

A Message from Archdeacon Charlie

This third edition of *The PeliDeacon* introduces a new section: *Deacon Saints and Heroes*, featuring the lives and work of men and women who model for us what it means to be a servant in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Be they lay, clergy or a member of some religious order, these saints and heroes offer us the inspiration to live a sacrificial life as well as much practical wisdom on how we ourselves can become saints and heroes of the faith. Below, in this edition, I tell how I “met” that 20th century saint of the ages, Mother Teresa of Calcutta (Page 3).



As with all things in this newsletter, your ideas and submissions are welcome.

In the peace and power of Jesus Christ,

Charlie

The Ven. Charles deGravelles.

2023 Deacon Spring Gathering



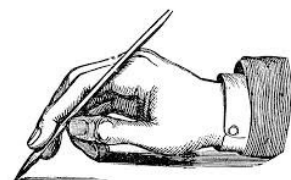
Deacon Charmaine Kathmann has begun planning our first deacon gathering of the year. The theme will be *The Life and Living Legacy of Frances Joseph Gaudet*. We will honor and learn from this 19th Century education and prison reformer who did her most productive work in New Orleans. We are hoping to find a Saturday in June which would allow us a morning at St. Luke’s New Orleans where we will learn more about Gaudet and then an afternoon at St. Anna’s where Deacon Luigi Mandile has agreed to show us the expanded ministries to at-risk youth at the Dodwell House. Other deacons with ministries in prisons, criminal justice and work with youth will be featured.

Letters of Agreement and Guidelines for Deacons Are in the Works

—Your Input Requested—

Under the leadership of Father Jay Angerer, we will be upgrading our forms of Letter of Agreement for deacons and also the Guidelines for Deacons in the diocese. We have been asked for input on these documents, and I'm asking you to review the old forms of these documents that we used during the episcopate of Charles Jenkins (sent to you recently by email) and to suggest any ideas you may have.

A Deacon's Story *A Continuing Series about the Deacons of Louisiana*



All Louisiana deacons are encouraged to write and submit a story about a time in their ministry in which they felt they were living into their diaconal calling. Our second in this series by and about Louisiana deacons is by **Deacon Elaine Clements**.



Deacon Elaine and Rev. Deborah are inspecting the renovation work as it was beginning on an apartment building that the local parish, the diocese and Episcopal Relief & Development purchased to renovate and provide affordable housing for Marathon Key, Florida.

The Best Job in the World by Deacon Elaine Clements

Deacon Elaine Clements served on Episcopal Relief & Development, Domestic Disaster Program, Partner in Response & Resilience team as from 2009 to 2022. Retired now and living in Alabama, she is currently serving on the Council on Deacons for the Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana. This "snapshot" of one emergency of the many Deacon Elaine responded to for ERD is a testament to the joy deacons get in serving those in need.

Hurricane Maria had displaced many Puerto Ricans; they'd come into the airports in Florida with suitcases that held everything they could bring and/or save from their devastated homes. They had no jobs but were hopeful that economically booming central Florida could provide housing and work for them to begin again.

Unfortunately, housing was scarce and expensive; jobs available to people without any English language skills and no connections were difficult to find. Many of these displaced folks had ended up in a corridor of decrepit FEMA-funded hotels, entire families crammed into one small room; they had been there for months. It was an urban desert; the only food was fast food, no grocery stores--really not much of anything other than empty strip malls, payday lending storefronts and fleabag hotels, holdovers from more prosperous times in this town.

Three Kings Day, January 6, is an important one in Puerto Rican culture. For the children, Christmas is not over until a visit from the Magi bearing gifts. Then after the gifts are discovered, there is typically a large family celebration with traditional food. *(Continued next page.)*

I was there on a trip to support a large, multi-faceted emergency outreach program begun during a visit to that diocese several months earlier, shortly after the hurricane had struck, and funded by Episcopal Relief & Development. It was my job to help them begin to transition from emergency relief to long-term recovery programs.

The priest who had been in charge of coordinating the emergency program felt we needed to do something to relieve the misery and loneliness of the people in these hotels; he also wanted to establish an ongoing relationship with them so as to be able to help them over the long term. Three Kings Day was a great excuse to get in there and meet everyone. We gathered a number of congregants from his largely Puerto Rican congregation, a bunch of folks from a second Puerto Rican congregation further out of the central city and closer to the area of residential hotels, some students from the local university who had Spanish language skills and a number of people who had already been helped by the emergency program. Presents were bought with discretionary funding: lots of baby dolls and soccer balls, lots of games and baseball bats. Traditional foods were cooked and readied to transport.

It was literally freezing in Central Florida that morning; ice was all over the palm trees when we awoke early to begin our day. We gathered up the cars, the food, the gifts and the people and off we went. I was in a van not only loaded with presents but with Three Kings (young men dressed up with robes and crowns), a telenovela child star now an adult and an Episcopal priest, and a hairless therapy pig-in-training. The poor little thing was so cold that it was snuggled up as close to me in that van as it could possibly be. I kept thinking as I looked around on our drive, "Thank you, God; I have the best job in the world".

Deacon Saints and Heroes

How I “Met” Mother Teresa

The Ven. Charles deGravelles



I had only just started going back to church for the first time since I was in high school, and so I surprised myself on a June day in 1985 when I called my employer, an oil and gas exploration group in Lafayette, to tell them I wouldn't be coming in to work because Mother Teresa was going to be in Baton Rouge, and I wanted to see her.

Even then, long before she was officially canonized by the Catholic Church, she was widely recognized as a saint by Christians of all stripes, and by those of other faith traditions and by non-believers alike. She was a tiny little lady, almost lost in her white flowing sari with the blue trim. Her face was worn and wrinkled as an old road map. Most of what you could see of her face, framed in its headscarf, was a glowing grin; the rest was pure energy. Mother Teresa exuded a compassion that had earned her a Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 for her work among “the poorest of the poor,” and she radiated the mysterious power that seems to come with complete surrender to God.

Why was I chasing Mother Teresa? I wasn't sure, but the idea of even catching a glimpse of a person like this fired my imagination.

The receptionist at the Catholic Life Center was helpful. Yes, Mother Teresa was in town. She'd participated in a 7 a.m. mass at St. Joseph's Cathedral that morning, given a short address to the State Legislature,

and she was now with some of her sisters (nuns), beginning preparations for a Baton Rouge home in a rundown neighborhood from which they would soon be working. She was scheduled to visit a Catholic homeless shelter, St. Vincent de Paul, at 11:30 with Bishop Stanley Ott, and perhaps I might want to see if I could catch up with her there.

I had to search for St. Vincent de Paul's homeless shelter and feeding station. It was then, as it is now, off Florida on Convention at N. 16th. Even though I got there about 10 am, homeless folks had begun to gather, waiting for the doors to open for the noon meal, and I howled with them on my way in. When I said I was there to see Mother Teresa, I was shown to a priest who had been assigned to greet her and the Bishop and to give them the tour.

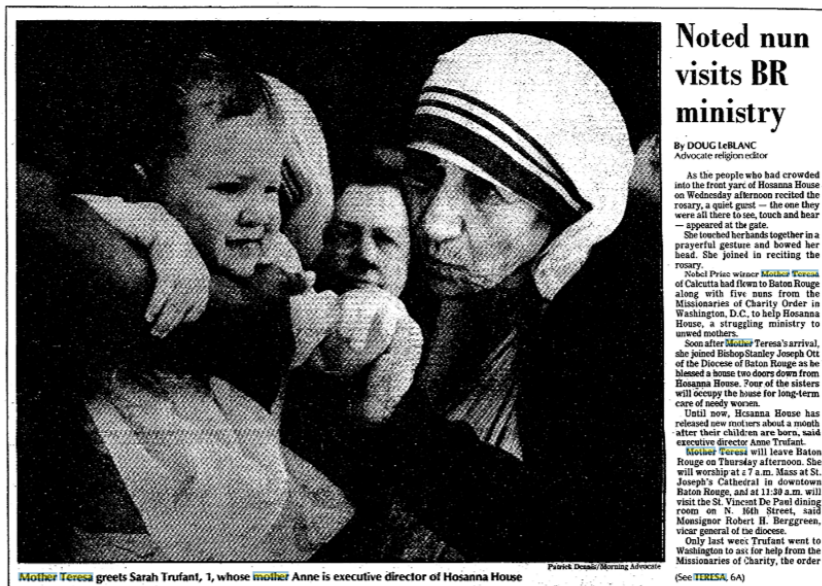
The priest apologized. Mother Teresa wasn't going to make it to the shelter, after all. It seems she decided to stay with her nuns preparing their new home. I was disappointed. Did I know where she was supposed to be next, I asked. I was ready to get on my pony and ride. He was sorry, he didn't.

"But I'll be happy to show you around, if you like," he said. Strangely, this took me by surprise. I'd come to see the famous celebrity saint; why would I want to see a homeless shelter? (This should give you some idea of my cluelessness.) But if I was nothing else, I was unfailingly polite, and I didn't want to seem ungrateful. "Yes," I said, "I'd like that very much."

At first glance, it didn't seem like much: we passed by rows of bunks in a large dorm-like setting. Deeper into the complex was a beautiful little chapel with altar, crucifix, and tabernacle; folding chairs were set up for service. This too, for some reason, took me by surprise. Why would you put a church in a homeless shelter? He asked me if I wanted to pause a moment to pray. I hesitated. It seems I was facing one surprise after another. Not wanting to be impolite, I said yes, and we stood together in silence for a few moments. Something was happening inside of me. I'm not sure you could call it prayer, but I had entered what was for me another zone, and I was struggling to get the lay of this new terrain.

Our last stop was the cafeteria where men and women had been allowed in and were lined up to get their lunch trays. Right away, I noticed a familiar face. One of the servers was Joe Planas, a sportswriter for the Advocate. I didn't really know him, but my last year of undergraduate school--1970-1971--I'd worked as a copy editor at the Advocate, correcting local and wire stories, marking them for the printers, and writing headlines. I'd seen him in the newsroom many times. Now he was wearing an apron and serving up mashed potatoes as each tray came down the line, smiling and making small talk with the men and women he was serving.

It was yet another surprise. All the journalists I'd ever hung with—at the Reveille, LSU's campus newspaper, the Advocate or WBRZ TV where I'd been a reporter in the early-to-mid seventies, were hard-drinking folks as I was. What was Joe Planas doing in here? He noticed me staring at him, looked over and smiled. There was something about that look. What was it? He didn't seem as surprised to see me as I was to see him. His look was something between a welcome and a recognition of some other me. Did he think I was someone else? Did he see something in me I didn't see in myself? We nodded to one another, and I turned away.



Mother Teresa greets Sarah Trufant, 7, whose mother Anne is executive director of Hosanna House

Patrick Desha/Morning Advocate

Noted nun visits BR ministry

By DOUG LEBLANC
Advocate religion editor

As the people who had crowded into the front yard of Hosanna House on Wednesday afternoon recited the rosary, a quiet guest — the one they were all there to see, touch and hear — appeared at the gate.

She touched her hands together in a prayerful gesture and bowed her head. She joined in reciting the rosary.

Nobel Prize winner **Mother Teresa** of Calcutta had flown to Baton Rouge along with five nuns from the Missionaries of Charity Order in Washington, D.C., to help Hosanna House, a struggling ministry to unemployed mothers.

Soon after **Mother Teresa's** arrival, she joined Bishop Stanley Joseph Ott of the Diocese of Baton Rouge as he blessed a house two doors down from Hosanna House. Four of the sisters will occupy the house for long-term care of needy women.

Until now, Hosanna House has released new mothers about a month after their children are born, said executive director Anne Trufant.

Mother Teresa will leave Baton Rouge on Thursday afternoon. She will worship at 7 a.m. Mass at St. Joseph's Cathedral in downtown Baton Rouge, and at 11:30 a.m. will visit the St. Vincent De Paul dining room on N. 16th Street, said Monsignor Robert H. Berggreen, vice general of the diocese.

Only last week, Trufant went to Washington to ask for help from the Missionaries of Charity, the order. (See TERESA, 6A)

The Advocate's story of Mother Teresa's 1985 visit to Baton Rouge

I wondered, as I shook hands with the priest and said goodbye, if I looked as dumbfounded as I felt. On my way home, trying to figure out what had just happened, I burst out laughing. Okay, I got the joke: I had come to see Mother Teresa, and even though I hadn't, I had. And even though I never met her in person, I would keep seeing her many times in many places for the rest of my life.

DEACON CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Feb 24-26—Silent Retreat at SECC
Feb 26-Mar 26—Bishop's Lenten Reflections
Feb 10-11—AED Life and Work of Deacons Conference (Zoom)
Mar 23-25—AED Archdeacon and Deacon Director Conference (Zoom)
Apr 22—Earth Day; Creation Care of Service
Apr 29—SECC 30th Anniversary Event
Jun 9-19—ECW Annual Gathering
Jun 10—Gay Pride Parade
Aug 4-6—Addictions Recovery Retreat



Please Join AED

If you are not already a member of the Association of Episcopal Deacons, please join. A strengthened relationship with Episcopal deacons in other dioceses will help to deepen and enrich our own ministries. Here's where you can join:

<https://www.episcopaldeacons.org/join--aed-membership.html>

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Our Vision: The Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana is one church, faithful to our Lord Jesus, united in mission, reaching out through service and proclamation to all for whom Christ died. We live in joyous expectation of God's transforming power, compassion, and mercy in our lives.

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