

origins

CNS documentary service

Enriching the Experience of Reconciliation

Bishop Pfeifer

“Conversion is not a once-in-a-lifetime moment, but a continuous, ongoing life-long process which brings us ever closer to the holiness and love of God,” Bishop Michael Pfeifer of San Angelo, Texas, said in a Feb. 1 pastoral letter for the 2006 Year of Reconciliation that he proclaimed for the diocese. “Sin is more than just ‘breaking the rules.’ Sin is the failure to grow. Sin is the failure to respond to the love God has shown us in Christ Jesus,” the bishop wrote. His pastoral letter contains “hints and helps for making a good confession.” Pfeifer writes: “We need to remember that it is what Jesus does in the sacrament of confession that is

“Jesus ... constantly calls us to wholeness and maturity, reminding us that he came that we might have life and have it abundantly.”

the most important thing, and on this we need to focus when we confess. The examination of conscience, sorrow for sin, purpose of amendment and telling of the sins to a priest are indeed all important aspects of the sacrament. But to have a more positive and meaningful experience of the sacrament, we need to remember what Jesus does.” Pfeifer said, “Our experience of this sacrament will be greatly enriched if we think about the reconciliation that Christ gives us and not only about confession of sins, which is usually not easy for most people.” To those “who have cut themselves off from God and the church by what we call ‘mortal sin’ or serious and grave sin and now wish to return to God’s table of the eucharist, the church offers the sacrament of confession to celebrate their homecoming,” the bishop wrote. His pastoral letter follows.

the main focus of this year of reconciliation for the Diocese of San Angelo is the wonderful sacrament of reconciliation and penance, commonly called the sacrament of confession. In this year I encourage all of our people to continue or to re-establish the practice of frequent confession, which not only forgives sins but fills us with God’s mercy and strength to live good Christian lives. I offer you here a few helps and hints to better understand the sacrament of confession.

Confession and Human Needs

Each time we confess our sins, there is

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In an intervention at the world Synod of Bishops last fall, Father Joseph Tobin, superior general of the Redemptorist order, discussed the relationship between the sacraments of penance and the eucharist. His text appeared in Origins' current volume on pp. 314f in the edition dated Oct. 20, 2005.

Tobin said, "The crisis of penance may be rooted in the fact that we are not successful in showing how the forgiveness of sin is neither cheap grace nor guilty self-obsession, but rather the free offer of God's restored peace in Christ to those who have gravely sinned and who sincerely repent." He said that in the relationship of penance to the eucharist, "there is a point that needs to be underscored. It is not our human effort that reforms us; such change is entirely the work of Christ in us."

In celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation, "it is important that the faithful have an intense experience of the face of Christ the Good Shepherd," Pope John Paul II said in his 2002 Holy Thursday letter to the world's priests. The letter appeared in Origins, Vol. 31, pp. 693ff in the edition dated April 4, 2002. The pope said that the ministry of the confessional "is a ministry always beset by two opposite extremes: severity and laxity." Severity fails to realize that "mercy comes first, encouraging conversion and valuing even the slightest progress in love," while laxity "fails to take into account the fact that the fullness of salvation ... involves a genuine conversion to the demands of God's love." The pope said that in this sacrament "the Good Shepherd, through the presence and voice of the priest, approaches each man and woman, entering into a personal dialogue which involves listening, counsel, comfort and forgiveness."

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a special set of human needs — spiritual, moral, emotional and psychological — that are addressed. We are social beings, and we need another person to understand what we are feeling, to help us experience God's compassion. The designated human person for celebrating this sacrament is the priest, who acts in Christ's name and is using the authority and power given by Christ to his church. On the very day of Jesus' resurrection, when he appeared to his disciples, he told them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, whose sins you retain are retained." Christ knew that we need other human beings to help us with the human feelings of guilt, sorrow and anxiety when we seek God's forgiveness of sins in confession.

What Jesus Does

At the same time, we need to remember that it is what Jesus does in the sacrament of confession that is the most important thing, and on this we need to focus the most when we confess. The examination of conscience, sorrow for sin, purpose of amendment and telling of the sins to a priest are indeed all important aspects of the sacrament. But to have a more positive and meaningful experience of the sacrament we need to remember what Jesus does. The one to whom we are confessing our sins is Christ, and it is our merciful Savior who died on the cross who extends his hands each time we confess to give us divine pardon and healing, to fill us with God's mercy, and to give us the strength to live good lives and to overcome sin and temptation.

Our experience of this sacrament will be greatly enriched if we think about the reconciliation that Christ gives us and not only about confession of sins, which is usually not easy for most people. Reconciliation names what is most important and what Jesus does in this sacrament. For this reason, the proper name given by the church for this sacramental experience is the sacrament of reconciliation and penance. The word *reconciliation* is rich in meaning and suggests the gift of God's forgiveness and the removal of the barriers we place in front of ourselves, our community and our God. Reconciliation means rebridging the gap between God and us and between ourselves and others. It also suggests the deep peace that comes from being brought back into harmony with God and with our sisters and brothers.

More Than "Breaking the Rules"

In the sacrament of confession our sins are forgiven. But sin is not merely about "break-

ing the rules." For the mature Christian, sin is understood in relation to love and breaking or weakening a loving relationship with our heavenly Father and Creator. Our compassionate God has an immense love for us and constantly wants to pour out mercy upon us even as we realize how often we have failed to return that love. Jesus, our loving and good shepherd who forgives our sins, constantly calls us to wholeness and maturity, reminding us that he came that we might have life and have it abundantly.

"We celebrate reconciliation not merely because we have to, but because it is a sacrament, a sign and celebration of God pouring forth divine mercy."

Yes, sin is more than just "breaking the rules." Sin is the failure to grow. Sin is the failure to respond to the love God has shown us in Christ Jesus, who gave his life to forgive our sins. For those who have cut themselves off from God and the church by what we call *mortal sin*, or serious and grave sin, and now wish to return to God's table of the eucharist, the church offers the sacrament of confession to celebrate their homecoming. This is the only time when Catholics are required to celebrate the sacrament. But we celebrate reconciliation not merely because we have to, but because it is a sacrament, a sign and celebration of God pouring forth divine mercy by reconciling the world through Christ and by bringing peace for all people and all things.

Confession and the Prodigal Son

One of the most beautiful descriptions of what happens when we confess our sins is found in the heart-touching parable of the prodigal son as told by Christ. A splendid way to prepare for confession is to read over this parable as found in Luke's Gospel (15:11-32). Parents need to read over this parable with their children as they prepare for confession and explain that at times we are all in some way the prodigal son or perhaps the older son of the parable, and we are all called to be like the merciful father who forgives the younger son of all his sins and wrongdoings. Let me share a few highlights with you from this parable.

The prodigal son made a crucial life decision. He chose a way of living that would break him off from his father and his family.

He demanded that his father give him money that he had no right to, then he ran away from home, living a dissolute and sinful life, wasting all that had been given to him. He had not only left behind his father's table and love, he left behind what he was taught there. In contemporary terms, we would perhaps say he was an alienated, rebellious son, a runaway youth.

After the prodigal son had wasted all the gifts that had been given him by his father in sinful living and realized that he was no longer in the family circle, he was filled with hunger and slowly began to admit that he was mired in a pigpen where he sought food and mired in sin and guilt for his wrongdoings. It was first physical hunger that motivated him to return home to his father just as a "hired hand." But once the young man came to his senses, he made the decision to return home to his father where he hoped he would find food — and mercy and forgiveness. We read how the father ran to meet him, embraced him, loved him, forgave him, took him back as a son — not as a hired hand — brought him back to the family table and never mentioned his sins.

We Are the Prodigals

In the sacrament of confession, we are the prodigal sons and daughters who have already accepted the grace to admit our sin and to return to our heavenly Father, the merciful father of the parable, who is always willing and ready to forgive us, to welcome us with a loving embrace when we have strayed from home. When we humbly admit our guilt and are sorry and confess our sins, God embraces us in mercy and love as we celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation and pardon.

The parable of the prodigal son is the most striking, powerful illustration of the human process that happens when we go to confession and celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation and of the theology that is contained in the sacramental ritual that celebrates the divine mercy and pardon that we receive because of the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. God is not out to catch us in our sin, but is constantly reaching out and hanging on to us, embracing us in love in spite of our sins and always willing to forgive us.

Confession of sin can only be sincere if it is preceded by humble examination of conscience. Confession is actually the external expression of the internal transformation of conversion that happens in our hearts. Conversion is not a once-in-a-lifetime moment, but a continuous, ongoing, lifelong process which brings us ever closer to the

holiness and love of God. Each time we go to confession, our moral experience of conversion prompts us to turn more and more toward God, because each conversion experience reveals God in a new loving manner.

As we humbly and sincerely confess our sins after admitting our guilt, we need to imagine in our minds the father of the parable of the prodigal son, our heavenly Father, rushing out to hug us, to embrace us, to forgive us and fill us with love and accept us even before we confess our sins. In this parable Jesus reveals to us a loving God who simply cannot not forgive.

Why Confess to a Priest

The question is often asked, Why confess my sins to a priest? Why not confess them directly to God, since God has already forgiven me anyway? From God's point of view, this simple answer is: There is no reason. But from our point of view, the answer is that as human beings who do not live in minds and thoughts alone, we need to externalize in a bodily way with words, signs and gestures what is in our minds and hearts. We need to seek, hear and feel forgiveness, not just think about it. We need other human beings to help us externalize what is within us and open our hearts before the Lord, which then puts confessors in a new light. They are best seen not as faceless and impersonal judges but as spiritual guides helping us with our guilt, sorrow and compassionately helping us to experience and receive the mercy of God in our lives.

"There is another figure in the parable we are dealing with — the older brother — the older son who is not ready to forgive, forget and accept his younger brother back home. Perhaps at times some of the attitude or behavior of the older brother lurks in all of our hearts."

God's merciful grace and good confessors often help people to find the peace and tranquility that people often seek from psychologists and psychiatrists. As mentioned earlier, confessors help us to deal with basic human needs that we experience as we struggle with sin and celebrate God's love and forgiveness.

For another past text in Origins on the sacrament of reconciliation, see "Renewal of the Sacrament of Reconciliation," a pastoral letter by Archbishop Michael Sheehan of Santa Fe, N.M., in Vol. 30, pp. 667f in the edition dated March 29, 2001. Sheehan wrote: "Some of you may have had a bad experience going to confession and don't want to go anymore. Don't let that hold you back! Our priests have grown in pastoral sensitivity and kindness, and want to help you be reconciled with the Lord. The priests know that they too are sinners."

Sheehan said: "My heart goes out to those who are unable to receive the sacraments because they are in a marriage not recognized by the church. Those in this situation are urged to speak with their pastor or deacon about the possibility of validating their marriage through our marriage tribunal. Our tribunal returns hundreds of couples to the sacramental life of the church each year." And, the archbishop said: "If you are uncertain about how to go to confession, just ask the priest to help you. You will come out of the reconciliation room with a lightness and tranquility you can't imagine."

See also in Origins the pastoral letter on the sacrament of penance by Cardinal (then Archbishop) Theodore McCarrick in Vol. 25, pp. 637ff in the edition dated March 14, 1996. McCarrick said: "The Greeks used the word 'metanoia' to symbolize the kind of contrition and turning away from sin which the Lord asks us to bring to this sacrament. 'Metanoia' describes a profound change in the whole person by which one begins to consider, judge and arrange one's life according to the holiness and love of God, made manifest in his Son in the last days and given to us in abundance."

Parishes and schools in the Archdiocese of Portland, Ore., “are not separate civil entities that can hold title to property or hold beneficial interests in their own right. They are simply divisions or part” of the archdiocese, U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Elizabeth Perris said when she ruled Dec. 30 on the ownership of parish properties in the archdiocese.

Perris said the archdiocese had argued “that if this court does not apply the church’s canon-law view of property ownership in the civil law bankruptcy arena, the result will be a rearrangement of the church’s polity in violation of the First Amendment. I disagree.” She said that under civil law, the institutions in question “are not separate civil legal entities that have the capacity to sue and be sued or to be beneficiaries of trusts.” Among other points, she said that because “parishes are merely parts of the archdiocese, contributions made to the parishes were in effect made to the archdiocese. Using the fruits of the contributions to pay claims against the archdiocese does not impose a substantial burden.”

Perris suggested that the loss of some properties might inconvenience parishioners who would then need to worship in another parish or send their children to another Catholic school. She also suggested that the archdiocese might be able to show that selling all or nearly all properties would impose a substantial burden on the exercise of religion from which the archdiocese might seek relief under the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

In a Jan. 3 letter to the Archdiocese of Portland, Archbishop John Vlazny discussed the Dec. 30 ruling by Judge Elizabeth Perris. Vlazny said: “The court’s rulings do not resolve the property lawsuit in our Chapter 11 case. The court ruled only on

The Other Figure in the Parable

There is another figure in the parable we are dealing with — the older brother — the older son who is not ready to forgive, forget and accept his younger brother back home. Perhaps at times some of the attitude or behavior of the older brother lurks in all of our hearts — we are not ready to forgive, we require more even than God. The older brother’s problem is a universal one. It is tough for most of us to say, “I am sorry”; it is even tougher to say, “you are forgiven.” And it is most difficult of all to say gracefully, “I accept your forgiveness.” To be able to do that, we must be able to forgive ourselves. That, too, is what we celebrate in the sacrament of confession, reconciliation.

The older son in the story would focus on the brother’s sin and guilt and would not celebrate his return, forgiveness, even though his father pleaded. But we should always strive to have the attitude and heart of the merciful and forgiving father, who told the older son, “But now we must celebrate and rejoice because your brother was dead and has come back to life again; he was lost and has been found.” This is what happens when we go to confession. ■

Reflections After Bankruptcy Court Ruling on Parish Properties

Archbishop Vlazny

“No one in the archdiocese had the authority to seize parish property or assets” to satisfy clergy sexual abuse claims, Archbishop John Vlazny of Portland, Ore., said in a column in the Jan. 20 issue of the *Catholic Sentinel*, Portland’s archdiocesan newspaper. He said the bankruptcy court ruling Dec. 30 declaring that parish properties are part of the Portland Archdiocese’s assets to be considered in settling sex-abuse claims “felt like a punch in the stomach.” The archdiocese filed for bankruptcy in July 2004. Bankruptcy Court Judge Elizabeth Perris ruled Dec. 30 that the archdiocese, not its individual parishes, owns parish properties and schools in the archdiocese. (For a report on the ruling, see the “On File” page in the Jan. 12 *Origins* edition.) Vlazny said, “Some have suggested that I received bad legal advice

and foolishly sought bankruptcy protection from the court.” But, he said, “in the face of two pending trials, we realized that negative verdicts could possibly consume the limited financial resources then available and leave nearly 70 other plaintiffs empty-handed.” He said that the question of ownership of parish properties “is of great interest to many,” but “the important question is the value of the claims.” He said, “We make every effort to balance the demands of victims with the needs of the church.” He said also that common sense suggests “no fair solution will be reached by my unethical confiscation of parish property for the purpose of selling it without appropriate discovery and giving plaintiffs whatever they want.” Vlazny’s text follows.

Three weeks have passed since the bankruptcy court ruling that parish real estate in western Oregon belongs to the Archdiocese of Portland. It was quickly assumed by some that these properties should now be available to settle claims for victims of clergy sexual abuse in Catholic parishes here. Fortunately or unfortunately, depending upon one’s point of view, the resolution of these claims is not quite so simple.

As you can well imagine, Friday, Dec. 30, was not the most satisfying day of my life. Nor was it the most disheartening. But I must confess that when I first received news about the ruling it felt like a punch in the stomach. I was concerned about all of you, your worry and frustration about such troublesome allegations and the consequences for a church we all love. I sensed that the critics of the church would have a field day. There was also the likelihood that the ruling would simply prolong and further exacerbate our efforts to resolve valid claims fairly, justly and equitably. Last but not least, who ever likes to lose?

Ever since Oregon law changed in 1999 and many of these claims began to come forward, our Catholic community has done its level best to respond with integrity, compassion and justice. We may not have appreciated the magnitude of the problem before us or responded in every instance in a manner that was perceived as helpful by those filing the complaints, but we honestly tried. We also had much to learn, and we have indeed learned a lot.

Before filing for bankruptcy in July of 2004, our archdiocesan church had successfully resolved more than 100 claims of victims of child sexual abuse by clergy. But, as I have told you before, available funds were diminishing, and insurance carriers who had been paid premiums promptly and fully by

the archdiocese suddenly became unwilling to participate in settlements. Because of the liberal statutes of limitation and vicarious responsibility laws of the state of Oregon, banks and other friends were unwilling to loan us the money we needed to compensate victims. Last but not least, even though this was unimportant to some, no one in the archdiocese had the authority to seize parish property or assets to satisfy such claims. In fact, most parishes don't have significant reserves that would allow them to offer assistance. Those who do probably would decline because of other plans they have for carrying out their evangelizing mission.

Some have suggested that I received bad legal advice and foolishly sought bankruptcy protection from the court. It is true that this was indeed the advice of legal counsel, but the concurrence of the archdiocesan finance council and consultors was unanimous. In the face of two pending trials, we realized that negative verdicts could possibly consume the limited financial resources then available and leave nearly 70 other plaintiffs empty-handed, given the diminished availability of archdiocesan assets. And what about the work of the church? How would that continue?

“It is true that [the bankruptcy filing] was indeed the advice of legal counsel, but the concurrence of the archdiocesan finance council and consultors was unanimous.”

Chapter 11 bankruptcy has been established by our government precisely to aid folks like ourselves who could not meet the demands of their creditors but who have every intention of continuing their operations and need help. We did indeed need such assistance. We still do.

Even though this property question is of great interest to many people, it is not the primary concern of any sincere attempt to bring the archdiocese out of bankruptcy and satisfy all the claims before us. The important question is the value of the claims. This is the one that we have attempted to address from the very beginning. We were obviously derailed by the request for judgment on the matter of the bankruptcy estate. Moreover, as I mentioned earlier, all of this has been complicated by the inability of the archdiocese to receive support from insurers to whom in good faith we had paid premiums at a time when the alleged

abuse supposedly took place.

Is this matter difficult? Is all of this a black eye for the church? Yes, of course, in both instances. But we move forward because we want to do what is right for victims, and we are committed to the evangelizing mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ. Parishioners, school children, the poor and the needy depend upon us for services that are not so highly valued by many in today's secular culture. For us these matters are paramount, and so we make every effort to balance the demands of victims with the needs of the church.

A few of you have suggested that I should stop the delaying tactics, meet our obligations and move on with the work of the church. Please be assured that I am in no way interested in delay. As much as any of you, I want this matter resolved and resolved it will be. Common sense suggests that no fair solution will be reached by my unethical confiscation of parish property for the purpose of selling it without appropriate discovery and giving plaintiffs whatever they want.

It will take some patience and considerable prudence to come to a fair resolution, but it will undoubtedly be costly. The archdiocese has proposed a reasonable plan, which will compensate victims just as generously as all who have come to us beforehand. We have had more experience than we want in these matters, and we have worked successfully with most of the same attorneys in resolving previous claims. We should be able to do the same now.

For Christmas I received a DVD of the 1950s movie titled *Diary of a Country Priest*. The English subtitles of this French movie were minimally distracting. It was a beautiful story of a young priest who met with considerable resistance and indifference in the parish he was sent to serve. Even his health failed him, but his final words were the ones that touched my heart most deeply, “All is grace.”

Yes, my friends, with God's help, all is grace. When we entrust ourselves to the Lord, whether we be victims, those falsely accused or those paying the price, all is grace if we will, in faith, put ourselves in the hands of God and not in place of God. Please join me in praying to the Holy Spirit for guidance in all of these important matters. God's peace be with you all. ■

certain specific legal issues. The court ruled that parishes have no separate civil legal existence — that they are merely part of the archdiocese — and that parish real estate, therefore, belongs to the archdiocese.

“The court did not rule on the question of whether the elimination of parish and high school interests in their property would violate the Religious Freedom and Restoration Act. That issue will have to be decided at a trial sometime in the future. We will fight hard to protect the First Amendment rights of parishes and parishioners.

“Neither did the court rule on whether other types of parish and school assets (cash, bank accounts, investments, endowments, etc.) are held in trust for a specific charitable purpose or otherwise for restricted use. There is substantial evidence that various parish, school and archdiocesan assets are held in charitable trust or otherwise for restricted use.”

Vlazny said: “You have often heard me say that parish assets belong to the parish, as has been our understanding and practice under canon law, and that I do not intend to seize parish assets to pay creditors of the archdiocese. My commitment remains to uphold canon law and respect the rights of each parish under canon law. If this means I must appeal bankruptcy court rulings to a higher court, I will do so.”

Regarding the sex-abuse lawsuits against the archdiocese, the archbishop said: “We have proposed to make available close to \$40 million to fund the pending and settled-but-unpaid claims, and believe this amount will provide fair, just and equitable compensation. The archdiocese has filed a plan of reorganization, which, if confirmed, would pay these and other claims as early as April 30, 2006.”

Bishop John D'Arcy of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Ind., said in February 2004 that the University of Notre Dame should not have allowed the production of "The Vagina Monologues" on campus; he said the play is offensive to women and "antithetical to Catholic teaching on the beautiful gift of human sexuality." D'Arcy said, "The play violates the truth about women, the truth about sexuality, the truth about male and female and the truth about the human body."

"The Vagina Monologues," performed annually on several hundred college campuses around the United States in mid-February, is based on more than 200 interviews by playwright Eve Ensler and features monologues by the all-female cast.

Father David O'Connell, president of The Catholic University of America in Washington, said in a Feb. 1 statement that the possibility of staging "The Vagina Monologues" at the university "came up two years ago. I said then what I recently told our student newspaper: The play is crude, ugly and unworthy of performing at CUA in any venue." O'Connell said that "though the play purports to promote the dignity of women, it succeeds in doing the opposite. There are much better ways to promote that noble goal, and I would wholeheartedly endorse them."

For another text in *Origins* by Holy Cross Father John Jenkins, see: "The Role of a Catholic University," in the current volume, pp. 277ff in the edition dated Oct. 6, 2005. That was his inaugural address as president of the University of Notre Dame. "My presidency will be driven by a wholehearted commitment to uniting and integrating these two indispensable and wholly compatible strands of higher learning: academic excellence and religious faith," he said.

Catholic Universities and Events They Sponsor

Father Jenkins, CSC

"The Vagina Monologues," performed in theaters on the University of Notre Dame campus the past four years, will be restricted to a classroom setting at the university this year. In a speech during a convocation with the university's faculty Jan. 23, Holy Cross Father John Jenkins, Notre Dame's new president, discussed "The Vagina Monologues," performed annually on several hundred U.S. college campuses in mid-February, as well as another annual campus event known as the Queer Film Festival, scheduled for February. He said that to those unfamiliar with the film festival, the title "seems to celebrate homosexual activity." In his speech Jenkins offered "some initial thoughts about why I think certain events, presented in certain ways, might not be acceptable on Notre Dame's campus," and he spoke on "principles which might guide decisions about the acceptability of certain events." He spoke not only about the two specific events, but "about the deeper issues they raise regarding academic freedom and our character as a Catholic university." These issues also were addressed during a convocation with students the following day. Jenkins asked for input from faculty and students to aid him in developing principles to guide decisions about what events are appropriate for Notre Dame. "Recognition of academic freedom in higher education has been hard-won for centuries, and it must be vigorously defended," Jenkins said; at the same time, "we must be clear about its appropriate limits." Jenkins said, "My concern is not with censorship but with sponsorship." The text of his speech to the faculty follows.

Thank you for your presence here today. Despite the fact that universities at the start of the 21st century have become complicated and diffuse organizations, they nevertheless remain in essence communities of scholars and students in conversation about significant issues. If we lose sight of that simple reality, we will have lost our soul.

I want to speak to you today about issues of importance for our community, and I will ask for your views today and in the weeks ahead. Your presence here, despite your busy schedules and many responsibilities, is an

indication that we have not lost our sense of ourselves as an intellectual community.

I will speak today about issues arising from the Queer Film Festival and *The Vagina Monologues*. I will speak not only about these particular events, but also about the deeper issues they raise regarding academic freedom and our character as a Catholic university. Whatever one thinks about these two events, few issues are more important for this community than these. Today and in the discussion of coming weeks we seek above all the deeper principles that take account of academic freedom and our Catholic character — the principles that guide decisions not only about the events currently at issue, but also about others in the future.

In addition to these very important issues, there is something else at stake. As I begin my presidency I am aware that as I make particular decisions and undertake initiatives I am establishing patterns and expectations for how I will lead in this position. Consequently, it is important not only what decisions I make, but how I make them.

On matters of significance, I will always strive to make decisions, consonant with my authority, according to my most informed and considered judgment about what is best for this university and its mission. I will not lead by consensus, nor by majority vote, nor in response to the pressures that individuals or groups inside or outside the university may bring to bear. However, prior to making a decision on an important matter, I will, as appropriate and practicable, strive to solicit and listen to the views of relevant individuals and groups. Central to the obligations of my office are the twin responsibilities of listening to the views of members of this community prior to a decision and then making that decision.

"Some presented arguments that this play should not be performed this year. ... It will be performed again this year. It will be performed in a classroom setting. There will not be fundraising activities, as occurred in previous years."

Today I meet with you, the faculty, and I will offer my thoughts on the issues at hand. At the end of my address I will take your questions

March 5-8

Annual Convention of the Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development. Crowne Plaza Anaheim. Anaheim, Calif. www.cppcd.org

*March 12-14

Conference: "Whence the Heavenly Jerusalem? The Politics of Sacred Space and the Pursuit of Peace." Notre Dame University's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies. Tantar Ecumenical Institute. Jerusalem. omar1@ndu

March 14-16

Meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Administrative Committee. USCCB Headquarters. Washington, D.C. www.usccb.org

March 16-19

Symposium on the Spirituality and Identity of the Diocesan Priest. Sponsors: Institute for Priestly Formation and University of St. Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary. Theme: "Good Shepherd: Living Christ's Own Pastoral Authority." USML Conference Center. Mundelein, Ill. ifp@creighton.edu

*March 21-22

Conference: "The Liturgy of the Hours: The Public Prayer of the Church as Foundation for Christian Spirituality." Sponsor: Notre Dame Center for Liturgy. University of Notre Dame. South Bend, Ind. <http://liturgy.nd.edu>

*March 24-26

Convocation: "The New Evangelization: Overcoming the Obstacles." Sponsors: Cardinal Adam Maida and Sacred Heart Major Seminary. St. John Center for Youth and Family. Plymouth, Mich. www.shmsonline.org

*signifies new entry

On File

Coretta Scott King, 78, died Jan. 31 at a health center in Baja California, Mexico. The widow of the slain Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., she was a civil rights leader in her own right. Archbishop Wilton Gregory of Atlanta, her home, issued a statement Jan. 31 after her death saying that "the entire nation stands in awe of the wondrous legacy of this great woman of faith." Gregory said: "We in the Archdiocese of Atlanta are especially grieved at her death. She was a noble resident of our city and a proud bearer of the heritage of freedom and justice that her husband epitomized and that she fulfilled with incredible determination. Dr. King could not have found a worthier spouse and colleague in the struggle for social change and civil rights. May Coretta Scott King and her gallant husband rest in the peace and mercy of Christ." King suffered a serious stroke and a heart attack in 2005.

Samuel Alito Jr., 55, was confirmed by the U.S. Senate to the U.S. Supreme Court Jan. 31. He watched the 58-42 Senate vote from the White House, where he was to be sworn in at a private ceremony in time to appear at the Capitol for the State of the Union address by President George W. Bush that evening. A second, ceremonial swearing-in was scheduled for Feb. 1 at the White House. Alito replaced retiring Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. He had been a judge on the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia since

1990. Alito became the fifth Catholic currently on the nine-member court. The other four Catholic members are Chief Justice John Roberts, Justices Antonin Scalia, Anthony Kennedy and Clarence Thomas.

The president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a letter Jan. 24, urged House of Representatives members to reject a budget reconciliation bill before them. Bishop William Skylstad of Spokane, Wash., USCCB president, said the budget agreement "could prove harmful to many low-income children, families, elderly and people with disabilities who are least able to provide for themselves." Skylstad said that while the plan had some positive elements, the nation's bishops "believe that, overall, the impact of this bill will be to fail to meet the needs of the most vulnerable." He wrote: "In December, as president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, I wrote to you expressing serious concerns about provisions in the budget reconciliation bill. The proposed changes in Medicaid, child support enforcement funding, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and agriculture conservation programs, in particular, could have a negative impact upon the most vulnerable in our nation." He added. "The final ... agreement coming once again before the House ... includes provisions in these areas which we believe could prove harmful."

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