

BISHOP ROBERT W. MUENCH
THE HAPPY BISHOP



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Commentator
August 3, 2018

Bishop Muench: 'It's been a graced time'

By Debbie Shelley

The Catholic Commentator

Laughing over the good times and surprises, reflecting on challenges faced by the diocese and concluding with a note about God's grace, Bishop Robert W. Muench shared a panoramic view of his life and ministry as he prepared to end his 16-year watch as shepherd of the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Bishop Muench was the person most surprised that God would call him to become a bishop when he entered the priesthood 50 years ago. With his trademark infectious laugh and smiling eyes, he looks back and sees the footsteps of the good shepherd who nudged him to lead his faithful.

The bishop was a nervous 13-year-old when he applied to St. Joseph Seminary College in St. Benedict in 1956 after Sister Mary Alice Russell OP, a former principal at St. Leo the Great Elementary School in New Orleans, asked him the question, "Have you ever thought about being a priest?" to which he replied, "Yes." She persuaded him that "now is better than later" to apply, and he wondered, "How am I going to shock my parents?" about his desire to apply. They were supportive, as were a number of priests and religious.

After the bishop's ordination to priest-

hood on May 18, 1968, his Uncle Bernie gave the freshly-minted priest a letter he wrote as an eight-year-old, inviting his uncle to his first Communion. Bishop Muench's one-page letter included this sentence: "I think some day I might be a priest."

Among the priests who served as a role model for him was Father Alcide Clement, who served as pastor at St. Leo. The bishop had fond memories of Father Clement training him to be a master of ceremonies during the Holy Week Masses. Without a notebook or notes, Father Clement sat with the future bishop on the steps to the sacristy of St. Leo and patiently went through the ceremonies one by one, teaching the young man when to turn the page, bring items up, etc.

"As a twerpy 13-year-old teen, I felt

validated as a human being," said Bishop Muench.

With so many good priests as role models, Bishop Muench said he was "happy as a lark" being a parish priest and it was his first love. Yet he was called forth to become a leader in Catholic education.

Archbishop John P. Cody sent Bishop Muench, then a seminarian to Catholic University in Washington, D.C. to study theology and work on his master's degree in education. Archbishop Cody told the bishop at the time to plan on being appointed as principal of a Catholic high school after

ordination.

He taught at St. John Vianney Prep School in New Orleans, which was then a high school for young men aspiring to be priests. He also served as chaplain at Brother Martin High School, also in New

Orleans.

Bishop Muench served four years as a teacher and counselor at St. John before asking Archbishop Philip M. Hannan to reassign him to a parish ministry.

But God had different plans. Archbishop Hannan called Bishop Muench to work as an administrative assistant, and as part of those duties he was heavily involved in the planning of St. John Paul II's visit to New Orleans in 1987. Later, Archbishop Francis B. Schulte, who had succeeded Archbishop Hannan, appointed Bishop Muench to serve as vicar general.

He was further shocked when he was appointed auxiliary bishop of New Orleans in May 1990.

Father Michael Fritzen appeared to leak the news, but was actually just conjecturing, when then-Msgr. Muench filled in for Archbishop Schulte during a confirmation ceremony at St. Paul Church in New Orleans. Father Fritzen thanked him for coming and added, "After all, everyone knows Msgr. Muench is going to be the next auxiliary bishop of New Orleans."

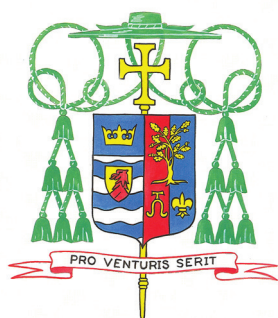
Bishop Muench angrily thought, "I am never going to be able to dispel this false rumor."

But only a few hours later, Archbishop

SEE REFLECTION PAGE 3B



Bishop Robert W. Muench 1968



His Excellency,

The Most Reverend Glen John Provost, D.D., M.A.

Bishop of Lake Charles,

with the clergy, religious and laity of the

Diocese of Lake Charles

express congratulations and best wishes to

The Most Reverend Robert W. Muench

upon his retirement as Bishop of Baton Rouge

after 50 years of ministry,

including 28 years in the episcopacy.



REFLECTION▼

From page 2B

Schulte asked him to meet him in his office. He said Archbishop Schulte said, "Let's go to the chapel (at Notre Dame Seminary)."

At the time, the Bishop of Detroit was retiring, so Bishop Muench thought the news would be that Archbishop Schulte was being appointed there.

"He said, 'The pope has appointed you the next auxiliary bishop of New Orleans,' " said Bishop Muench.

"I had missed it, 'Zoom'" laughed the bishop.

Attracted to the role that St. John the Baptist played in heralding Jesus as the messiah, Bishop Muench chose the episcopal motto, "Jesus Must Increase" (Jn 3:30).

"He (St. John Baptist) was saying 'I'm not the one, Jesus is one,'" said Bishop Muench.

And he continues to be humbled that God called him to leadership roles.

"This was not my plan. Being a priest was my plan, I loved the priesthood and still love the priesthood," said the bishop.

But God nudged him farther along. In 1996, Bishop Muench

was appointed bishop of Covington, Kentucky. He had known the bishop of that diocese was retiring.

When a papal nuncio visited the archbishop's residence in New Orleans he asked him,

nuncio called me, and he said, 'This time we need Bobby.' You are being assigned to Covington," said Bishop Muench.

"Kentucky?" the bishop quizzically thought. "It was like, 'I'm not ready for this' and it had



Bishop Robert W. Muench is seldom seen without a smile.

"You're from Kentucky, aren't you?" But Bishop Muench never connected the dots that he would be going to Kentucky.

"Archbishop Schulte called me into his office and said, 'The

nothing to do with Kentucky. One builds up comfort with the known (New Orleans)."

The bishop said the transition was eased because of his relationship with outgoing Bish-

op William Hughes. And, his former classmate, Father Ray Hartman, also retired, lived in the diocese.

The bishop oversaw the massive restoration and refurbishment of the Basilica of the Assumption while in Covington.

But God wasn't through with the surprises. Bishop Muench was called to be bishop of Baton Rouge two weeks after the renovations of the basilica were complete. He remembers thinking when the Baton Rouge diocese was established in 1961 that it was a nice part of the state but that he would never be assigned there now that it had become its own diocese.

He mused that when asked how he felt about going to the Diocese of Baton Rouge he said it was a wonderful diocese with a lot of gifts and that he would be closer to his elderly parents.

"My dad was upset. He said call people elderly at 120," laughed Bishop Muench.

The bishop's parents attended his installation on March 14, 2002.

He shared many warm memories about the later years of his parents, who moved back to Kentucky after Hurricane Katrina and lived at St. Joseph

Home for the Aged in Louisville. His mother received her dying wish to pass away with the Little Sisters of the Poor by her bedside. His dad lived to be 101.

Bishop Muench has served as bishop of the diocese longer than any of his four predecessors.

"It's a wonderful place to be," said the bishop. "I'm grateful for all the good the people

SEE REFLECTION PAGE 27B

WITH THANKS

The Catholic Commentator greatly appreciates the contributions and assistance of the Archives Department of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, Dr. Boyd Helm, Bishop Robert W. Muench's sisters, the Archives Department of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, the Clarion Herald, St. Joseph Seminary College, Catholic Life TV and, of course, Bishop Muench in putting together this commemorative edition.

Most Reverend Robert W. Muench
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'We were one,' bishop's sisters say of family

By Bonny Van

The Catholic Commentator

"We're four different children but we're one," said Mary Muench Pringle, sister of Bishop Robert W. Muench. She was describing the closeness, the love and the faith-filled dynamic of the Muench family.

The Muench family emigrated to the U.S. from Germany, settling in Kentucky, according to Pringle. When Bishop Muench was three-years-old, his father, William Anthony; mother, Mary Kathryn (Allgeier); older sister, Jo Ann Muench Talken; and baby, Mary, who was 8-months-old, moved to New Orleans for his father's job.

"There was no favoritism in the family," said Pringle. "We were one, we were all part of one another. Even today we have a hard time when we are separated. Jo Ann being out of town in California; Marsha, Bob and I do a lot of things but we're always missing a piece of us when Jo Ann's not with us."

Being so close and close in age also came with its challenges, as Pringle related times she caught her parents' ire over scrapes created by her older brother. The

memories of these episodes still fill her with joy and tears of laughter.

"He was always up to something," she laughed. "I was his little drag along, whatever he wanted to do, whatever trouble he wanted to get in and I was so easy going that I got in, more trouble because of him and he would be Mr. Innocent, (saying) 'Me? I didn't do anything.'"

One particular incident that still makes Pringle laugh involved bedtime, when the children shared one large room upstairs in the family home. According to Pringle, her older brother would cause a noisy commotion then feign sleep when their father walked up the stairs to scold them.

"And, I used to tell Dad, 'Really? Do you think I'd be sitting up there yelling by myself knowing what was going to happen?' But, he (Bishop Muench) was always full of it with me and always dragging me in trouble," Pringle laughed.

Early on, the family knew their brother would be a priest.

"It was kind of funny because a friend of my mom said, 'You know, he is going to be a priest or a radio announcer,'" said Talken. "He was very sick when he was a baby. Mom stayed up all night and prayed



Bishop Muench's sisters, from left, Jo Ann Talken, Mary Pringle and Marsha Morse

to the Blessed Mother and devoted him to Mary, and he's mentioned that sometimes at the altar."

"His vocation was always there. Always," said Pringle.

Pringle then described how her 9-year-old brother spent playtime pretending to celebrate Mass as a priest, with her as an altar server.

"He would set up a little table outside the garage door, take the dictionary he used and we sat there and I was his altar server and I better listen to what he said and how he said it because he would tell me I didn't do it right or whatever," she laughed.

Bishop Muench left the family at age 13 to begin studying for the priesthood at St. Joseph Seminary. Family trips to St. Benedict for the once-a-month Sunday visit

created cherished memories for the three sisters. There were picnic lunches, fishing and exploring in the woods. When Bishop Muench was ordained a priest May 18, 1968, youngest sister Marsha Muench Morse recalled her brother's happiness.

"He just radiated!" she said, with tears in her eyes. "And as a teenager, (I'm thinking) I'm not just seeing that – that's real! He (was) so happy, he (was) just radiating in the praise and glory he has for God and from then on, I knew he was happy in what he did."

After his ordination, the bishop served in various capacities for the Archdiocese of New Orleans, including as a religion teacher, director of vocations, vicar general and auxiliary bishop of New Orleans. When Bishop Muench was appointed the

SEE SISTERS PAGE 28B



Bishop Muench, We Love You



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Through your support of our efforts, you have exemplified the Gospel message of love and compassion, as well as faith in action. You have played such an important role in our visions and accomplishments, and we are forever grateful for your direction, counsel and encouragement. Thank you for making an impact that truly cannot be measured.





Bishop Robert W. Muench baptizes Dr. Boyd Helm's son in December 1968.

Friends for life

By **Bonny Van**

The Catholic Commentator

The first time Dr. Boyd Helm of Baton Rouge met Bishop Robert W. Muench was 1952. The fifth-grade boys attended St. Leo the Great School in New Orleans and both served as altar boys.

"It was a different time; it was safe," recalled Helm. "So, as grammar school kids, we took the bus. We went to Canal Street every weekend. And, we had a project, Bobby and I, we were going to go to every radio station and sit in on the live broadcasts and just watch them do their thing."

One of those stops was WSMB, atop the old Maison Blanche building, where the Ritz-Carlton Hotel is now located. Broadcasting legend Sid Noel who later became the iconic Morgus the Magnificent, was hosting his show when the two young boys, seated nearby, began to be disruptive.

"I can remember sitting there, he's doing his live advertisements, the bishop and I were talking and sort of laughing during his live broadcast and he (Noel) kicked us out," laughed Helm.

Another innocent incident that still makes Helm laugh happened in eighth grade during lunch hour.

"The bishop, to this day, talks about this incident," he said. "At St. Leo, you could not say one word during lunch. You sit next to each other and don't say a word. Sister Alice, the principal at that time, came up to us and said, 'I would give up this ship if I thought that you two were just talking to each other.' And, Bobby looked at her and didn't say anything and I looked at her and I said, 'It's time to give up the ship, Sister.' I think he's still embarrassed because Sister Alice was very important to Bobby because he says to this day that she is the one who

gave him his priestly vocation. She's the one that sent him to the seminary and he attributed that to her until the day that she died. And, she was at his bishop (installation) ceremony here in Baton Rouge, in a wheelchair, because they were so close."

The two best friends were headed for Cor Jesu High School, now Brother Martin High School, when the bishop had a change of heart and settled on going to "St. Ben Seminary."

"So, I said to my mother, 'I'm going to go to seminary, too.' She said, 'That's not a good idea.' So, I didn't go," recalled Helm, who ended up finding his calling to be a physician while in high school.

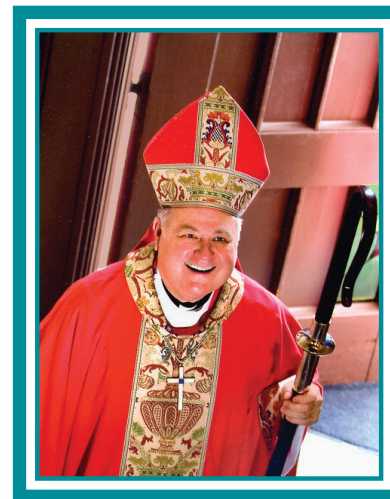
Helm said he knew Bishop Muench would eventually land in Baton Rouge as leader of the diocese.

"We were blessed to have him here," said Helm. "(My wife and I) are astonished at his devotion to his bishop status, to his priesthood, because even in the face of adversity and physical pains, he has not stopped. So, he just lets the pains go. He puts up with any orthopedic pains he may have and does his job because of the love he has for being the bishop of Baton Rouge.

"He's a very humorous person but he also likes his time alone because he's also a private person in a lot of ways. And, in a lot of ways, there's some shyness to him that he has to give up as being the bishop.

"My mother, who is 100, knows the bishop well because he was at my house all the time. So, to this day, the bishop calls her his second mother and every Mother's Day, he sends her a dozen red roses. She loves that and she loves Bobby. Now, she knew I was going to give this interview so she said, 'When you give that interview, do not embarrass Bobby with those stories.' So, I won't tell some stories," laughed Helm.

Bishop Robert W. Muench



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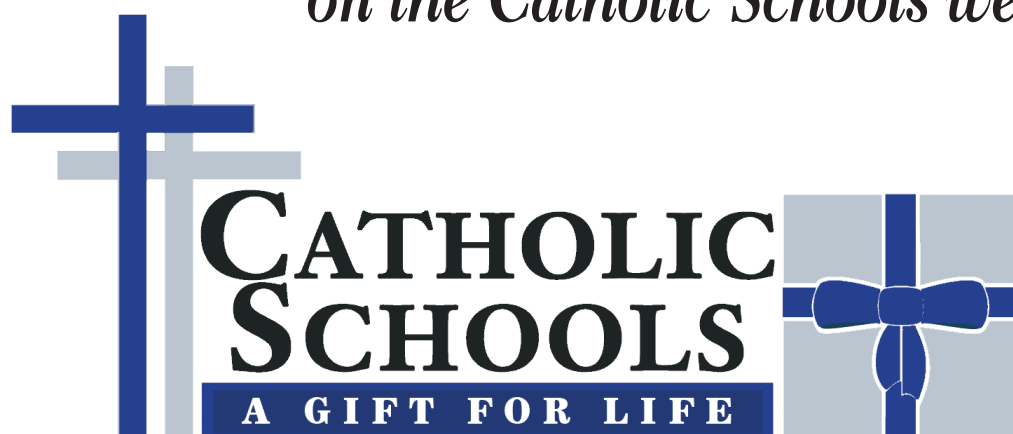
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for your commitment to Catholic education.*



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Bishop is a 'pastor' at heart, Father Ranzino says

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

The first time Father Tom Ranzino, vicar general of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, met Bishop Robert W. Muench was at the Chrism Mass in 1993. Bishop Muench, then auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of New Orleans, was celebrating the Mass for the diocese following the death of Bishop Stanley J. Ott the previous November.

"I remember being a little nervous about him coming in because I didn't know (if) he would accept any direction or what and I remember being pleasantly surprised that he was both affable and kind and really wanted to do what we normally did," recalled Father Ranzino, who was chancellor over liturgy at that time. "That was first time working with him in any capacity."

The two would not cross paths again

until the spring of 2002, after Bishop Muench was installed as the fifth bishop of Baton Rouge. After learning who the new bishop of the diocese would be, Father Ranzino spoke to a colleague in Covington, Kentucky, where Bishop Muench had served as bishop prior to being appointed to the Baton Rouge diocese.

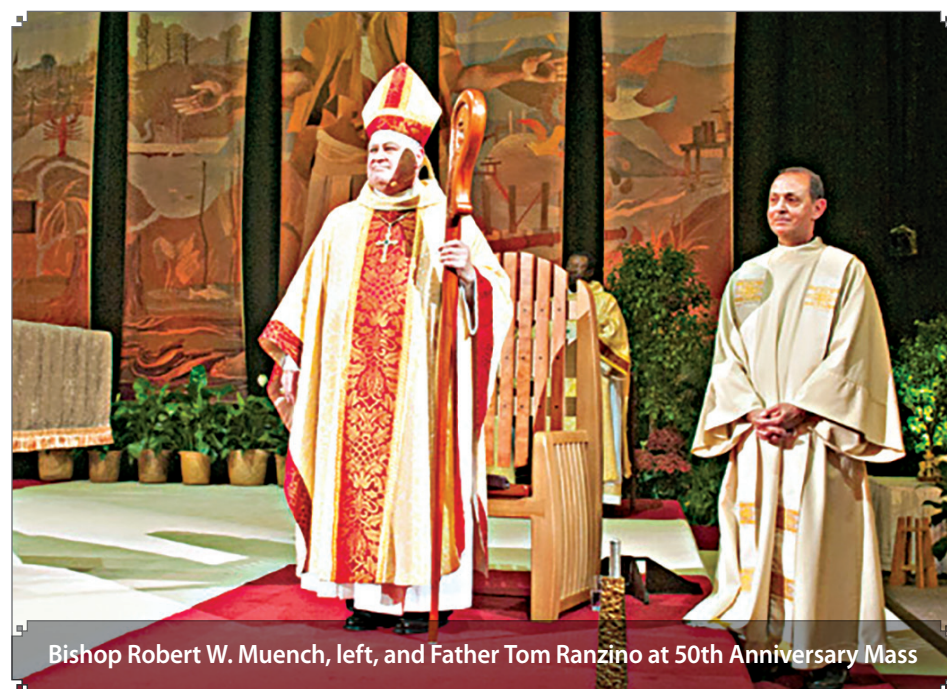
"It's quite humbling to me to see what a powerful commitment that is to the men of our clergy,"

Father Tom Ranzino

Vicar General, Diocese of Baton Rouge

"(She said that) if he says something more than once, it's really important and I took that as sort of an inside scoop so that when I first began to deal with him on more or less a regular basis, I really listened for what he began to repeat," recalled Father Ranzino. "I eventually told him that, after a number of years. I said, 'Bishop, I know when you say something more than once, I know it's really important to you' and he laughed. He says, 'You know, I guess that's true.'"

Father Ranzino credits the smooth transition for Bishop Muench by the fact



Bishop Robert W. Muench, left, and Father Tom Ranzino at 50th Anniversary Mass

that the bishop was "genuinely personable and interested in what we had been doing." Working in the chancery allowed Father Ranzino to work closely with Bishop Muench and Father Than Vu, the vicar general at the time. It was an experience that allowed him to learn about the chancery and other departments within the diocese, including archives because of official materials. Father Ranzino also noted that Bishop Muench and Father Vu had a strong working relationship, with the bishop being able to "hand off to Father (Vu) certain areas of responsibility

that Father (Vu) was very good at dealing with."

After Father Vu's death from cancer in 2015, Bishop Muench appointed Father Ranzino vicar general.

"I felt grateful that (Bishop Muench) had that trust in me and I thought, 'Well, how can I bring to this position in the chancery my particular way of looking at dealing with issues, which I try to bring more people around the table than less?' he said.

According to Father Ranzino, some
SEE RANZINO PAGE 27B

Bishop Shawn McKnight
Bishop Emeritus John R. Gaydos
and all the faithful
of the Diocese of Jefferson City
offer blessings and best wishes to

*Bishop
Robert W. Muench*

on the occasion of your retirement,
after 50 years of faithful service
to the People of God.

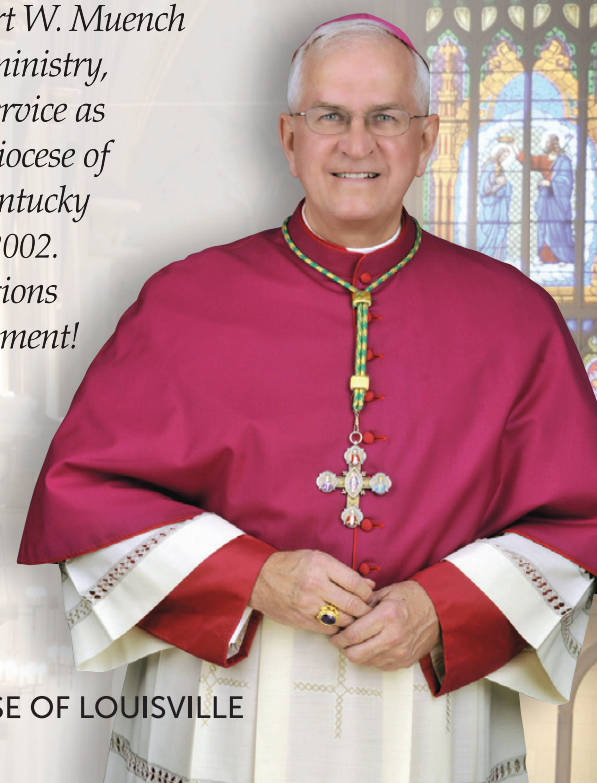
Yet I consider life of no importance to me, if
only I may finish my course and the ministry
that I received from the Lord Jesus, to bear
witness to the gospel of God's grace.
—Acts 20:24

Most Reverend Joseph E. Kurtz, D.D.
and the priests, religious
and lay faithful of the
Archdiocese of Louisville
extend prayers and best wishes
to native son

Most Reverend Robert W. Muench
on 50 years of ministry,
including his service as
Bishop of the Diocese of
Covington, Kentucky
from 1996-2002.
Congratulations
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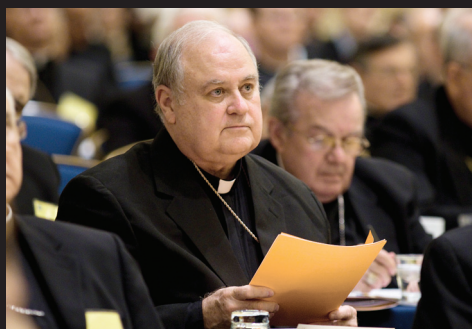




ARCHBISHOP THOMAS J. RODI
AND THE PEOPLE OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MOBILE
OFFER PRAYERS AND BEST WISHES TO

BISHOP ROBERT W. MUENCH

AS HE BEGINS HIS RETIREMENT
AFTER HIS DEDICATED SERVICE TO GOD'S PEOPLE



BELIEVING THAT *Deus Providebit*,
WE PRAY GOD WILL SHOWER ABUNDANT BLESSINGS UPON HIM.

Gautreau hopes bishop 'takes time to relax'



Bishop Robert W. Muench keeps a busy schedule.

By Debbie Shelley

The Catholic Commentator

Marsha Gautreau calls it "divine intervention" that she became administrative secretary to Bishop Robert W. Muench 13 years ago.

"I had been in the chemical industry for about 15 years and my daughter was married and my son left for the military. One of my girlfriends passed away – she was so young. I decided that it was time to change careers and do something meaningful," Gautreau said.

She resigned from her job thinking "something will come up." Because her first job after graduating from high school was working for the church, she told her sister-in-law, who worked in one of the diocesan church parishes, that she wanted to go back to work for the church. The next day her sister-in-law called and said her office had received a fax that Bishop Muench was looking for an administrative assistant.

"When I went for the interview I can remember telling the bishop that I was trying to relate (the advertised position) to something that I was doing before – working in a big corporation. 'You would be the corporate president, the priests would be the salesmen and everyone else would be the workers.' It's

the same thing as a corporate office, it's just a different industry. But I've been blessed for the past 13 years," she said.

Gautreau said it is not hard to keep up with the bishop's schedule, but it fills up quickly.

"So about a year-and-a-half in advance I try to schedule his confirmations and his other priorities. The challenge is when people call a month or two or three weeks in advance and ask him to be at a function and his calendar is already booked up," Gautreau said. "It's a challenge in a way that he (the bishop) has time to get around to everyone."

But the bishop does his best to make himself available to everyone, according to Gautreau.

She said the bishop's family is important to him and he goes on vacation with them each year in August.

And if family or clergy call, Gautreau connects them with the bishop.

Furthermore, the bishop "takes care of himself" – he drives himself, does his own grocery shopping, etc., according to Gautreau.

Because the bishop is known for his sense of humor and easily relating to people, some may ask, "Is he always that way?"

"Most of the time he is. There are times when the office of bishop has its

trials and challenges. I would say 90 percent of the time, he's upbeat and very easy going," said Gautreau.

Gautreau said she has worked with Bishop Muench through various stressful situations over the year.

"We went through (Hurricane) Katrina together," said Gautreau. "He was an unbelievably good shepherd with everyone who went through the devastation, and of course with the flood (in 2016) ..."

She added, "My favorite memories are whenever he shepherds the diocese when people are in need. When he's out helping the needy and people who have been through devastating circumstances and visiting hospitals. Many people don't realize he does a lot of the same things a pastor does. He gives a lot of spiritual direction. He's very grounded (from his time as a priest) and that continues to guide him."

Gautreau hopes the bishop finds leisure time in retirement.

"People can't appreciate how busy he is and how little time he has for himself," said Gautreau. "His calendar can't be any busier than it is now. I hope he finds some quiet time for solitude and to slow down. I know he wants to volunteer and help, but I hope he takes time to relax."

Farewell Bishop Muench

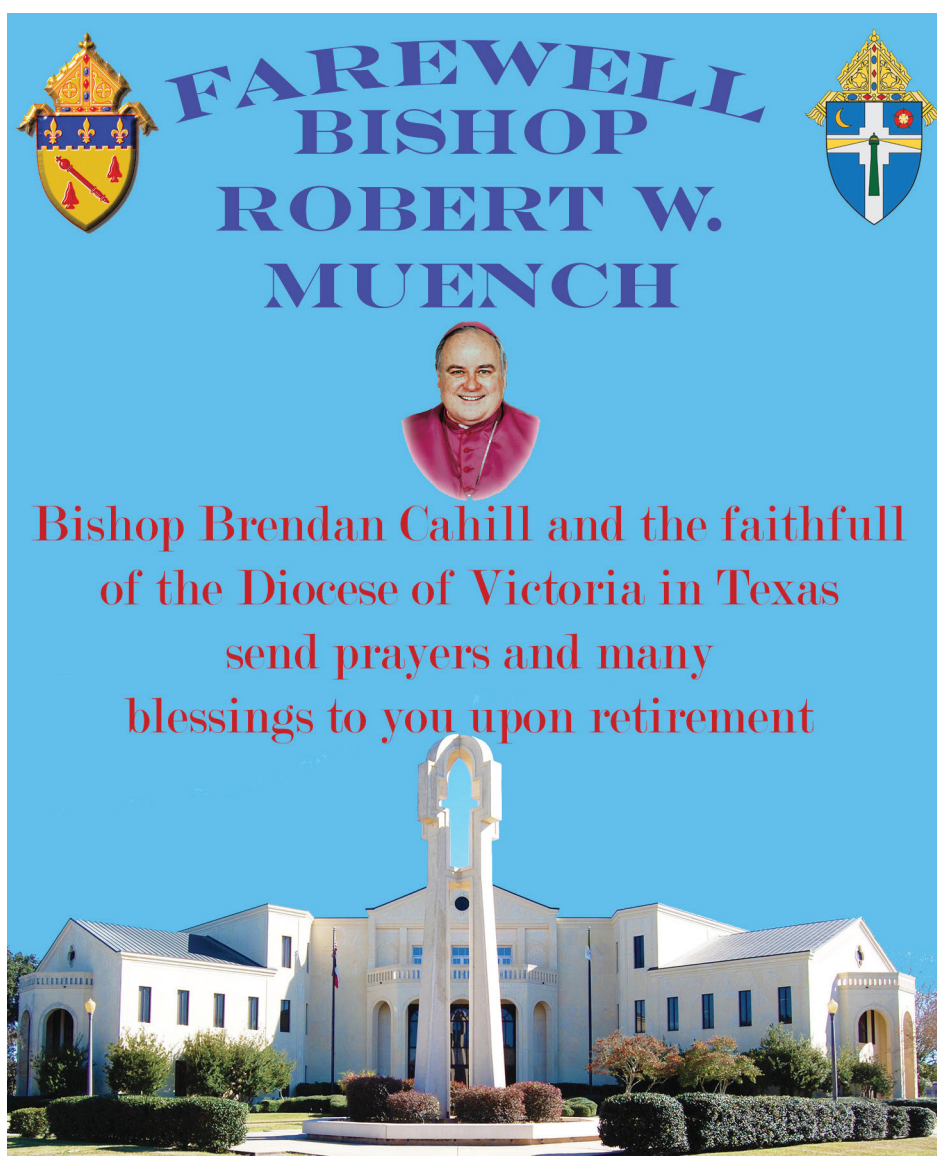


Congratulations on your retirement!
St. Patrick Parish expresses heartfelt thanks to you for your dedication and service to the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

We pray that God will bless you abundantly with peace and joy for years to come.



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With Thanksgiving to **Bishop Robert W. Muench**

The Diocese of Fort Worth,
Bishop Michael F. Olson,
the priests, religious, deacons, and laity
gratefully acknowledge
your guidance and care for the
Diocese of Baton Rouge
and prayerfully extend best wishes
upon your retirement.

*I am the good shepherd.
The good shepherd lays down his
life for the sheep.*

John 10:11



‘The liveliest bishop we had,’ Father Carville recalls

By Richard Meek

The Catholic Commentator

Father John Carville remembers his first encounter with the man who would serve as bishop of the Diocese of Baton Rouge for 16 years.

With a smile, Father Carville recalled Bishop Robert W. Muench as “sort of skinny” who displayed a fierce devotion to the sport of handball. Although he was several years ahead of Bishop Muench at Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans, Father Carville said Bishop Muench’s handball talents were outstanding.

Years later, in 2001, Father Carville was pleasantly surprised when the Vatican announced Bishop Muench would be replacing then-Bishop Alfred C. Hughes, who had been appointed archbishop for the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

“When we (received the news) I said, ‘that makes sense,’” said Father Carville, who was serving his

second term as diocesan administrator, the first being after the death of Bishop Stanley J. Ott. “I can’t say that we anticipated who it would be, but we were happy.

“(The Vatican) was thinking about someone who was close to us.”

Father Carville, who taught at the seminary for 10 years, remembers how Bishop Muench was the “gatekeeper” in the archdiocesan chancery for those wanting to see Archbishop Francis Schulte.

“(Bishop Muench) sort of put you at ease and told you what the archbishop wanted from you, and then you got ushered in,” he recalled.

Although their personalities differed, Father Carville said he always enjoyed working with Bishop Muench. He fondly remembers the enthusiasm the bishop has had regarding what was going on at the Catholic high schools.

“And so his penance services (at the high schools), which he structured very carefully, were big

events where as before they were never that much,” added Father Carville, who also served as vicar general under Bishop Muench. “That impressed me.”

Father Carville said Bishop Muench was likely the “liveliest bishop we had.” He recalled Bishop Robert E. Tracy as being “such a forceful person” and Bishop Ott as a social person.

“Bishop Muench had the gift of making a large crowd laugh and feel at ease and happy with whatever ceremony or liturgical celebration that was going on,” Father Carville said.

He said the bishop’s frugality might be his greatest gift to Bishop-designate Michael G. Duca. Father Carville said because of Bishop Muench’s financial leadership, the diocesan finances are in “very good order.”

Father Carville said he always remembers Bishop Muench’s devotion to the sacraments and his “good homilies that often had a bit of humor in them.”



Bishop Robert W. Muench at Marian grotto


The Very Rev. James A. Wehner &
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May the Lord *bless*
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for his *service* to the *Church*

+ Robert J. Baker
BISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM IN ALABAMA



Chef Folse, bishop cook up close friendship

By Bonny Van
The Catholic Commentator

"I knew of Bishop (Robert W.) Muench back in 1984, when he was the auxiliary bishop of (the Archdiocese) New Orleans and working on the visit from St. John Paul II," recalled renowned chef John Folse during an interview at the Catholic Life Center in Baton Rouge.

According to Folse, Bishop Stanley J. Ott visited Folse's Donaldsonville restaurant regularly and recommended the chef as caterer for a dinner for the pope. Though plans fell through for that event, Folse later got another invitation to serve St. John Paul II at the bishops' conference in Rome. He also attended Mass and had an audience with the pope at the Papal Palace of Castel Gandolfo, Italy, an event that Folse said changed his life and faith life.

Folse partnered with Bishop Ott to begin the Poor Man's Supper, now known as St. Vincent de Paul Society's Count Your Blessings Supper, 23 years ago. The event serves 350 people each year and Bishop Muench has been part of the program for six years.

"Bishop Muench has been the bishop that has influenced my religious work in the community, but also the philanthropic work, between the seminarians, well, you name it," said Folse.

"When I met Bishop Muench, I not only met a bishop, I met someone who was going to become a very close friend," he added. "He was always willing to spend time to talk about things that you really needed in your religious life, in your faith life. So we became friends early on. He immediately took up the same dinner that other bishops had done, but then he said, 'Who else can we get involved?,' so I started getting involved in many other ways, because he was willing to get out in the community. He was a priest of the people. People love Bishop Muench. He was so big and his smile was so huge the kids just gravitated toward him and he just loved children. And I was always moved by the way children reacted to Bishop Muench. And, if I called him for a TV show, he was always ready. He never said no. And, I know a lot of times he just didn't have the time but his time was so generous to me and, of course, I could never say no to him, so whatever he needed. And I can



Bishop Robert W. Muench with Chef John Folse at Count Your Blessings Supper

remember walking into his dining room here for the first time and seeing that beautiful picture on the wall of the Good Shepherd and it was the first time looking at the picture of the Good Shepherd, with Jesus holding that little lamb. I thought to myself, I know exactly what that is, now. I know Muench and I know what the Good Shepherd really means because Muench just had that ability to attract people, regardless of faith. His motto of 'Jesus must increase' was incredible to me that every time we talked, every time we walked, Jesus' name should be in it. Jesus must increase in our community and in our

school.

"The most emotional day I ever had with Bishop Muench was when my dad died and I'm in church, standing at the altar with my family and there were all these people coming in who knew our family's story, we lived in poverty, in the swamps of Louisiana. And, I looked down the aisle and commented to my sister, 'Daddy had nothing, but look at these people. How did he get these people?' And, at the back of the line was Bishop Muench and I told my sister, 'Bishop Muench is in the back of the line and it's 8 o'clock at

SEE FOLSE PAGE 31B

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A great storyteller

By Richard Meek

The Catholic Commentator

Spend a few minutes with Bishop Robert W. Muench and invariably his love of St. Joseph Seminary College will become apparent.

He attended high school at the abbey, in the days when many priests entered seminary after eighth grade. Bishop Muench also completed his college studies at the St. Benedict campus before attending Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans.

Even today, Bishop Muench is the chair of the abbey's finance committee and sits on the board of trustees. Previously, he was chair of the physical plant committee.

"Bishop Muench loves to talk about his days here," Abbot Justin Brown OSB said. "Whenever he has the opportunity, he talks about the positive experience he had here, the great times he had, how foundational that experience was to him as a priest.

"He credits his time at St. Joseph Seminary and the abbey for giving him a great love for the liturgy, for music, for prayer. He's so grateful to the monks for that experience."

Abbot Brown said his staff and the monks always find the bishop to be a positive and grateful alumnus, plus he always has a great story to tell.

That relationship took on greater importance after flooding in the spring of 2016 devastated the abbey. Some buildings took on several feet of water, causing temporary displacement of seminarians.

Exacerbating the problem was the fact the abbey did not carry flood insurance, with damage topping more than \$20 million.

The damage was so extensive that the popular retreat center did not open until earlier this year.

"(Bishop Muench) also has been very much involved in helping us since the flood in

our recovery by being very generous by extending help from the Diocese of Baton Rouge to the abbey and seminary during this time," Abbot Brown said.

He said his first memory of Bishop Muench was in the 1970s watching him in a "fierce" handball game, "beating one of the seminarians." At the time, the bishop was the vocations director of the Archdiocese of New Orleans and Abbot Brown himself a seminarian.

The bishop's prowess on the handball court is legendary, extending to his own days in the seminary.

"I remember him, from the moment meeting him, being very impressed with his spirit, his joy, his enjoyment of life and people," Abbot Brown said. "Whenever he came around, he always added such a great spirit to any room, any group, any meeting and that goes back to that very first meeting of him."



Bishop Robert W. Muench during a blessing

**Thanks to
Bishop Robert W. Muench
for all you have done
for the people of the
Diocese of Baton Rouge.**

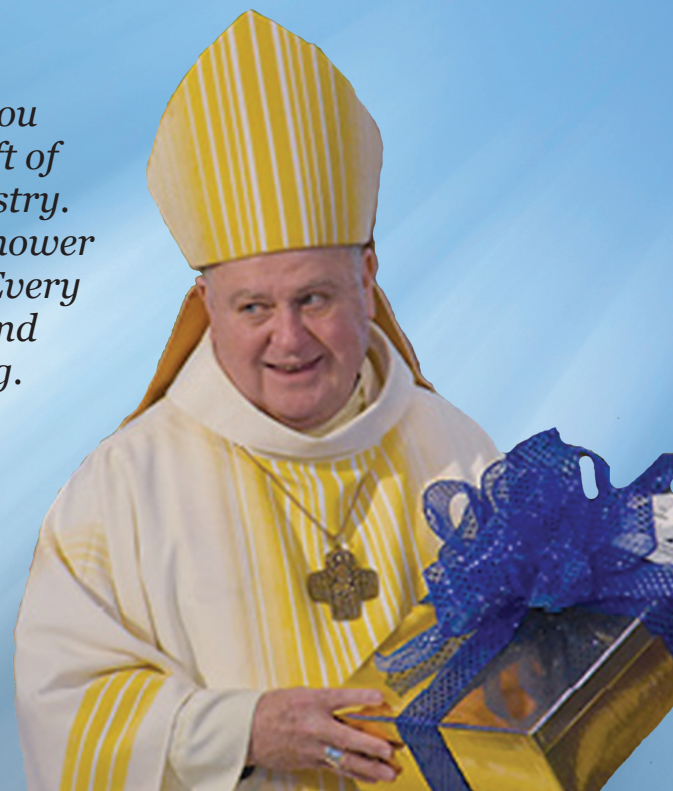
God Bless!

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**Bishop Louis F. Kihneman, III
And The People Of
The Diocese of Biloxi
Offer Prayers And Best Wishes
To Bishop Roger Muench
On Your Retirement.**

*Thank you
for the gift of
your ministry.
May God Shower
You With Every
Grace And
Blessing.*



Bishop Muench a minister to the downtrodden

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Bishop Robert W. Muench has left an indelible mark on some of the most poverty-stricken and vulnerable families in the Diocese of Baton Rouge, according to longtime Society of St. Vincent de Paul director Michael Acaldo.

Since being installed as the diocese's fifth bishop in 2002, the bishop has made the growth of St. Vincent de Paul a priority, and his efforts have paid off with an amazing uptick in services and assistance to those most in need, according to Acaldo.

Just in meals served to the homeless and needy, the total has grown from 100,000 in 2002 to 267,000 a year ago.

"So that gives you an idea of the number of meals and the number of people we're serving, the difference we're making and what really is for me, eye-opening," said Acaldo, who has been steering St. Vincent de Paul for the past 29 years.

But the bishop's influence extends beyond a few additional free meals. The annual toy giveaway, where Bishop Muench dons a Santa Claus hat and parcels out

Christmas gifts to children, has grown from 200 to 800 this past year.

Anyone that has witnessed the joy emanating from Bishop Muench during this event will likely nod in agreement when Acaldo says the toy giveaway is something the bishop loves.

"He's really St. Nick, he gets into it, he connects with the children and in a very powerful way, gives them a gift but reminds them, when they're coming through the line that God loves each and every one of them," he added.

The bishop is also present at the annual Thanksgiving and Easter dinners, offering up a prayer before the meal. He then engages with those in attendance, inquiring about their own lives and personal challenges, using his trademark humor to brighten their day and never leaving anyone without a powerful word of encouragement.

"When you see Bishop Muench at St. Vincent de Paul, you see a lot of energy and you see him energized," Acaldo said. "I think it really goes back to serving Christ and understanding the importance the church has in spreading the Gospel message of love. We see the face of Christ



Bishop Robert W. Muench shares a laugh at the St. Vincent Thanksgiving dinner.

in each person we serve and that kind of really motivates him and also makes it a special occurrence.

"It's very, very powerful to be around when Bishop Muench is at St. Vincent de Paul."

Acaldo said the bishop not only visits with the guests but also with the volunteers, sending a message that's not just talking about his faith but also becoming involved. Acaldo said although Bishop Muench has many priorities, making time to serve the poor, serve the homeless and serve those without a voice in the commu-

nity goes a long way and empowers people to ask themselves what they can do to follow that example.

"There are a lot of great things to get excited about when you talk about Bishop Muench," he added. "He not only has that one-on-one, that power between one person and another, but his sense of humor is great because it brings people together, and it does so in a way that people focus on what their mission is."

Under Bishop Muench, St. Vincent has also opened a new men's shelter, es-

SEE SHELTER PAGE 25B



Bishop Robert W. Muench

As a counselor, teacher and bishop, you have shown tireless commitment to serving the people of God.
Your 50 years of service have been a great blessing to the Church.

We are grateful and thankful for the gifts of your ministry.

May God continue to grant you health and blessings
in your retirement.

Congratulations!



+ Daniel Cardinal DiNardo
+ Auxiliary Bishop George A. Sheltz
+ Archbishop Emeritus Joseph A. Fiorenza
+ Retired Auxiliary Bishop Vincent M. Rizzotto
+ The Clergy, Religious and Faithful of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

'He really is concerned about our priests'

By Richard Meek

The Catholic Commentator

During the dedication of the new church at St. Jude Parish in Baton Rouge, at one point Bishop Robert W. Muench sat in the new presider's chair and smiled.

"Either I've lost about 80 pounds or you've got a new chair," he joked, referencing the old presider's chair that was, what pastor Father Trey Nelson called a "little narrow."

That type of humor, and his concern for the people of the Diocese of Baton Rouge and especially the welfare of his priests, will be Bishop Muench's legacy, Father Nelson said.

"I think Bishop Muench has tried his absolute best to be a good shepherd," Father Nelson said. "I think he dearly loves the people, he dearly loves kids and I think he really is concerned about our priests."

"I personally believe that with all my heart."

Father Nelson has had a unique, personal look into Bishop Muench as he had to make difficult decisions re-

garding the closing and merging of church parishes. But Father Nelson was quick to call the bishop "courageous" in making decisions that were not always popular but necessary.

In 2013, Bishop Muench asked Father Nelson to form what was then called The Committee, which later developed into the Planning Task Force. The Committee's original intent, according to Father

Nelson, was to look at two situations in the diocese where there existed some concern.

"When we started meeting, we realized the issue of pastoral planning is more than one or two places in the diocese, it's a diocesan-wide issue," Father Nelson said. "So we came to realize that our anxiety, our concern, our reality and what drives our work, and the reason we exist as a task force is a decreasing number of priests and an increasing number of Catholics."

Although the bishop did not originally give The Committee a carte blanche trust, Father Nelson said about three years ago Bishop Muench "shifted into another gear, and he placed his complete confidence in us."

"As with any bishop there would be some anxiety, and so with Bishop Muench there was what I would look back on as a normal amount of anxiety," Father Nelson said. "(Today) we don't make a step without speaking with him but it really helped us to feel a lot more at peace and a lot more con-

fident in ourselves and the work that we do, knowing that he expressed that he had that much confidence in us."

Father Nelson added the bishop makes no decision "solo" but relies on the task force for counsel.

"He's concerned about how the people feel and he seeks enough counsel, and then we recommend what to do," Father Nelson said. "He has the ball and he calls the play. It's not easy."

"He takes it very seriously but he believes in what we're doing. I think it's very courageous, to be honest, on his part."

Along with assessing the viability of parishes, the task force has also addressed such pastoral issues as how many Masses a priest can reasonably be expected to celebrate on a weekend, should seminarians need to learn Spanish, pastor preparation programs and other issues that directly affect the quality of life for clergy members. Father Nelson repeated that the bishop's concern, along with bringing the Gospel message to his people, is the health and happiness of his priests.

He said the bishop gave no push-back and accepted the report "across the board."

"There have been two things the bishop has said all along about pastoral planning and I think it's important to know,

SEE PLANNING PAGE 27B



Bishop Robert W. Muench "has tried his best to be a good shepherd."

Congratulations

BISHOP ROBERT W. MUENCH

Thank you for your years of service to the Church.

*May the Lord grant you a peaceful
and joyful retirement.*



+MOST REV. MICHAEL MULVEY, STL, DD
BISHOP OF CORPUS CHRISTI



Bishop Robert W. Muench

On behalf of the Diocese of Jackson,

Thanks for your years of dedicated service to the people
of Christ and congratulations on your retirement.

May God bless you with many years of health and peace.

Bishop Joseph Kopacz ♦ Bishop of the Diocese of Jackson

Out of the darkness shines the light, hope of unity

By Debbie Shelley

The Catholic Commentator

One of the darkest moments in Baton Rouge's history provided an opportunity for people to come together for long-needed conversations and healings with the establishment of the Diocese of Baton Rouge Racial Harmony Commission by Bishop Robert W. Muench.

"In the aftermath of the Alton Sterling shooting (July 5, 2016), the bishop really got involved and the Racial Harmony Commission started. He said this is not just a task force (which is formed on a temporary basis and to address a specific task and then disbands), but it is an ongoing commission on racial sobriety and to get people talking about racial prejudice and racism," said Deacon Alfred Adams, director of the Office of Black Catholics of the Diocese of Baton Rouge and a member of the Racial Harmony Commission.

Bishop Muench said the events leading up to establishing the commission were "gut wrenching."

"The dual incidences of the loss of life from security and the loss of life by security really challenged our soul as a city of Baton Rouge and as a diocese of the area of Baton Rouge," said Bishop Muench.

He noted that St. Paul wrote, "We know that all things work for good for those who



Bishop Robert W. Muench with members of the Racial Harmony Commission

love God."

"We don't wish evil," the bishop emphasized. "But sometimes it almost takes the evil to prod us to look at where we are and what we tolerate and what we need to change personally and as a community."

He said in the aftermath of the event, he remembered that on Feb. 11, 1956, he was an altar server at St. Leo the Great Church in New Orleans when the letter of Archbishop Joseph F. Rummel was read

in which he called racial segregation morally wrong and sinful.

Bishop Muench said on the Racial Harmony Commission there are "some of the most professional people to assist us in regards to this."

"They are meeting and discussing how we can deal with the tensions in our society, in our local church and make a tangible difference," the bishop said.

Father Joshua Johnson, co-chairman

of the racial Harmony Commission along with Father Tom Clark SJ, said, after establishing the commission, the bishop took on the role of a learner.

"The bishop has come to listen, to be a student and learn. He has given us a platform. He has been nothing but supportive," said Father Johnson.

He noted the work of the commission is bringing about change through dialogue, days of ecumenical service, the writing of a "Building Bridges" prayer for racial harmony for use by church parishes in the diocese and a multi-cultural prayer service on the feast of Corpus Christi at St. Joseph Cathedral.

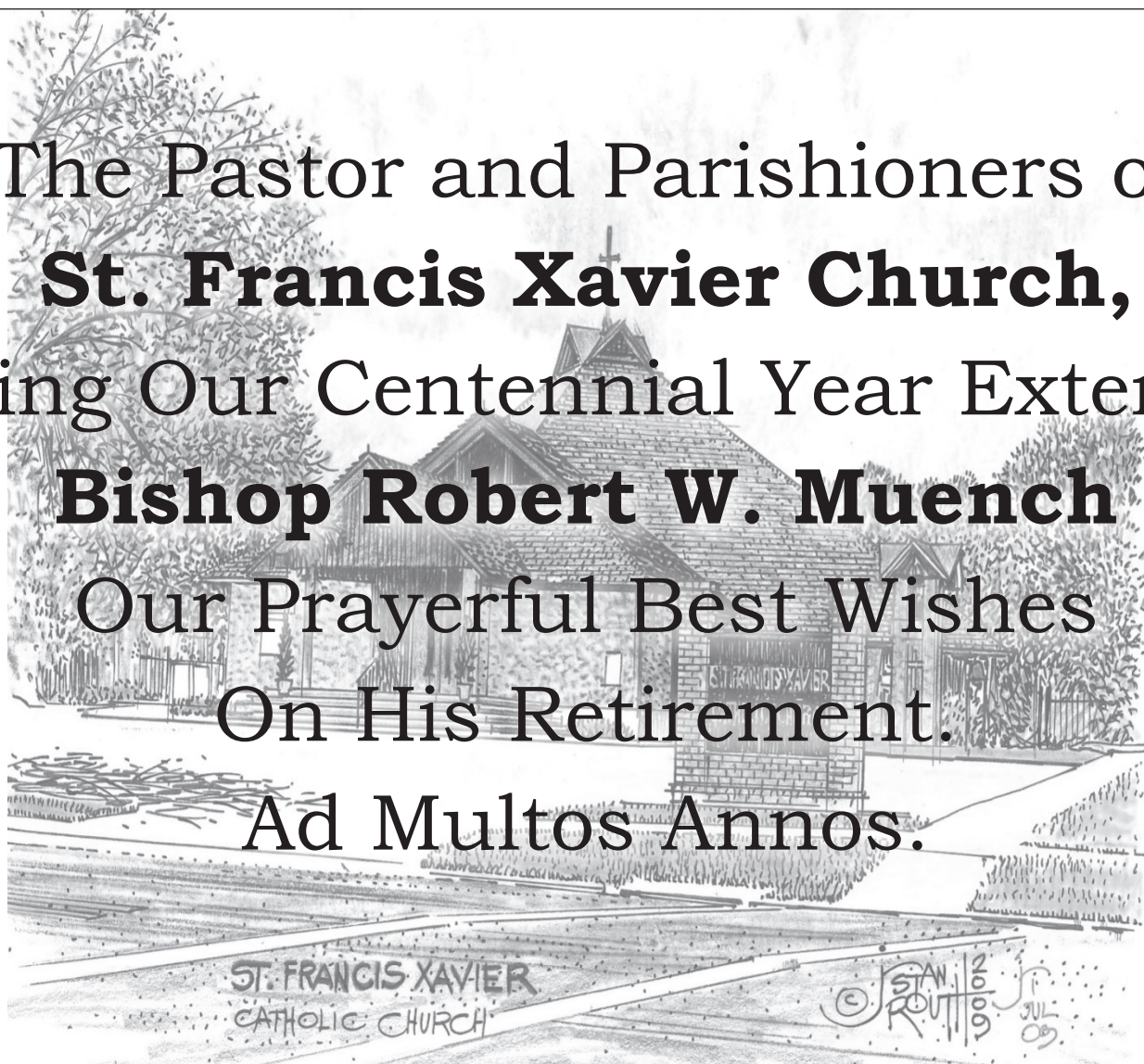
Father Johnson said the Racial Harmony Commission strives to change racial prejudice at all levels.

"We are learning from each other to transform policies and institutions of racism, to heal hearts and minds. We're taking a both/and approach. We believe that sin happens within people but also institutions."

According to Father Paul Yi, chancellor of the Diocese of Baton Rouge and pastor of Ascension of Our Lord and St. Francis churches, in Donaldsonville, which has people of diverse backgrounds, the gift of the Racial Harmony Commission is the changing of hearts.

SEE HOPE PAGE 31B

The Pastor and Parishioners of
St. Francis Xavier Church,
 During Our Centennial Year Extend to
Bishop Robert W. Muench
 Our Prayerful Best Wishes
 On His Retirement.
 Ad Multos Annos.



'Effective communicator'

By Richard Meek

The Catholic Commentator

Bishop Robert W. Muench's ability to put others at ease with his pleasant personality and always ready with a story that would evoke laughter established him as an effective relationship builder in the Louisiana Legislature, according to Rob Tasman, executive director of the Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Tasman has spent the past several years helping the state's bishops finesse their way through the sometimes murky waters of the Capitol. He said Bishop Muench has been active with LCCB and always willing to offer his insight and expertise.

"I've seen him in action with legislators and just like every other individual I've seen him with, he's always gracious, jovial and he brings a joy to the conversation," Tasman said. "He puts people at ease but at the same time can communicate to them the important points that he needs to get across. He's very effective at that."

Tasman said prior to any legislative session, Bishop Muench

hosts a luncheon for legislators, an event the lawmakers enjoy attending and they are typically eager to hear what he has to say.

"I think a testament to that is when the luncheon happens it's a very free flowing conversation, very relaxed," Tasman said. "I think the legislators appreciate that."

"Just to see him converse with them in a very casual, relaxed way, that means the world with legislators. When they're dealing with an environment that is consistently tense and dealing with all kinds of conflict and they comment that he just always seems to put them at ease as usual."

Lawmakers also appreciate the bishop's availability, Tasman said, as they always feel the bishop has an open door policy. Tasman said the bishop has also made himself available at a number of different events, including prayer breakfasts.

"He's in that environment; he's comfortable there. The legislators know that and they feel that," he said.

Tasman said he has certainly been helped by the bishop's dedi-

cation to staying educated and informed on key issues. Additionally, he said Bishop Muench is always aware of what his brother bishops are saying through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"When he speaks, he speaks from a very genuine place based on his own experiences," Tasman said. "Anything having to do with human development, the environments people are in and education. (Education) is his bread and butter."

"Any time you have an opportunity to talk to him and he tells you he was (an educator) he lights up as bright as I've ever seen him."

Beyond the education arena, Tasman said Bishop Muench brings wisdom to every dialogue, no matter the issue. He said the bishop is an attentive listener but also pastoral and holds himself to the truth of Catholic teaching.

"I always felt a personal connection and I will certainly miss that," said Tasman, a New York native who shares a love of the Yankees with the bishop. "I'm glad to hear he is staying in Baton Rouge."

"I would love to stay connected with him and I would not hesitate to seek his wisdom."



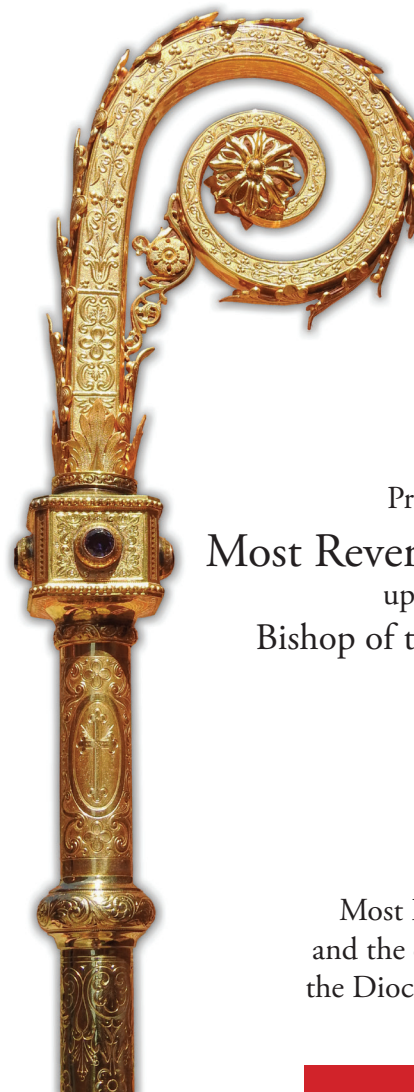
Bishop Robert W. Muench at diocesan Anniversary Mass



As we celebrated your 50th anniversary in June, we were grateful to have had you with us for our 50th Jubilee in September 2010 at our parish. We wish you many more anniversary blessings and graces during your time of retirement. We thank you for being our Shepherd of our diocese for 16 years!

**Immaculate Conception of
The Blessed Virgin Mary**

Denham Springs, Louisiana



"For I know well the plans I have for you..."

Jeremiah 29:11

Prayerful best wishes to
Most Reverend Robert W. Muench
upon your retirement as
Bishop of the Diocese of Baton Rouge



Most Reverend David P. Talley,
and the clergy, religious and laity of
the Diocese of Alexandria, Louisiana

CCDBR has expanded under bishop's guidance

By Bonny Van

The Catholic Commentator

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge today bears little resemblance to what the agency looked like in 2008 when David Aguillard became the director.

The difference now is size. Aguillard credits the support from Bishop Robert W. Muench for how the agency has grown.

"(Bishop Muench) has been very generous with resources of the diocese and with his support; we've practically doubled in size, all of our real core, essential mission services," said Aguillard.

He lists examples of the number of people helped by CCDRB, including Sanctuary for Life, a homeless shelter for pregnant women, which has gone from housing three women to 20; Joseph Homes, a shelter for ex-offenders, which went from taking in nine men to 14; and, Refugee Resettlement Services, which has grown from one attorney to a staff of five accredited representatives. Also, there is the new Families First Housing, an apartment complex for families trying to recover from hard times.

"First off, Bishop Muench just has a way of bringing joy and laughter to any situation that he comes into, but, also, it's the support that he gives us and the con-



Bishop Robert W. Muench consoles a relief worker following a natural disaster.

fidence that he has in our board and in our agency's leadership that really gives us a firm spiritual foundation from which to go forth and do the work that we do in service to the poor in our diocese," said Aguillard. "He is always there whenever we need him, if it's something as simple as coming to the office during a particularly stressful time to greet people as they come in in the morning, to being present at prayer services, helping us dedicate

new projects, new additions, new furniture."

Aguillard noted the bishop "has been very clear that our agency's and our diocese's response after disasters is really essential and it's a priority of his." He said the bishop has also helped CCDRB obtain grants from Catholic Charities U.S.A.

The grant money helped provide generators in church parishes throughout the diocese. According to Aguillard, Bishop

Muench "understands that after a disaster, it's the local community, it's the church parishes where people have to turn."

"He's been in the shelters with us, comforting families who don't know if they're going to have a home to go to after they leave the shelters," Aguillard recalled. "He stood out in the heat and the sweat, dressed in his black and in his Roman collar, handing out supplies in parking lots after disasters. And, I can remember the look of surprise and joy on people's faces when they've seen that the bishop is out there."

"I can remember that look on their faces and I'm sure that they will remember the look on the bishop's face and the care and concern that he showed for them at those times."

Aguillard said Catholic Charities is now better prepared than before Hurricane Katrina ravaged the New Orleans area in 2005. He said there is a much better understanding "that both the physical resources and material resources that we can bring to bear are just as important as the spiritual and emotional support."

"At Catholic Charities, with the flexibility that (Bishop Muench) has given us, we know that we can pause for a few days, if not a week or so and pause, and

SEE CHARITIES PAGE 23B

*Congratulations and
Prayerful Best Wishes*

Bishop Robert W. Muench

for 50 years of dedicated service
to the Priesthood

May God Continue to Bless You



Bishop Frank J. Dewane,

the Clergy, Religious and Faithful
of the Diocese of Venice in Florida



Bishop Muench,

*Thank you for being
a Shepherd after
the Lord's own heart.*

*Blessings in your
continued priestly service
in retirement.*

Family life, youth priorities for bishop

By Debbie Shelley

The Catholic Commentator

“God love you.”

This signature concluding statement by Bishop Robert W. Muench in his homilies illustrates the core of who he is and is one of his most important tools when it comes to shepherding souls in the Diocese of Baton Rouge, according to Dina Dow, director of the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis in the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Dow believes that people will remember Bishop Muench for his warm personality and reminding people of God’s love.

“The way he pauses and lets it sink in. It’s a reminder ‘remember God loves you,’” said Dow.

“And then we (Office of Evangelization and Catechesis) can come in and say ‘and this is why.’”

She noted, “One of the blessings for this office is that we’ve always just supported his mission in evangelization and catechesis for the diocese. I thank him for trusting me and the team with that mission.”

“It’s a great thing when a bishop recog-

nizes that evangelization and catechesis is important enough to have a department for it,” she added.

Dow noted that the readings on Good Shepherd Sunday during the Easter Season emphasized that a shepherd makes sure people are close to the Lord. She said Bishop Muench emphasized this in his ministry.

Shannon Baldrige, coordinator of Certification and Catechesis, saw how Bishop Muench especially worked to make sure the youth of the diocese knew God loves them when she worked for the youth office.

“Bishop Muench has always had such a great heart for youth ministry in our diocese. I saw this come out many times while I worked with the youth office for several years,” said Baldrige. “He was always at our major events like (the) Diocesan Youth Conference and World Youth Day. He supported those events and asked the clergy to support them also. He also made himself available for many other smaller youth events. The youth on our Diocesan Youth Board always loved to talk to him and exchange jokes with him. His support for that ministry was inval-



Bishop Robert W. Muench at a pro-life rally at the Catholic Life Center

able to the work we did.”

Bishop Muench also wanted people to understand how love is expressed through the context of the family.

“The Office of Marriage and Family Life felt the support of Bishop Muench in its ministry to families since he recognized that the family, as the ‘domestic church’ is the primary place in which Christians learn to recognize and experience the love of God,” said Darryl Ducote, director of the OMFL.

“He especially encouraged the efforts of the office to prepare couples for marriage and to provide resources to strengthen couples already married, even offering his ‘Imprimatur’ (permission to print) to resources created for marriage

enrichment.”

Bishop Muench also showed his support for family life by being out among the people, according to Ducote.

“He took a personal interest in affirming married couples by consistently celebrating the annual Anniversary Mass for couples who were celebrating 25, 50 and 65 years of marriage. He proclaimed the sanctity of life and welcomed the efforts of the OMFL to foster respect for life at all stages of development, including such initiatives as Life Fest, 40 Days for Life, Parish Respect Life Coordinators, etc. He often referred to his experience within his own family as the reason of his dedication to family ministry,” Ducote said.



BISHOP J. DOUGLAS DESHOTEL

and the clergy, religious and lay faithful of the

DIOCESE OF LAFAYETTE

send Congratulations and Prayerful Best Wishes to

BISHOP ROBERT W. MUENCH

DIOCESE OF BATON ROUGE



Sister Adele recalls bishop's warmness, support

By Debbie Shelley

The Catholic Commentator

Bishop Robert W. Muench has been a warm presence among the religious throughout his administrative career, according to Sister Adele Lambert CSJ, who has served in leadership positions of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph and has known the bishop since his days with the Archdiocese of New Orleans and now the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Sister Adele served as executive director of the Archdiocesan Office of Social Apostolate from 1992 to 2002 and worked for a year for the archdiocese in the Office of Continuing Education for Priests. She also served at several schools in the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

"He greeted everyone warmly who came to the administrative

building as well as his visits to the schools and to the events we had in the archdiocese," said Sister Adele.

She said both in the archdiocese and the Diocese of Baton Rouge, one of his greatest desires was to "grow the church," not only in administrative departments, but in spiritual life and vocations.

In 2004 Sister Adele became the first president of St. Joseph's Academy in Baton Rouge in the school's 143-year history.

"He loved to come to St. Joseph's (Academy), not just to visit the administrators, but the girls as well," said Sister Adele. Retired since 2012, she continues to be active in the CSJ Associates Program.

Sister Adele noted that the bishop was "gracious in accommodating us, especially when we



Bishop Robert W. Muench has always been a warm presence among religious women and men.

were in the throes of graduation and end of the year activities."

"Particularly at graduation, he offered a wonderful and warm event, with the liturgy and the graduation," said Sister Adele.

She said the bishop has also shown great support for religious men and women in the Diocese of Baton Rouge. Each February, he has celebrated a Mass honoring religious men and women who are celebrating jubilees.

She further noted that Bishop Muench welcomed other religious communities for specific work, citing the Hospitaller Sisters of Mercy, who help assist victims of human trafficking in the Baton Rouge area.

After Hurricane Katrina, Bishop Muench was supportive of the Sisters of St. Joseph when their provincial home in New Orleans flooded.

"This was a horrific situation

for us," said Sister Adele. "We were sending our elderly sisters from place to place.

"He was compassionate and he did promise to assist us. And he kept his promise. When he went to our residence (retired facility built for the retired Sisters of St. Joseph in Baton Rouge), he blessed our chapel and altar. I do remember it as a beautiful occasion and a gift from the bishop to

SEE ADELE PAGE 21B

Remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love.

1 Thessalonians 1:3



ARCHBISHOP WILTON D. GREGORY
WITH AUXILIARY BISHOPS

BERNARD E. SHLESINGER III AND JOEL M. KONZEN, S.M.
AND THE FAITHFUL OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF ATLANTA
OFFER OUR GRATITUDE FOR YOUR DEDICATED SERVICE.

WE SEND FAREWELL WISHES TO
Bishop Robert W. Muench
ON THE OCCASION OF HIS RETIREMENT AS BISHOP OF
THE DIOCESE OF BATON ROUGE.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC
ARCHDIOCESE OF ATLANTA



A true leader in education

By Bonny Van

The Catholic Commentator

When Dr. Melanie Verges accepted the job to take the helm of Catholic schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge in 2009, the first thing she asked her new boss, Bishop Robert W. Muench, was his vision for the school district.

"He said, 'We have extremely good schools in the diocese. I'd like it to become a little more creative and to expand the ministry' and so I took that as a directive," said Verges.

The decision to have all Catholic schools in the diocese accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) had already been made when Verges became superintendent and she said it was that call to action that created a united front among herself, the bishop and school leaders.

"That brought us together as a collaborative unit and I do believe that's what the bishop intended, is that the schools work as partners instead of as separate silos," she said.

Verges also said that, as a result, diocesan principals know each other "better

than they ever did." She also noted that test scores continue to rise and that six of the schools have been named National Blue Ribbon Schools. However, that doesn't tell the whole picture, according to Verges, who said the true ministry of education goes beyond books and report cards.

"My favorite quote from Bishop Muench is, 'The most important thing you teach in Catholic schools may not be measurable today,' she said. "So, we have to always keep in mind that we have a bigger ministry, a bigger mission, than just test scores and what we learn day to day. And, I think a true leader reminds us of that and Bishop Muench is a true leader."

The bishop's background as a school administrator made for a supportive working environment for the Catholic Schools Office, with the bishop able to fully understand challenges such as funding, enrollment, policy and school closures.

"I know that's very heavy on his heart but sometimes you have to make those decisions for the good of the students for the future," she said. "It was very difficult for him but he stepped up. He didn't hide behind anyone, he didn't take a back seat



Bishop Robert W. Muench has always been at home in the classroom.

and blame it on a committee; he really stepped up and he was the leader. I think a lot of people respected him for that."

Through the years, according to Verges, the bishop has maintained his great sense of humor, something that can help ease the pain of those tough times. But, it was also a useful tool in connecting with students of all ages, from telling knock-knock jokes to second graders to multiple visits to high schools. A favorite story

from Verges was when a group of high school senior boys could not attend their graduation because it coincided with a baseball playoff game.

"So the bishop told the parents, 'Do not worry. We will have a special graduation and I will give them their diploma next week,' she said. "And, so, he did and when they threw their caps in the air, so did he. But, he does that kind of thing, he turns lemons into lemonade."

ADELE ▼

From page 20B

the sisters."

She further said the bishop was strong in his outreach to catholic charities and addressing issues such as racism and poverty.

"We certainly couldn't ask for anyone better in the wonderful outreach that he did," said Sister Adele.

Bishop Muench will also be remembered for his confirmation Masses, Sunday Masses at the cathedral and all the special events he participated in Baton Rouge, said Sister Adele.

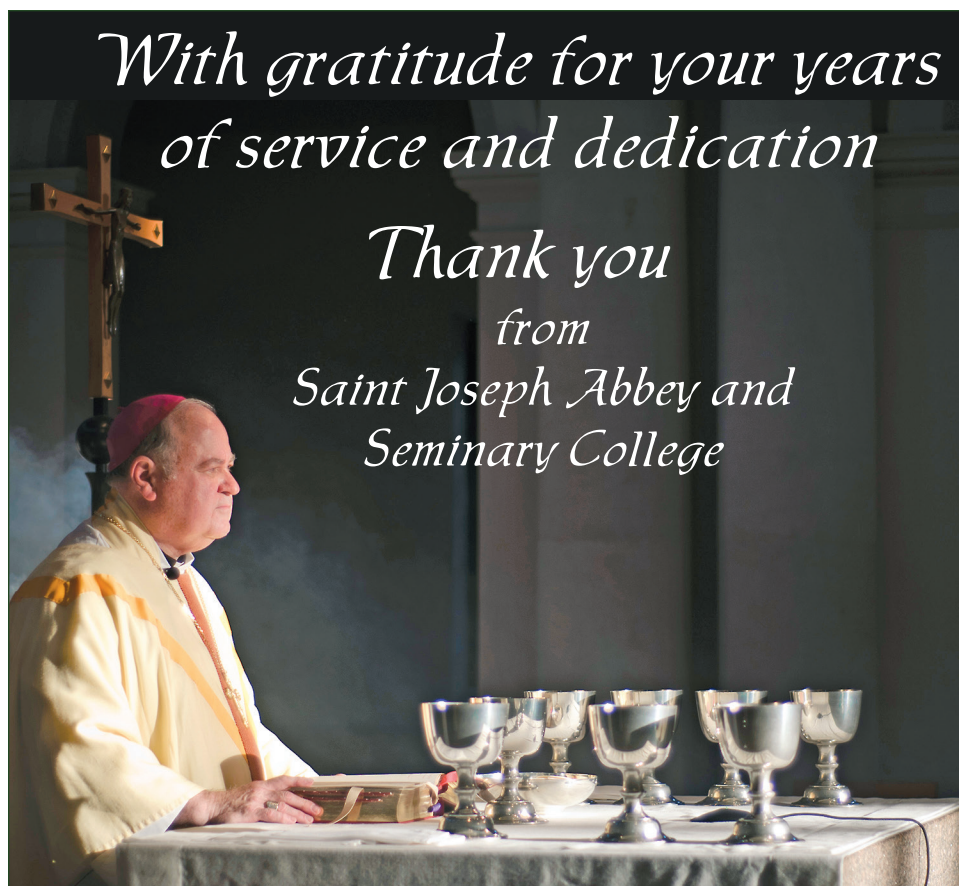
"Bishop Muench will definitely be remembered for his relationships here," Sister Adele said. "He has just a wonderful personality, gracious smile and hearty laugh."



Bishop Robert W. Muench is presented a jersey from Brother Martin High School.

*With gratitude for your years
of service and dedication*

*Thank you
from
Saint Joseph Abbey and
Seminary College*



SAINT JOSEPH ABBEY + SEMINARY COLLEGE

Vocations a high priority

By Debbie Shelley

The Catholic Commentator

Bishop Robert W. Muench kept vocations to the priesthood and religious life in the Diocese of Baton Rouge in the forefront by talking about it directly with young people or when celebrating Masses, said Father Matt Lorrain, di-

rector of seminarians.

"He would make an appearance at any retreats that we had, he would usually visit any high school retreats," said Father Lorrain.

These moments are especially remembered by seminarians at St. Joseph Seminary in St. Benedict.

Bishop Muench confirmed seminari-

an James Vu at St. Thomas More Church in Baton Rouge in October 2014.

"I remember when Bishop Muench gave us a talk before the ceremony. He told us that soon we will be heading off to college and that he wanted us to keep striving in our faith. Without it, we would fall. He also told us jokes. The one I especially remember is what people have named the 'Pope Yes' joke. (Then Monsignor) Muench was showing Pope St. John Paul II around New Orleans (in 1987). They had passed by a Popeyes restaurant and the pope said that New Orleans must really love him because it said 'Pope Yes.'"

"I love how Bishop Muench is very down-to-earth and very approachable," said Vu.

He added, "The bishop had a huge impact on my discernment to the priesthood. I remember in high school, I would always request going to the bishop for confession. To this day, I still don't know why. The bishop was very helpful and gave me good advice in my discernment."

During Vu's high school senior retreat he went to Bishop Muench for confession.

"After confession, the bishop asked me if I was still interested in the seminary. I had been interested before, but

the plan was to go to LSU for a year first. If I was still interested, then I would apply to seminary after," said Vu. "The bishop told me that if I was thinking about it now, why would I not enter in now? I had nothing to lose. And since then, I have not regretted this decision. The bishop has given me something to look for in the priesthood."

Seminarian Tres Turner said, "Bishop Muench has been the bishop as long as I can remember, and for me, he has been the symbol of the good shepherd in our diocese. I can remember my seventh-grade year getting picked from my middle school, Our Lady of Mercy (in Baton Rouge), to go to the Catholic Schools Week Mass. He was the celebrant, and I was able to talk to him after Mass. I remember being surprised that he was cracking jokes because I didn't know priests, let alone bishops, were allowed to do that. He was definitely an early sign for me that priesthood was something more than a sad, lonely life.

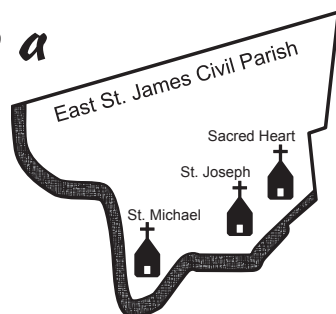
"Since then, he was always present in my life as a greatly loved pastor. He also did my confirmation in 2015 at OLOM, and he was, again, making jokes – some of them I might have heard him say more than once. It's amazing to be

SEE VOCATIONS PAGE 23B



Bishop Robert W. Muench ordains Father Joshua Johnson to the priesthood.

*The Catholic Church in
East St. James Parish,
St. Michael the Archangel,
St. Joseph, and
Most Sacred Heart of Jesus,
offer prayers of gratitude
for the years
Bishop Muench
has served as our chief shepherd,
and we pray that
his retirement will be a
time of peace
and joy for many
years to come.*

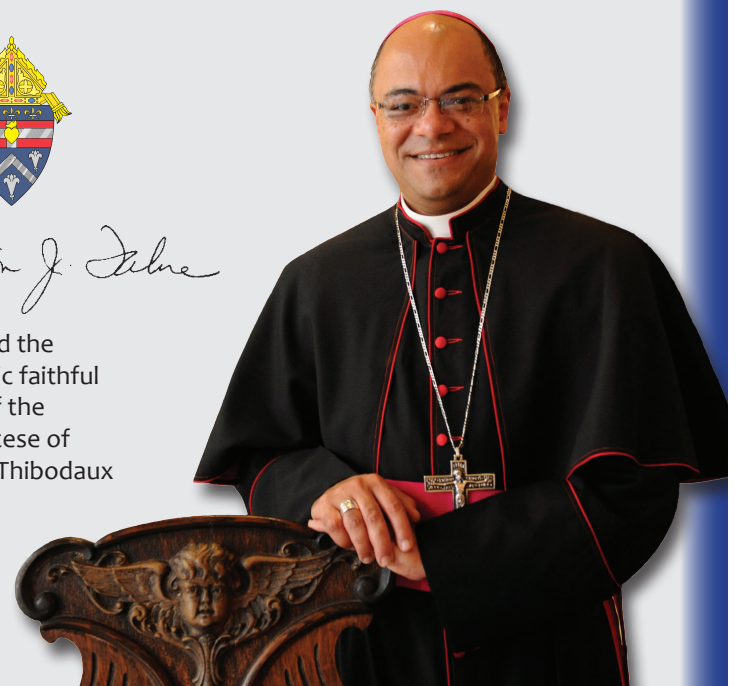


**BISHOP MUENCH,
"THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE.
WE WISH YOU GOD'S GRACE,
PEACE, AND BLESSING
IN YOUR RETIREMENT."**



+ *Julien J. Falme*

and the
Catholic faithful
of the
Diocese of
Houma-Thibodaux





Bishop Robert W. Muench made annual visits to death row at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola.

CHARITIES ▼

From page 18B

everybody switches hats and switches uniforms, for that matter, and becomes disaster response workers,” said Aguillard. “We can do that and get back to our jobs as the federal and the state (relief agencies) get their operations geared up, and, we can do that because we know that the diocese is there to support us.”

That support and flexibility in diocesan resources has also been imperative in helping CCDBR’s Refugee Resettlement Services to expand and apply those resources toward the greatest need at that time, whether it’s a disaster or “unaccompanied children coming across our borders.”

“So we have that flexibility to respond to the refugee and immigration crisis as they arise but also I think it’s important to understand why we have that flexibility, and why that is a priority of the bishop,” said Aguillard. “He understands and

he gives us that spiritual foundation to understand that service to refugee and immigration is rooted to the earliest days of the Christian church.”

Prison Ministry, another agency of CCDBR, has also been a priority of the bishop, according to Aguillard, with the bishop making regular visits to prisons throughout the diocese.

“We have a lot of prisons in this part of the world,” said Aguillard. “As a matter of fact, it’s been said East Baton Rouge Parish is the prison capital of the world because there are more prisons per capita here than any place else on the planet. But, year after year, Bishop Muench goes to those prisons. He meets with the people, he meets with the men on death row. And, you know what he says at the end of every visit? He will tell each individual, each and every prisoner, ‘You are important.’ And, I think that that signifies not only that they are important to the bishop but they are important to Christ as well. Just as important as I am, just as important as you are.”



Bishop Robert W. Muench prays with Catholic Charities employees during disaster relief efforts.

VOCATIONS ▼

From page 22B

able to be sealed in the Holy Spirit by such a wonderful person and caring pastor. Of course, when I entered seminary, he was always present in my life as a seminarian – and using the same jokes again.”

Father Lorrain said that by the time a priest was ready to be ordained, he had interacted with them enough that they were someone he had come to know and love.

“The ordinations were moments of great joy and that was visible in the way he presided at the liturgy, celebrated the ordination, congratulated

the priest and thanked his family for having promoted his vocation; those are joyous occasions,” said Father Lorrain.

And Bishop Muench’s support continued after ordination. He visits priests who have been hospitalized to offer his prayers and support and expresses a vote of confidence in a pastor when installing him at a church parish.

“The installment as a pastor also involves the parish leadership, so it’s a nice opportunity for our bishop as our chief shepherd to also visit the local parishes,” said Father Lorrain.

Baton Rouge Magnificat Chapter
farewell wishes to Bishop Muench!
May God bless you on your retirement and grant you good health and happiness in the years ahead.

Blessings, Bishop Muench!
In thanksgiving for your years of service as the Bishop of Baton Rouge. We are grateful to you and the retreatants from Baton Rouge who have supported the “Cenacle” over the years!

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May the days to come be filled with
Good Health & Happiness.

God bless you
BISHOP MUENCH
on your Retirement

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The Most Reverend Roger J. Foys, D.D., the priests, deacons, religious and lay faithful of the Diocese of Covington, Kentucky, send our congratulations, best wishes and prayers to the Most Reverend Robert W. Muench, our former Bishop, on his retirement after 50 years of ministry.





Bishop Robert W. Muench on Thanksgiving Day at St. Vincent de Paul

SHELTER ▼

From page 14B

established a pharmacy in 2003 that has already been expanded, opened a new dining room in 2014 and is putting the final touches on doubling its Bishop Ott Sweet Dreams Shelter for young women and their children. Once completed, St. Vincent de Paul will have more than 174 beds combined for homeless men, women and

children.

“Without the bishop’s support we just can’t do what our faith calls us to do and in a real powerful sense, because he’s so active,” Acaldo said. “He gets the St. Vincent de Paul mission.”

The bishop has had strong ties to St. Vincent de Paul for his entire life, witnessing his dad serve the poor through the society in New Orleans for more than six decades. From

that experience was born a love of witnessing to the needy and spreading the Gospel message of putting one’s faith into action.

“It’s been great; Bishop Muench has been so much fun to work with through the years and we’ve grown much over those (16 years) that it really is remarkable to see the difference that a shepherd of the diocese can make,” Acaldo said. “And for us it’s been a true blessing.”



Bishop Robert W. Muench takes great joy in the annual toy giveaway.

THANK YOU, BISHOP MUENCH.

The LORD bless you and keep you!

The LORD let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you!

The LORD look upon you kindly and give you peace!

NUMBERS 6:24-26

SSA CONSULTANTS



Bishop Edward J. Burns and all in the Diocese of Dallas
Offer Congratulations and Best Wishes to
Bishop Robert W. Muench
For 50 years of faithful ministry to the Church
And 16 years as Bishop of Baton Rouge
May God bless you abundantly in your
Retirement

Bishop Muench,

As you leave your office, know your legacy will remain here forever.



*Installation as
Bishop of the
Diocese of
Baton Rouge
March 14, 2002*

Come, you who are
blessed by my Father.
Inherit the kingdom
prepared for you from
the foundation of
the world.
For I was hungry
and you gave me
food, I was thirsty
and you gave me
drink, a stranger and
you welcomed me,
naked and you clothe
me, ill and you cared for
me, in prison and you
visited me.

Mt 25:34-35

Your Staff and Family of The Catholic Life Center



Bishop Robert W. Muench greets Pope Benedict XVI.



Bishop Robert W. Muench discussing football with former LSU coach Nick Saban.

REFLECTION ▼

From page 3B

do. There's a high level of generosity and there's a high level of faith. There are many great things happening, not because of me, but in spite of me."

Bishop Muench said he has inherited the incredible legacy of the previous bishops while doing some things to bring in his own style. He had television cameras installed in St. Joseph Chapel and St. Jo-

seph Cathedral to televise Masses, implemented the Wednesday night "The Light is ON for You" Lenten confessional services and authorized Baton Rouge to host a national Cultivating Unity of Priests meeting.

He also established the Pastoral Planning Task Force and the Racial Harmony Commission. He broke ground for a new Archives Department building that was dedicated July 27.

The bishop was also shepherd during

some critical moments in the history of the diocese, such as Hurricanes Katrina and Gustav, the shooting of Alton Sterling and the subsequent lone gunman's shootings of six area law enforcement officers, three of whom died. There has also been the closing of church parishes, because of demographic changes and the priesthood shortage.

He's also been on hand at many Society of St. Vincent de Paul events and enjoyed distributing the gifts as St. Nicholas

to children in need at Christmas.

Bishop Muench said when he sent his letter of resignation on his birthday in December to Pope Francis, which is required when a bishop turns 75, it wasn't so much "I'm quitting" as "it's time."

And he plans to stay in Baton Rouge, the city that he has called "home" from the first day he arrived.

"It's been a graced time, a wonderful experience, something I will treasure for the rest of my life," said Bishop Muench.

RANZINO ▼

From page 7B

of the biggest challenges the bishop has faced during his tenure were the most recent: the declining number of priests; supporting Catholic education; and, "the personal grief the bishop has felt over the violence that has erupted in our city."

"I remember that day that he and I went to the hospital the day the policemen were shot," recalled Father Ranzino. "He made a personal visit to the mother of one of the policemen who had died, who was one of my parishioners (at St. Jean Vianney Church in Baton Rouge)."

Father Ranzino said the event moved the bishop to create the diocesan Commission on Racial Harmony. Another area that is important to Bishop Muench, according to Father Ranzino, is the spiritual, emotional and physical well-being of

the priests in the diocese.

"It's quite humbling to me to see what a powerful commitment that is to the men of our clergy and how Bishop Muench has been a true pastor to those men," he said. "Basically, the diocese has got your back."

In fact, he said, some centers that work with the clergy say "we don't have dioceses like yours who stick with the men in such a way as to walk with them through this time in their lives." And, that is a testament to the bishop's pastoral ministry.

"I think at his heart he is a pastor," said Father Ranzino.

"I have heard him in conversations with priests who are having difficult times," said Father Ranzino. "There's no more pretense of anything other than here is one man talking to another man, and while we never forget he's a bishop, he is really trying hard to be a father and I can tell you, it's not easy to be a bish-

op and father at the same time, because sometimes you have to be a bishop and that means decisions have to be made

that are hard. In all of those times, Bishop Muench goes out of himself, both to care and to console."

PLANNING ▼

From page 15B

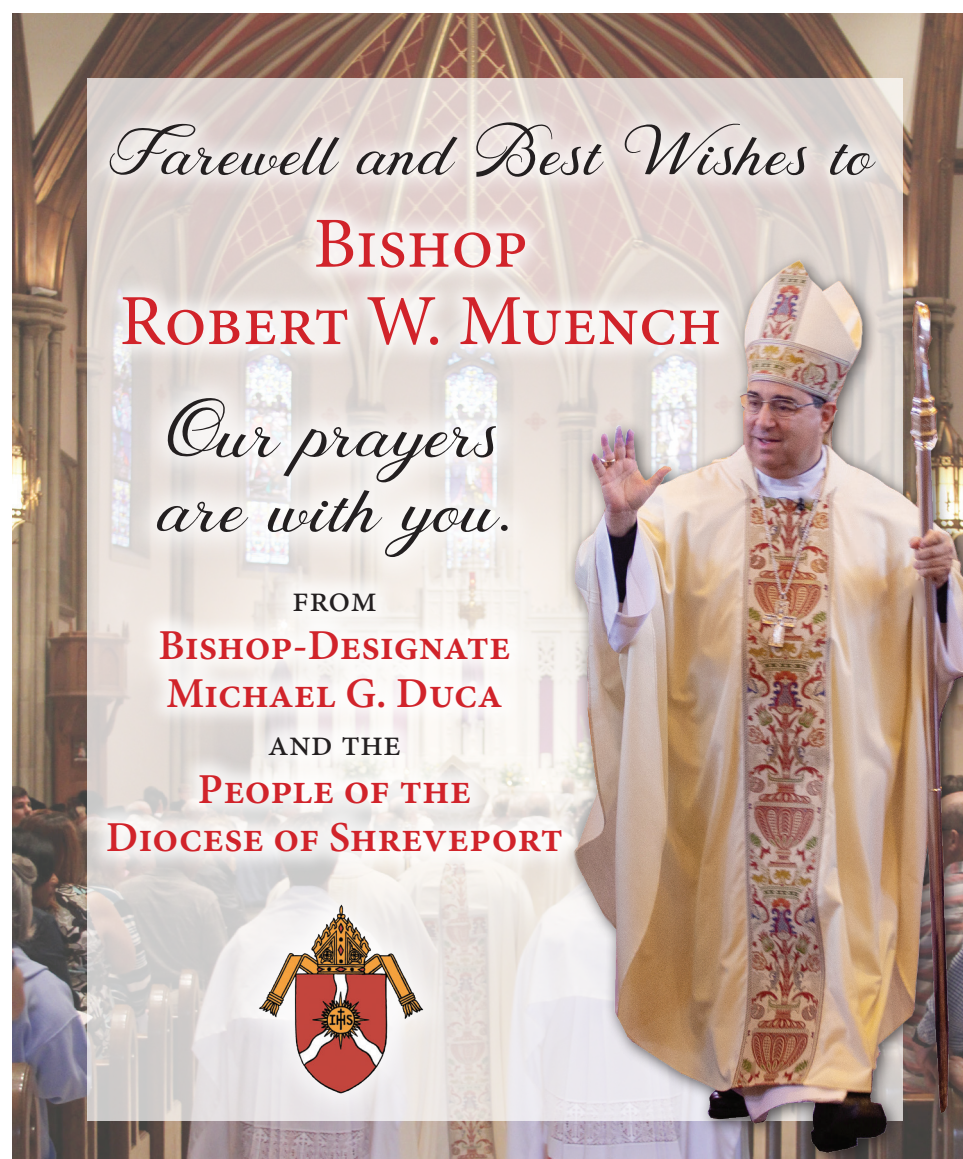
he's said all along any idea could be on the table for discussion," Father Nelson said. "He's also said all along that all of us, including priests, and I would say especially priests, we need to be more ecclesial and less parochial, which, simply defined, means more 'our church,' less 'my parish.'"

"And, that made me feel really good, to hear him say that."

Father Nelson hopes efforts of the task force will enable priests to continue to deliver an effective ministry and to do so in

a way that helps clergy members remain happy and healthy. However, Father Nelson said priests do need additional help from the laity on the administrative side of managing a parish, requiring additional lay involvement, ministry formation and training so "priests can be free to be priests as opposed to being worried about leaks in the roof or the air conditioning going out."

"I know if it had not been for (Bishop Muench) our task force and pastoral planning effort would not have moved forward," Father Nelson said. "It would not have happened and it desperately needs to happen."



SISTERS ▼

From page 4B

ninth bishop of Covington, Kentucky, it was like a homecoming of sorts, with extended family members already living in Kentucky.

"We always had some wonderful trips to see him when he was in Covington, Kentucky," said Morse. "It was always hard

to leave him."

In 2001, Bishop Muench was appointed to fill the vacant See in the Diocese of Baton Rouge, a blessing for both the faithful and the family.

"And, Bob (Bishop Muench) kept saying, 'This doesn't really happen, to be this close to home,' " said Morse. "And, he kept telling us, 'Don't expect it, don't expect it.'"



Bishop Robert W. Muench serving wine.

Despite the demands on his schedule, the bishop maintains close relationships with his siblings and their families, performing marriages, baptisms and first Communions. And, he has formed special bonds with his nieces and nephews, taking special care to spend "15-20 minutes and they could talk about anything," according to Morse.

"That's the kind of connection he has with each of them, and he loves them all and watches over them all, like they are his own," said Morse.

"He has a special connection with the youth," said Pringle. "And he's just as good with the elderly as he is with the youth. They have a special place in his heart, also."

Three years after Bishop Muench was installed as the fifth bishop of Baton Rouge, Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and the bishop jumped into action.

"Mom and dad lost everything in Gentilly," said Morse. "But, I tell Bob (Bishop Muench) all the time, there was a reason you were brought here ... more than just being bishop."

"Bob (Bishop Muench) was able to handle the tough times in



Bishop Robert W. Muench's parents William and Mary Muench

Baton Rouge through his faith in God," said Pringle. "That's what we were raised with and that's the only road you went down. That's just what we knew and it's never let us down. We've all had

tragedies in our lives; we're not exempt. And, it's always been our foundation. We're very, very blessed to have always had this. It's just been a God-given blessing."



In gratitude for your goodness,
service, warmth, and shepherding
of our Diocese.

The *friendship* you have
shared with Mercy
is a *blessing*!



Thank you

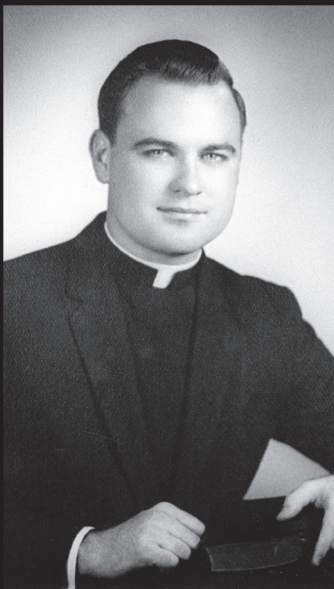
Bishop Muench for your
years of support and
encouragement.

Enjoy your retirement.



THE STAFF of
THE CATHOLIC
COMMENTATOR





"Let's not get tired of doing what is good,
for at the right time we will reap a harvest —
if we do not give up.

So then, whenever we have the opportunity,
let's practice doing good to everyone,
especially to the family of faith."

Galatians 6:9-10



Archbishop Gregory M. Aymond,
Archbishop-emeritus Alfred C. Hughes,
Auxiliary Bishop Fernand J. Cheri, O.F.M.,
the clergy, religious, and laity of the
Archdiocese of New Orleans extend their
prayerful best wishes to
Bishop Robert W. Muench on the
occasion of his retirement as
Bishop of Baton Rouge.

May his example of "doing good to
everyone" continue to shine forth in
Baton Rouge and here in his beloved
hometown of New Orleans.



**HOPE ▼**

From page 16B

"One of the graces that came out of this is that we can identify misunderstandings that come from hearts that need to be evangelized and converted," said Father Yi.

Bishop Muench agreed the heart is the first place to look when rooting out racism.

"We need to look at this by taking a look inward," he said. Is there any prejudice, racially

motivated practices or biases elsewhere or inside of me? Do I have to agree with everyone's opinion to get along with them or am I called to really be a neighbor and maybe disagree with someone's opinion, but do relate with them as a fellow human being with equal dignity and integrity that every human being has. This needs to be prayed about, reflected upon and concrete changes need to be made to help us live as disciples of Jesus Christ."

FOLSE ▼

From page 12B

night.' I said, 'What is he doing?' I just couldn't believe. And, I said, 'I'm going to go get him and bring him up to the front of the line,' and I said, 'No, he wouldn't want that.' He came up the whole line to my dad's coffin and came up to all of us and he said, 'Your dad is where he wants to be, he's with your mother.' He says, 'Your dad always said the only woman he

ever loved was in the graveyard. And one day he was going to see her again and today is that today.' I mean think of that comfort, right?"

Folse said he has worked closely with the bishop on other events for St. Joseph Seminary and Helping Hands and considers the bishop a close friend. He said the bishop gives everyone the same amount of importance, regardless of "socioeconomic levels, color of skin, creed; doesn't matter to

him."

"When I see him, whether he's meeting with dignitaries, whether he's doing ribbon cuttings, whether he's doing the greatest Mass at the men's conference with a 1,000 men, and for him to stand on the altar and say 'I am overwhelmed by what I see,' I wanted to say, 'Bishop, it's under your watch. It hadn't happened before. It's been because you inspired these men. It's because of you, Bishop' and I know that to be true," Folse said.



Bishop Robert W. Muench at dedication of Metanoia Manor

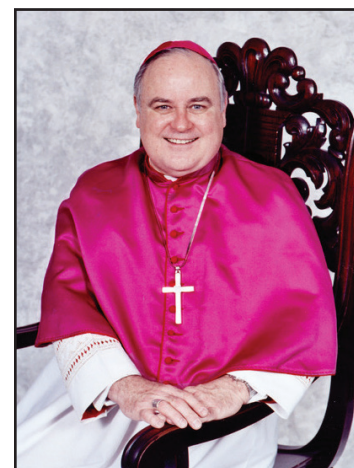


BROTHER MARTIN

Congratulates

Bishop Robert W. Muench

Cor Jesu Class of 1960



Congratulations on your retirement and for faithfully serving the Church for 50 years.

God Bless from your Brother Martin family!



*Life is Good!
Happy Retirement,
Bishop Robert W. Muench*

The St. George faith community offers our deepest thanks to Bishop Robert W. Muench, who has so generously served the people of God in the Diocese of Baton Rouge. Be assured of our continued prayers.

7808 St. George Drive | Baton Rouge, LA 70809
(225) 293-2212 | www.st-george.org



Thank you, Bishop Muench

You blessed our community
with your prayers, presence and
service for the past 16 years.
Enjoy your retirement.



FRANCISCAN
MISSIONARIES
OF OUR LADY
HEALTH SYSTEM