follow Jesus into the desert of “heart health.”

# CATHOLIC TECHNOLOGY RESOURCES FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

*Instruct the wise and they become wiser still. Proverbs 9: 9*

## Catholic Podcasts

### Ave Explores

Presented by Ave Maria Press and hosted by Katie Prejean McGrady, Ave Explores provides in-depth, practical Catholic insights for educators and the faithful, covering topics like the Mass, scripture and family life. It features interviews and resources to support spiritual growth, exploring Catholic influence on education. Key features for educators include: thematic series, practical resources and expert guests. Available on your favorite podcast app.

### Making Every Class Catholic

The podcast of the Making Every Class Catholic, hosted by Dr. Brett Salkeld and dedicated to helping Catholic educators approach everything they teach and do from within a Catholic worldview. On the most recent episode Dr. Brett discusses AI with John Braheir, of Magisterium AI. Together they discuss Pope Leo's document on Catholic education, and the impact of technology and AI on students. It provides great insight. Available on your favorite podcast app.

## Websites & Apps for Ipad, Iphone

### Resources for Catholic Educators

[www.4catholiceducators.com](http://www.4catholiceducators.com)

Resources for Catholic Educators is a portal of information about the Catholic faith. This website allows the user to find anything from church history to clipart. The resources available on this site are appropriate for all involved in Catholic education: religious education teachers of children, and youth. It also has resources for adult faith formation. The site contains over 20,000 worksheets. Choose from crossword puzzles, posters, coloring pages and Mass readings. It is a great resource for the classroom.

### Theo: Prayer & Meditation App

This app is designed to help parents, teachers and students deepen their faith, connect with God and experience the peace and love Jesus teaches us. With the Theo app you can create a meaningful devotional routine in just nine minutes each day. The app's content is rooted in the holy Tradition of Catholic and Christian faith. The app includes guided prayers, Bible stories, scripture meditation and bedtime routine support for parents. It provides faithful content curated by theologians. It's free but does offer in-app purchases.



### Shared Wisdom

*Two heads are better than one.* Please submit your favorite technology resources for Catholic religious education at [krantzihm@yahoo.com](mailto:krantzihm@yahoo.com). Submissions will be included in upcoming issues. Many thanks to those who shared tools for this issue.



# GPS for Success



**Recalculating Positive Social and Emotional Strategies  
which create healthy climate and learning in the classroom.**

## **Why Social and Emotional Health Matters**

Children's social and emotional health affects their overall development and learning. Research indicates that children who are mentally healthy tend to be happier, show greater motivation to learn, have a more positive attitude toward school, more eagerly participate in class activities, and demonstrate higher academic performance than less mentally healthy peers. Children who exhibit social and emotional difficulties tend to have trouble following directions and participating in learning activities. Compared with healthier peers, they may be more likely to suffer rejection by classmates, have low esteem, and do poorly in school. Thus, children's social and emotional health is just as important as their physical health and affects their capacity to develop in a beneficial manner.

## **Giving Effective Praise**

Meaningful feedback pertinent to the task at hand in the form of effective praise is a powerful strategy for fostering children's social and emotional development. To make praise effective, teachers describe specifically what they see – without generalizing, evaluating, or making comparisons.

## **Promoting Young Children's Social and Emotional Health**

Children who are socially and emotionally healthy tend to demonstrate, and continue to develop, several important behaviors and skills.

They

- Are usually in a positive mood
- Listen and follow directions
- Have close relationships with caregivers and peers
- Care about friends and show interest in others
- Recognize, label, and manage their own emotions
- Understand other's emotions and show empathy
- Express wishes and preferences clearly
- Gain access to ongoing play and group activities
- Are able to play, negotiate, and compromise with others



## Establish Trusting Relationships



Young children develop and learn in the context of relationships. A trusting and caring teacher-child relationship is essential for children's optimum development. Children who have trusting relationships with their teachers are, on average, more willing to ask questions, solve problems, try new tasks, and express their thinking than their peers without such relationships.

Children benefit socially, emotionally, and academically when teachers intentionally create close, trusting relationships. But gaining the trust of every child is not as simple as being nice and engaging. How can teachers create trusting relationships with all of the children? Consistently offering warmth, affection, respect, and caring is essential.

### **Showing Warmth and Affection Consistently**

Warmth and affection, even on bad days and when children are misbehaving, are critical to a child's well-being in early education settings. They contribute to developing secure relationships between children and adults, provide models of gentle behavior, and are linked with children's ability to interact positively with peers. Social and emotional well-being is nourished by a teacher's warmth and affection.

### **Respecting and Caring About Every Child**

Showing respect is a keyway to connect with children and strengthen positive relationships. It helps children feel more confident and competent to explore and learn. Teachers accomplish this by:

- **Listening with full attention and restate what children say (often also seizing the opportunity to expose the children to new vocabulary).**
- **Accepting and reflecting children's feelings.**

When teachers accept and reflect on children's feelings, they exhibit sensitivity and caring in a way children understand. Teachers' acknowledgements make children feel heard and accepted. As a result, children feel safe to express their emotions – and receive support in identifying, labeling, and better understanding their emotions.

- **Spending private, quality time with individual children through one-on-one activities, such as story reading and game playing.**
- **Teach social and emotional skills intentionally**

Teachers intentionally support social and emotional growth by using children's books, planning activities, coaching on the spot, giving effective praise, and modeling appropriate behavior.

# 13 Benefits of Reading Aloud



1. Develops language skills
2. Improves listening comprehension
3. Increases attention span
4. Builds vocabulary
5. Exposes the child to good grammar
6. Exposes the child to new experiences and information
7. Stimulates the imagination
8. Stimulates brain development
9. Promotes critical thinking skills
10. Creates bond between the child and the reader
11. Builds confidence and self-esteem
12. Teaches values
13. It's fun!

[www.readitloud.org](http://www.readitloud.org)

# Teens & Fasting

## IS IT POSSIBLE?



### MY EXPERIENCE

#### LEARNING TO FAST

As I grew up my only notion of fasting was on the Fridays during Lent and Good Friday with my family. I did it because I was told, but there was no deeper meaning. I would get frustrated, because I didn't like seafood, so my options were minimal. Reflecting back, I see the grace of obligation, because it taught me fidelity to my commitments. However, when I was in high school, I participated in a 30-hour fast with my youth group. That experience changed my understanding of fasting and stirred a calling to make fasting a more regular part of my practice of the faith outside of the Lenten season. Fasting became the space where I could empty my life of the superficial, make room for God, and let my hunger teach me that only in God could I ever find true satiation.



### CHANGE THE 'ASK'

- 1) Make it communal!
- 2) Unite fasting and prayer!
- 3) Focus on transformation and conversion!

*"Continually we carry about in our bodies the dying of Jesus, so that in our bodies the life of Jesus may also be revealed." (2 Corinthians 4:10)*

## Communal Fasting

While Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:18 that our fasting should not be seen by others, but by our Father who sees in secret, when young people are learning the real sacrifice necessary to make a meaningful fast, **accountability** is needed. Encourage your youth to form a small group or make a commitment as a large group to a communal fast. Consider a 30-hour bread & water fast or one meal day fast or liquid only fast. Pick a day where the youth can gather for most of the day **together**. Being in person makes the accountability easier! When the temptation comes to give up, their friends can keep them faithful. **We are better together than apart!**



## FASTING & PRAYER

Encourage each youth to take the time they are fasting from food during a mealtime to fill it with prayer. Skipping a meal becomes more burdensome when we allow them to focus on what they are missing. When mealtime becomes an **intentional** prayer time, each youth begins to find meaning in their fasting. The emptiness they are feeling physically begins to draw them into a deeper relationship with God. Suggest to your youth to **plan out** who or what they will pray for each time they fast. Having a particular intention keeps the prayer fruitful and focused. As they unite fasting and prayer, your youth will begin to experience St. Augustine's beautiful words: "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."



*By fasting and meditation upon our Lord's Passion we most readily awake within ourselves the grace of contrition and consciousness of sin. (Taken from "The Catechism Explained" by Fr. Francis Spirago)*

## TRANSFORMATION & CONVERSION

Fasting unites us to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. We do not fast, because we are holy. We fast because we need to be changed. Remind your youth that fasting is not easy. They will face temptation, discouragement and failure. Encourage them to unite their struggles to the cross knowing they will come to fuller realization of their own sinfulness. Fasting should lead your youth back to the sacrament of Reconciliation. Be ready to listen to their struggles while reminding them to uphold their commitments. I find the words of the hymn Change Our Hearts (Rory Conney) speak the truths we need to hear as we teach our youth the purpose of fasting:

*Change our hearts this time; Your word says it can be. Change our minds this time; Your life could make us free. We are the people Your call sets apart. Lord, this time change our hearts. Brought by Your hand to the edge of our dreams; one foot in paradise, one in the waste. Drawn by your promises; still we are lured by the shadows and the chains we leave behind, but change our hearts this time...yes, this time change our hearts.*

*"Fasting is the soul of prayer, mercy is the lifeblood of fasting. So if you pray, fast; if you fast, show mercy; if you want your petition to be heard, hear the petition of others. If you do not close your ear to others, you open God's ear to yourself."*

*-St. Peter Chrysologus*

## Ash Wednesday 2026

### YEAR OF SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

**Call to Prayer:**

Today is Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. During Lent, Jesus invites us to journey with Him to Calvary by prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. At this holy time, Pope Leo XIV has also announced that 2026 is a SPECIAL YEAR OF SAINT FRANCIS. In this year, Our Holy Father has called us to keep the spirit of Jubilee alive by celebrating the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Saint Francis of Assisi.

May Saint Francis , who created the very first Stations of the Cross, be our model and guide as we enter into these 40 solemn days. We pray that the example of Saint Francis will teach us to SERVE with JOY, PRAY at the CROSS, LOVE all CREATION, GIVE with COMPASSION, and LIVE as true PEACEMAKERS during this sacred season of Lent and always.

**Gathering Song:**                    Lift High the Cross: Verses 1 and 2

**Opening Prayer:**            Father in heaven, bless our Lenten journey with Jesus. Help us to be more like Your Son. Inspire us by His love and guide us by the example of Saint Francis. May the Cross that we carry in our pocket remind us of Jesus who died for us and redeemed us. This we ask through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**First Reading:**            Joel 2: 12-18  
*Return to the Lord with your whole heart*

**Sung Response:**            Psalm 113 - Loving and Forgiving

**Gospel Acclamation:** Praise to You, Lord, Jesus Christ, King of  
Endless Glory

**Gospel:**                    Matthew 6:1-6, 16 - 18  
*Pray - Fast- Give Alms in secret*

## **Distribution of Ashes**

We will now receive "Ashes" which were the palms that were burned from Palm Sunday. They are a sign that we are entering into a season of penance. They remind us how precious time is and how we should use each day to grow closer to God.

**"Pay it Forward" Outreach and  
Service Announcements from each grade**

**Intercessions**

**Prayer:** Father in heaven, bless our Lenten journey and all those who will journey with us in spirit and in faith.

**Response:** **LORD, HAVE MERCY.**

For Pope Leo and the leaders of our Church, our country, and our world, that they may lead with wisdom, courage and compassion, let us pray to the Lord...

For all in need of healing in mind or heart or body, that they may find strength in knowing that Jesus carries their cross with them, let us pray to the Lord...

For all of us here, that we may use this time of Lent to come to know Jesus better and to share His generous and forgiving love with others, let us pray to the Lord...

For all those whose journey on earth has ended, especially Father McLaughlin, and all departed loved ones that they may now know the Easter joy of heaven, let us pray to the Lord...

**Prayer:**

Loving Father, please accept our prayers and hopes for this Lenten season. May this holy time fill us with love and compassion that we may walk with Jesus to Calvary and rise with Him at Easter. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Closing Prayer:**

**Student's Prayer for Lent**

PEACE PRAYER OF SAINT FRANCIS

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy.  
O Divine Master, grant that I may not  
so much seek  
to be consoled as to console  
to be understood as to understand  
to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned  
and it is in dying that we are born to  
eternal life. Amen.

**Closing Hymn:**        Lift High the Cross: Verses 3 and 4

## *Tuesday Lenten Prayers 2026*

### *First Week of Lent*

**Gathering Song:**        *Loving and Forgiving - Verse 1*

**Sign of the Cross:**        In the name of the Father...

**Call to Prayer:**        We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You.  
- Because by Your holy cross, You have  
redeemed the world. (Prayer composed by St. Francis)

**Introduction:**        During these sacred days of Lent, we are asking Our Lord to walk with Him to Calvary in the spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi. Each Tuesday, we will pray for one particular grace from the life of Saint Francis. Saint Francis brought special JOY to the people when he created the first Live Nativity, which was the beginning of our manger scenes at Christmas. This week we pray for the JOY of serving all those in need.

**Intercessions:**        Saint Francis said: *“The deeds you do may be the only sermon some people will hear today.”*

**The Response is: LORD, HAVE MERCY.**

For the grace to live today with JOY:

**J** - Jesus first, **O** - Others second, **Y** - Yourself last, we pray...

For all those who feel no JOY and are sad today, we pray...

For our parents and teachers, who show us the JOY of serving others everyday, we pray...

**Pray Together:**

**SAINT FRANCIS' PRAYER FOR PEACE**

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace...*

**Sign of the Cross:**

In the name of the Father...

## *Second Week of Lent*

**Gathering Song:** *Loving and Forgiving - Verse 2*

**Sign of the Cross:** In the name of the Father...

**Call to Prayer:** We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You.  
- Because by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world.

**Introduction:** This week, we ask for the grace to pray at the CROSS. Saint Francis himself gave us the devotion of the STATIONS OF THE CROSS. After a visit to the Holy Land, he desired to find a way that everyone could trace the steps of Jesus to Calvary in any place and at any time. Through pictures, various images, and beautiful prayers, Francis showed us how to walk with Jesus and experience His incredible love for us through the STATIONS OF THE CROSS.

**Intercessions:** Saint Francis wrote the prayer: *“We adore You, Christ and we bless You, because by Your holy CROSS, You have redeemed the world.”*

**The Response is: LORD, HAVE MERCY.**

For all who are bearing heavy CROSSES today,  
we pray...

For the generous spirit of Simon to help others  
carry their CROSS today, we pray...

For the brave heart of Veronica in wiping the tears of anyone who is sad  
today, we pray...

**Pray Together: SAINT FRANCIS' PRAYER FOR PEACE**

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace...*

**Sign of the Cross:** In the name of the Father...

## *Third Week of Lent*

**Gathering Song:** *Loving and Forgiving - Verse 3*

**Sign of the Cross:** In the name of the Father...

**Call to Prayer:** We adore You O Christ and we bless You.  
- Because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

**Introduction:** This week, we pray for the grace to love all of CREATION in imitation of Saint Francis. Our Creator God has gifted us all with our Common Home, the Earth in all its beauty. But.. many are suffering their own Calvary for lack of healthy food, clean water, and safe shelter because of other's selfishness.

**Intercessions:** Saint Francis said: *"Praise be to You, my Lord, through our sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us."*

**The Response is: LORD, HAVE MERCY.**

That we may never waste food and be grateful for every meal that we share, we pray...

That those who suffer lack of food and water and shelter will receive a helping hand this day, we pray...

That we may be generous with our various food collections for the poor and with our parish poor boxes, we pray...

**Pray Together:**

**SAINT FRANCIS' PRAYER FOR PEACE**

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace...*

**Sign of the Cross:**

In the name of the Father...

## *Fourth Week of Lent*

**Gathering Song:** *Loving and Forgiving: Verse 4*

**Sign of the Cross:** In the name of the Father...

**Call to Prayer:** We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You.  
- Because by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world.

**Introduction:** This week, we pray for hearts of COMPASSION to give to all who are suffering. Two years before he died, Saint Francis was given the Stigmata. The Stigmata meant that he physically experienced the wounds of Jesus in his hands and feet and side. That close union with Jesus' Passion made Francis offer COMPASSION to others; feeling their pain.

**Intercessions:** Saint Francis said: *“Preach the Gospel and if necessary, use words.”*

**The Response is: LORD, HAVE MERCY.**

For all the sick and all who are grieving the loss of a loved one,  
we pray...

For all those in hospitals and nursing homes, especially our  
Sisters in Camilla Hall, we pray...

For all who are victims of violence and war, we pray...

**Pray Together: SAINT FRANCIS’ PRAYR FOR PEACE**

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace...*

**Sign of the Cross:** In the name of the Father...

## ***Fifth Week of Lent***

**Gathering Song:**      *Loving and Forgiving* – Verse 1

**Sign of the Cross:**      In the name of the Father...

**Call to Prayer:**      We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You.  
- Because by Your holy cross, You have  
redeemed the world.

**Introduction:**      This week, we pray to live each day as true  
PEACEMAKERS. People of all religions  
honor Saint Francis as a holy man of PEACE.  
His famous PEACE PRAYER has been recited and sung  
by millions and millions of his followers. May we strive  
to live the words of this powerful prayer.

**Intercessions:**      Saint Francis prayed: “*Lord, make me an instrument  
of your PEACE...*”

**The Response is: LORD, HAVE MERCY**

Help us to be true PEACEMAKERS in our words and actions  
at home, at school, and at play, we pray...

Help our Military who are giving their lives every day to  
preserve our PEACE, we pray...

Help all Leaders to work for PEACE in our cities, our country,  
and around the world, we pray...

**Pray Together:**

**SAINT FRANCIS' PRAYER FOR PEACE**

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace...*

**Sign of the Cross:**

In the name of the Father...



# *Let Us Walk with* **ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI**

*Serving with*  
**JOY**

*Praying at the*  
**CROSS**



*Loving all of*  
**CREATION**

*Giving with*  
**COMPASSION**

*Living as a*  
**PEACEMAKER**

*As we celebrate our Lenten journey with Jesus!*

*Let Us Walk with*  
**ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI**

*Serving with*  
**JOY**

*Praying at the*  
**CROSS**



*Loving all of*  
**CREATION**

*Giving with*  
**COMPASSION**

*Living as a*  
**PEACEMAKER**

*As we celebrate our Lenten journey with Jesus!*

# The Paschal Candle

## Christ, Our Light



The use of candles is very important in the Catholic Church, on the altar during Mass, at Baptisms, in the sanctuary lamp, as vigils before statues, sometimes during processions. The reason why we use candles so much is because the candle, which gives forth light, reminds us of the Light of Christ which illumines our soul and which we share with others through our lives. Jesus is the Light of the World. Of all the candles which are used in the church, the most prominent candle is the Paschal Candle, also known as the Easter Candle. This is a very large candle which is blessed and marked with symbols and given great attention as it is lit each year at the beginning of the Easter Vigil. This candle represents Christ to us and the light of his resurrection, the light of new life as it dispels the darkness of sin and death.

The Paschal Candle is made of pure beeswax to represent the purity of Christ. In the center of the candle is etched a cross with the Greek letters Alpha and Omega, which means the beginning and the end. The numbers of the calendar year, currently 2024, are added onto the candle. Then five grains of incense are pressed into the wax of the candle, which represent the five wounds of Christ.

The Paschal Candle is then lit from the new Easter fire and carried into the darkened church by the priest or deacon as the congregation follows. Three times he stops to intone "Christ, our light." As the procession of congregants slowly fills the church, the light is passed on from the Paschal candle to small individual candles held by those in attendance as the church is filled more and more with the soft light of many candles in the darkness. When the Paschal Candle reaches the altar it is placed in a special, usually decorated, holder and incensed to show the great reverence we hold for this candle, as it represents Christ to us. Then the priest, deacon or cantor intones the Exsultet or Easter Proclamation, an ancient prayer chant that embodies the joy and exultation of this holy night of vigil of the Resurrection.

These phrases from the Easter Proclamation show the significance of the Paschal Candle to the celebration of this Easter liturgy.

*"Therefore, dearest friends, standing in the awesome glory of this holy light, invoke with me, I ask you, the mercy of God almighty, that he, who has been pleased to*

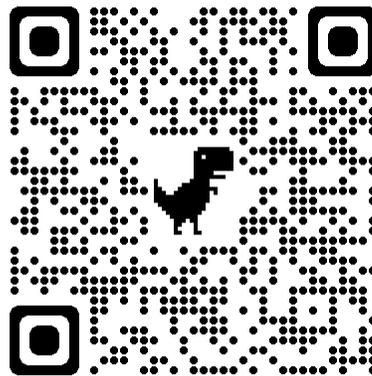
*number me, though unworthy, among the Levites, may pour into me his light unshadowed, that I may sing this candle's perfect praises."*

*"On this, your night of grace, O holy Father, accept this candle, a solemn offering, the work of bees and of your servant's hands, an evening sacrifice of praise, this gift from your most holy Church. But now we know the praises of this pillar, which glowing fire ignites for God's honor, a fire into many flames divided, yet never dimmed by sharing of its light, for it is fed by melting wax, drawn out by mother bees to build a torch so precious."*

*"Therefore, O Lord, we pray you that this candle, hallowed to the honor of your name, may persevere undimmed, to overcome the darkness of this night."*

The Paschal Candle remains in the sanctuary of the church, close to the pulpit, and is lit at all liturgies from Easter until Pentecost. For the remainder of the year, the Paschal Candle is kept by the baptismal font of the church when it is lit at the celebrations of the Rite of Baptism throughout the year. The Paschal Candle is also placed at the head of the casket at a Catholic's funeral mass, thus reminding us that the promises of eternity received at our Baptism are fulfilled at the end of our earthly life when we share in the light of Christ's Resurrection. This is cause for rejoicing indeed! Alleluia!

- Plan to make a visit to your church with your students and find the Paschal Candle. You can get a close up look.
- These QR codes will connect you to web pages that contain Paschal Candle craft ideas to make with your students.





# A Playbook of Love: A Journey of Full Inclusion at Pope John Paul II



## *A Mission in Motion*

For a Catholic school, the idea of full inclusion is more than just a pedagogical goal; it is the fulfillment of a mission to serve all of God's children. But as any educator knows, the step from alluring idea to daily practice requires a bridge of preparation, prayer, and profound bravery.

Our journey began when Ayuni first visited our school at age three. She was a bundle of energy and joy. While her speech patterns were still developing, her spirit was unmistakable. After reflecting on her needs and our own resources, we made the decision: Ayuni would join our Pre-K 4 program the following year.

We had one year to prepare. We didn't realize then that this year of preparation would transform more than just a classroom; it would transform our entire perspective on what it means to teach.

## *A Whirlwind of Preparation*

As Principal, Patricia Tarquinio knew that opening the door was only the first step. Inclusion isn't a policy; it's a practice that requires a dedicated team. She entrusted Ayuni's arrival to Nikki Stewart, a resourceful educator often described as a "human Swiss Army knife."

We spent the year immersing ourselves in the "how" of inclusive education through three specific pillars:

- Research: We studied how students with Down Syndrome learn best and explored evidence-based approaches for neurodivergent learners.
- Collaboration: We met regularly with Ayuni's family and her Behavioral Health Technician (BHT) to ensure her transition was seamless.
- Observation: We visited fellow Archdiocesan schools that had successfully welcomed students with similar needs to see inclusion in action.

Yet, despite the checklists, a quiet trepidation grew within Nikki. As a teacher who prides herself on dependability, her deepest fear wasn't about the logistics or the lesson plans. It was a simple, profound question: What if I'm not good at this? What if I fail her?

## *Love Names the Fear*

That fear, while heavy, dissolved in a single morning. In May, Nikki visited Ayuni at her current school. The moment they met, the "program" vanished, and the child appeared. It was love at first sight.

Nikki realized her anxiety wasn't about a lack of preparation; it was about the weight of wanting to give Ayuni, and her nineteen classmates, the very best version of herself. When she confessed this to Patricia, the Principal offered a simple, necessary advice: "Give yourself grace." It was a lesson Nikki was still learning, but it was the exact fuel she needed for the journey ahead.

## *The Playbook of Love*

When the school year finally began, the "perfect method" didn't come from a textbook, a seminar, or a podcast. It came from the student herself. Ayuni became the mentor. She provided the playbook we had been searching for, and the instructions were simple: Lead with love.

Ayuni's boundless affection lit a fuse in the classroom. Without a single word of instruction, the other nineteen children began to respond with incredible gentleness and empathy. They weren't just following a teacher's example; they were responding to the "magic" of a peer who lives entirely without judgment.



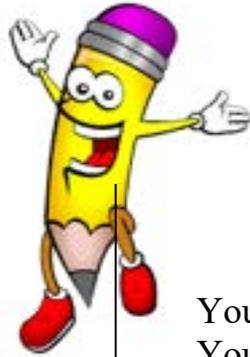
## *A Community Transformed*

Today, the rigorous preparation we did has benefited our entire Early Childhood Department. But the true gift is spiritual. Ayuni reminds us daily to strip away the distractions that adults use to complicate life. She is a messenger of the goodness that lies within all of us.

We are blessed beyond measure to be part of Ayuni's story. We have navigated the "glitches" of the first few weeks by working as a unified team, and we are already looking forward to a morning nine years from now: the day we hear Ayuni's name read from the altar as she graduates from the 8th grade.

Until then, we will keep following Ayuni's lead, remembering that when we lead with love, we are never far from Heaven.

# IHM Good Writers' Club



Grades 3 & 4

**APRIL**

Jellybeans are:

As red as apples,  
As green as trees,  
As purple as violets,  
As yellow as bees.

**MAY**

You have brains in your head.  
You have feet in your shoes.  
You can steer yourself  
Any direction you choose.

Dr. Seuss

Grades 5 & 6

**APRIL**

Imagine with all your mind.  
Believe with all your heart.  
Achieve with all your might.

**MAY**

Yesterday is history  
Tomorrow is a mystery.  
Today is a gift,  
That's why we call it the present.

Grades 7 & 8

**APRIL**

Some succeed because  
they are destined to;  
Most succeed because  
they are determined to.

Louis McMaster Bujo

**MAY**

Reputation is what other people  
know about you.  
Honor is what you know  
about yourself.

Anatole France



Spring, 2026

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This certifies that

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Date

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# Religion Bulletin Boards

2025-2026

**America—Melting Pot of Heritage, Faith, and Sacrifice**

*Bulletin boards have a prominent place in every classroom. They should be interactive as they provide a way to introduce new concepts or display student work related to the concept. Every classroom in a Catholic school/PREP program should have at least one bulletin board dedicated to increasing student awareness of faith values. They should be changed/updated on a regular basis throughout the school year.*

*Teachers and catechists should create boards that are equally engaging and educational. The use of interactive boards in the classroom ensures that students recognize the importance of the posted materials.*

*As we move forward into the year 2026, we will continue to commemorate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our country. Our Bulletin Boards for the remainder of the school year will focus on our faith heritage, the sacrifices made to build and strengthen our country, and the freedom we must practice our faith.*

*We continue the year-long celebration with a focus on our heritage and those who have sacrificed much to ensure that we continue to be “One Nation Under God.” A focus on sacrifice is appropriate at this time of year as we move through the season of Lent.*

*The Easter season calls on us to celebrate new life; it also calls on us to pray for a new life of faith among all Americans and a renewal of the values affirmed by our founding fathers. As we commemorate Memorial Day close to the end of the school year, we remember all those who sacrificed their lives so that we can enjoy the freedoms that America stands for!*

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**God Bless America!**

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# March

## Saints, Heritage and Sacrifice



St. Joseph



St. Patrick

### Saints

that are part  
of our  
American  
Heritage



St. Oscar



St Katharine Drexel

Prepare a bulletin board with the names and Images of saints whose feasts are celebrated during the month of March. Pictured to the left are some of the more notable Saints familiar to many of our students, Share with the students the stories of these Saints, emphasizing the sacrifices that these Saints made to work at building the faith. Tell the students that. Although some of these saints never put foot on American soil, they had a profound influence In building America and the cultural heritage we now celebrate. Give us some examples such as parades, special foods, and decorations. Resources can be found at the following site:

<https://dbqarch.org/march-saints>



## The Greatest Sacrifice



America was built on sacrifice,  
Sacrifice strengthens faith,

Have the students complete the worksheet on page 5., Have them share their findings during a time of prayer of gratitude for the blessings they have.

**Free printable Lenten resources and activities for children:**

<https://catholicprintablesforkids.com/category/liturgical-seasons-en/>

<https://create.kahoot.it/profiles/2b9df25c-b9f7-4dcd-a211-80c34164a1b6>

<https://www.saintanneshelper.com/printable-stations-of-the-cross.html>

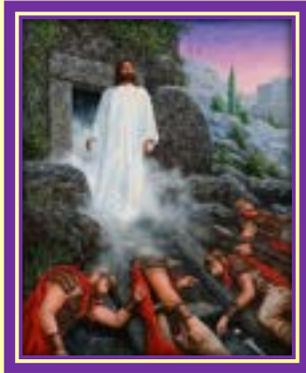
<https://www.saintanneshelper.com/rosary-coloring-pages.html>

<https://catechismangel.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Stations-Of-The-Cross-Guide-Children.pdf>

# April

*Praise the Lord all you nations.!*

**By Your Cross and Resurrection,  
You have set us free.  
You are the Savior of the world!**



The Easter season brings with it times of joy and celebration. We celebrate this each time we proclaim the mystery of faith at the celebration of the Eucharist. Design a bulletin board with a picture of Jesus at his resurrection and place on it the phrase proclaimed as the mystery of faith that we use at Mass. Remind the students that Jesus suffered and died to bring joy and peace to **all** nations. Including our own.

As we move into the celebration of the Easter season, we will often hear the word *Hallelujah* sung. This is a word that has also been used in a patriotic song. *Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord*. This is a suitable time, as we begin to prepare to celebrate our nation's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday, to review the many patriotic songs and documents that include God. Whenever and wherever these beloved American songs are sung, God is rightfully acknowledged as having blessed America from its very beginning and is visible in how He continues to bless us today.

Have older students research the origins of these songs. Many of them were written at times when America was from war or other national difficulties. Have the students sing a patriotic song each day after they recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

Choose a patriotic hymn appropriate to your level and place it on a bulletin board, Have the students complete one of the activities (see p. 6) to place on the board.

**GOD BLESS AMERICA**

God bless America,  
Land that I love,  
Stand beside her, and  
guide her  
Through the night with a  
light from above.

From the mountains, to  
the prairies,  
To the oceans, white with

Activity board with 20 empty rectangular boxes for student input.



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# May

## *We Remember How You Loved Us*

### *Mary in America*



*Our Lady of Champion*

May is the month of Mary, With the upcoming celebration of our country's birth, it is a suitable time the influence of Mary in America. Design a bulletin board with examples of places and groups named after Mary:

- State and cities such as Maryland and Leangles (originally named after Our Lady of the Angels)
- Religious communities such as SSND and IHM
- Schools and colleges such as Immaculata and Notre Dame.
- Shrines such as Our Lady of Champion and Miraculous Medal.



Have older students complete the activity sheet on.p.7

**We remember  
how you  
loved us**



It is also a time to remember those who have given of themselves to make America what it is. Invite the students to bring In pictures of family members who have served in the military, as law enforcement officers and first responders. use these as background on the bulletin Board as seen on the left. Have the students remember these people in prayer. During the month, have students write letters of gratitude to those whose pictures are the bulletin board.



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# My Heritage

## My Heritage of Faith



My name is \_\_\_\_\_

What I know about my heritage \_\_\_\_\_

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A faith practice my family has that reflects my heritage is

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I was baptized on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ Church

My patron saint is \_\_\_\_\_

The first prayer I learned was \_\_\_\_\_

It was taught to me by \_\_\_\_\_

I received my First Holy Communion \_\_\_\_\_ at

---

 Church.

I was confirmed by Bishop \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_

at \_\_\_\_\_ Church. My Confirmation patron saint is \_\_\_\_\_

What I would like my descendants to know about their background:

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I can set an example for them by \_\_\_\_\_



# Honoring **Mary**



State Named after Mary \_\_\_\_\_

Cities/ Towns named after Mary\_

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Marian Shrines \_\_\_\_\_

Colleges and Universities named after Mary \_\_\_\_\_

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Parishes and schools in the diocese named after Mary

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