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NOVEMBER 2025 ISSUE

EMPTY TOMB PROJECT

T H E M A G A Z I N E

Prepare for Advent this Thanksgiving

*Use Turkey Day as the Start of
Your Advent Spiritual Planning*



Meeting Jesus in the Poor



Pope Leo's First Major
Document



A Grateful Conversion

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ETP: The Magazine

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What is The Empty Tomb Project?

Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine is a non-profit that exists to bring the reality and power of the empty tomb to as many people as possible. We are convinced that if men and women encounter Jesus as a real living person their lives will be radically changed.

We are an evangelization company that desires to bring relevant cultural and spiritual topics to our readers in an honest and fresh manner. We dive into topics that truly matter to people, themes that are brought up in people's homes as well as in church circles. We desire to bring uniformity in message and an increase in inspiration to Catholics across Long Island (and beyond).

Along with providing the most dynamic content we are committed to producing a product that is beautifully captivating to the eye. To do so we rely on the faithful designers at Startup Catholic so that the content can be amplified by the aesthetics of the magazine.

In order to reach as many people as possible with the critically important message of Christ we rely on donors in order to grow the mission and impact of our magazine. This will allow us to remain free and ensure that anyone who desires to meet Jesus today will have that opportunity. If you feel called to support us, please reach out via email: EmptyTombProject@gmail.com and join us in the mission! You can also mail us a check using the envelope inside of the issue. All donations are tax deductible.



Prepare for Advent this Thanksgiving

By Thomas Griffin

We are quickly entering the season of gratitude as Thanksgiving approaches and the season of Advent quickly follows. These are, undoubtedly, the most busy times of the year. They include family gatherings and beautiful celebrations - great parties and the joy of children preparing for Christmas morning.

Behind and before all of the Christmas parties, gift wrapping, and holiday music is a truth that we too easily gloss over: we are all hurting in some way. This is not meant to be a message of doom and gloom but a reality that, if you are like me, we too often neglect to pay attention to. The chaotic schedules of work and family life coupled with the entrance into the holiday season can breed a superficial mentality in our jobs, homes, and faith. We become so busy that we miss out on reflecting on our desperate need for God.

As we enter into this preparation season for the coming of Christ in Bethlehem there are two important questions that can guide us: what are you struggling with and what are you going to do this Advent to cling to your need for God?

First, use Thanksgiving as a springboard into your preparation for the birth of Christ on December 25th. Gratitude breeds a greater sense of appreciation for all of the little things in life. Being thankful also allows us to consider that we can too often be cynical and pessimistic rather than grateful and positive. This is true about our life in general but also about our faith lives.

Once a year, we dedicate an entire day to just reflecting on the most important people and things in our lives that we should be grateful for. We do this because we know that we often take for granted the people and things that we most depend on. This is true when it comes to parental relationships and close family bonds as well as when it comes to having housing or heat. The people and things that are most a part of our lives can often become aspects of our lives that we overlook.

Thanksgiving can be a great way to start to consider how this applies to our spiritual lives. Think about the benefits that could come from honestly reflecting on the aspects of our Christian faith that we too often take for granted but that are so critical for our lives. At times, we might think that growing deeper in our faith or following the rules of the Church is something tedious rather than something to be appreciated. This Thanksgiving, consider how the fundamentals of our faith are mind-blowing and opportunities for deep renewal.

For example, when you calculate the odds of your singular existence (your parents even meeting when they did, getting married, and you being conceived), there is a one in four trillion chance that you exist. Our faith states that your existence was willed by God. That He deemed that the world was not good enough without you in it. Your existence was meant to be. Out of those

minute odds, how grateful are we that we are simply just alive?

Other aspects of our faith that we too often overlook is the truth that our God became one of us. He was so small that He was a baby that depended on parents for nourishment. Christ became small and subjected himself to the beating, torture and death by crucifixion just to convince us how much we are loved by God and how desperate He is to save us from our sin. This same Jesus who rose from the dead locks himself in tabernacles across the world and waits us for to visit him and receive him at Sunday Mass.

Our God didn't only become one of us, die for us, save us, rise from the dead, and defeat sin and death - He waits for us in the Eucharist and desires for us to know Him as a real living person. What greater thing to be thankful for than the Eucharist?

The second opportunity that Thanksgiving should supply us with is a chance to think about how we will make this Advent different. We can achieve this by making a list of Advent goals for ourselves. Studies show that literally writing down our goals and creating realistic goals is a huge determining factor in achieving the goals we set for ourselves. So, no matter what we currently do to grow closer to Christ - what is something intentional and extra we can do this Advent?

Maybe we are going to commit to attending daily Mass. Maybe it is reading the daily Gospel passage and writing about it. Maybe we are going to find more Eucharistic Adoration to frequent or spend more time in silent prayer early in the morning or late at night. Whatever your list is - make one. Allow Thanksgiving to be your chance to begin to prepare well for the season of waiting for the coming of Christ. This way, his birth will result in a revival of our faith and a deeper appreciation for what it means to know Jesus, love him and serve him.

Thomas Griffin is the chairperson of the Religion Department at a Catholic High School on Long Island where he lives with his wife and three children. He is the founder and editor-in-chief of Empty Tomb Project: The Magazine. He is the author of Let Us Begin: Saint Francis's Way of Becoming Like Christ and Renewing the World.





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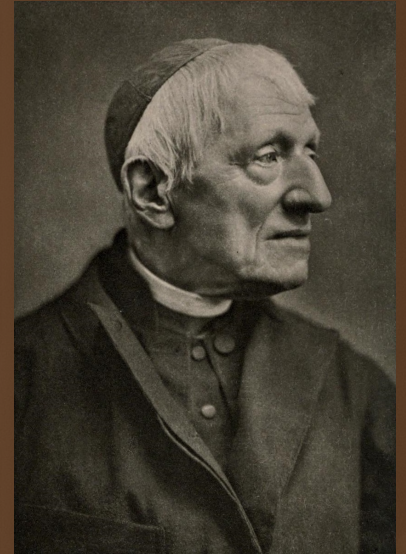
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The Role of the Laity

By Antonio Tufano

Saint John Henry Newman once wrote on the vocation of the lay person, saying: “You must not hide your talent in a napkin, or your light under a bushel. I want a laity, not arrogant, not rash in speech, not disputatious, but men who know their religion, who enter into it, who know just where they stand, who know what they hold, and what they do not, who know their creed so well that they can give an account of it, who know so much of history that they can defend. I want an intelligent and well-instructed laity...I wish you to enlarge your knowledge, to cultivate your reason, to get an insight into the relation of truth, to learn to view things as they are, to understand how faith and reason stand to each other, what are the bases and principles of Catholicism.”



Saint John Henry Cardinal Newman was an Anglican priest who converted to Catholicism. He was ordained a Catholic priest and began to work, publishing over forty works on many topics ranging from philosophy and theology to how a university should be run. In 1879, Pope Leo XIII made him a cardinal of the Church for his service to England, the Church, and for his faith. Newman was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI in 2010 and canonized by Pope Francis in 2019. On November 1, 2025, Pope Leo XIV proclaimed him a Doctor of the Church. A title granted to those saints who possessed profound knowledge, were great teachers, and contributed to the Church's theology in a significant way. Newman has joined the likes of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Therese of Lisieux, Saint Augustine, and Saint Anthony of Padua. These great saints have given so much to the Church and have provided great teaching for all of us.

I first came across the quotation above in a pastoral ministry class I took on the lay apostolate. After reading and reflecting on it, I've come to try to live out my life according to it. As a Catholic layman, I found Saint John Henry Newman's words to be aimed towards me. I found that they still spoke to me even though I'm living in a time and place completely different from Newman. He teaches us that the laity should know why they are Catholic. I firmly believe that in this day and age, while the clergy and religious are vital to the Church, the greatest witness for non-Catholics is someone just like them; someone who goes to work every day, plays sports, watches TV, all the same things they do. The only differentiating feature is that one is Catholic and the other is not. Not only are they Catholic, but they know why; they can tell you. They have a grasp of the essential doctrines and can defend them when they deem necessary. To non-Catholics, this offers them an opportunity to stop for a moment and think: “This person is just like me, he (or she) is so normal, but he's Catholic”. A spark of interest can then occur, and they can begin to ask fundamental questions about faith and life.

If someone asked me why I'm Catholic, or a basic doctrine, and if I don't know the answer, what witness am I really giving? In most cases, the Catholic lay person is the first line of contact for most people. This can be at work, at the gym, anywhere. If they encounter “well-instructed” laypeople,



then they will continue to go back to them, and it opens the door for the laypeople to refer them to the clergy and religious for deeper guidance. We live an attractive life, but if we don't know why, then it is all for nothing in the eyes of those outside the Church. It is our responsibility to be instructed in the faith so that we may live and minister to those around us, whether that be formally or informally.

We are all called to different forms of mission; nonetheless, we're all called to mission.

Now, how do we come to know these things? How do we grow in our understanding of the faith and become "well-instructed"? The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), in *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, has many great suggestions. The USCCB suggests that we should read the lives of the saints, and their writings. As I have said before, we can come to know so much from the saints, and they are such a great fountain of knowledge and revelation as God worked through them so powerfully. The Doctors of the Church, especially, are those saints who have left behind great knowledge for us all. St. Anthony of Padua left us his beautiful spiritual teachings in his sermons. Sts. Thomas Aquinas and Augustine have left for us such rich philosophical and theological truths that they are still taught in both Catholic and non-Catholic institutions today.

This also includes the writings of theologians who help us to understand the theological truths we hold. The more we read, the more we are prepared to answer any question we may encounter. Finally, the USCCB suggests discipline in daily prayer and spiritual practices. One of my favorite sayings in ministry is "you can't give what you don't have." If you do not foster your relationship with Christ and His Church, you cannot expect to foster anyone else's. Now there's no formula for success with this one. For me, this means frequent reception of the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Our Lord, seeking his mercy in the confessional regularly, and basking in the rays of his light in Eucharistic Adoration as often as I can. But for you, this may be different.

If you're reading this magazine, you likely know why you're Catholic and know the basic doctrines. I encourage you to go deeper. I encourage you to show the love of Christ to your neighbor. This love will open the door. Pope Francis has called us to be missionary disciples and bring the love of Christ to the world. Live with the love of Christ in your heart, and people will see it and want it for themselves. When you live like this, people notice, and when they notice, they will ask questions. Those questions are the soil of conversion - conversion that can and must be nurtured by the laity.

Antonio Tufano is currently a junior at The Catholic University of America. At CUA, Antonio is studying Theology and History, as well as pursuing a Certificate in Pastoral Ministry. He hails from Mineola, New York. Antonio also pitches for CUA's varsity baseball team. After college, Antonio plans to teach high school theology and history, as well as pursue a Master's Degree in Theology.



Encountering Christ in Poverty

By Mary Molloy

“Every encounter along the way represents an opportunity to meet the Lord; it is an occasion charged with salvation, because Jesus is present in the sister or brother in need of our help. In this sense, the poor save us, because they enable us to encounter the face of the Lord.”

— (Pope Francis, *Message for the Third World Day of the Poor*, 17 November 2019).

When I was growing up, my parents made it a priority for our family to serve the poor. We lived near several Franciscan priests, sisters, and third order Lay Franciscans, and my parents wanted my brother and me to be inspired by the example of St. Francis of Assisi, who encountered Christ profoundly in the poor. We often visited nursing homes, food banks, and volunteered at the local soup kitchen a couple of times a month.

As a child, I didn’t always appreciate it. I often saw it as a chore resenting the early Saturday mornings and late Friday nights spent cooking or sorting canned goods when I wanted to rest or be with friends. At that age, I didn’t yet understand what my parents were trying to teach me, that love is often found in the small, hidden acts of service that draw us beyond ourselves.

When I went to college, my perspective began to shift. I spent a week in the Bronx with several religious communities who served vulnerable women and children, the elderly, the homeless, and those struggling with addiction. That week was one of the happiest of my life. There was something real and honest about the people we served. Their stories and even their pain brought me closer to the “Poor Christ” than I had ever felt.

I again encountered Christ in the poor on a mission trip to Chicago. I worked with an organization helping men leave the streets and lives of crime. Many had never known the love of a family or even someone willing to share a meal with them. They were often intimidating, and I was fearful for much of the trip. But with the encouragement of my mission leaders, I tried my best to meet each person with genuine joy.

What I didn’t expect was how deeply these men would bring Christ to me. Before the trip, my father had died suddenly of a heart attack. I was drowning in grief and fear, pushing God away because I didn’t know how to face my own poverty of fatherlessness. On the last day, one of the men we had been serving, who knew nothing of my loss, gave me the most fatherly and tender goodbye and affirmation I had received since my dad’s death. In that farewell, I heard in the depth of my heart not this man’s voice, but Christ Himself speaking to me: “You are my joy and my delight.” That moment pierced through my defenses and reopened my heart to vulnerable prayer, allowing God to meet me in the very places I had been hiding from Him.

As I've grown in my spiritual life, I've found that prayer and service go together. The poor continue to teach me how to be open before God, bringing Him my fears, insecurities, and wounds without pretending to have it all together. Poverty reveals our desperation, but also frees our hearts to trust more deeply. The poor know their need; they don't try to mask it. And in that honesty lies a profound grace of receptivity.

This past summer, I had two experiences that brought this truth home again. The first was on a "Jesus Run" in the Bronx with a group of religious. We went to an area known for its large homeless population. Usually, we met adults, but that night we found a young mother and her two little girls. The priest with us offered to bring them to a shelter, and I joined the car since I had bonded well with the mother and little ones. We didn't have a car seat for the youngest, so I held her in the backseat with her mother and sister beside me. The mother, clearly traumatized from her time on the streets, was distant for most of the ride, but the little girls clung to me with trust and relief. The youngest nuzzled her face against mine, just happy to be safe and loved. I had nothing to offer that night except my presence but their innocent affection and gratitude humbled me. It reminded me how powerful it is simply to be with someone in their pain.

Later that summer, I went on pilgrimage to Lourdes. The pilgrimage wasn't easy. The crowds were overwhelming, and at times I felt invisible or ignored by fellow pilgrims. But what struck me most was the humble joy of the poor, sick, and homeless who gathered near the Grotto. They were the ones who looked up, smiled, and greeted me. As I prayed at the Grotto, I realized that their joy mirrored the poverty of Christ in the Eucharist who gives Himself to us in the lowly form of bread and wine, entrusting Himself completely to be received or rejected.

Through these experiences, I've come to see that accepting my own poverty allows me to encounter Christ more deeply in prayer, in others, and in myself. When I stop running from my weakness and allow myself to be seen, I discover again and again that He is already there, gazing at me with tenderness, calling me His joy and delight.

Mary Molloy teaches Religion at a Catholic high school on Long Island. She received her BA & MA in Catechetics and Theology from Franciscan University of Steubenville. She has spent the last 15 years in ministry both internationally and domestically. Her favorite thing is to serve the poor and spend quality time with her loved ones.

The Story of the God of the Poor

By Mike Schramm

Pope Leo understands the evangelical power of storytelling in a disenchanted world. *Dilexi Te* (“I Have Loved You”) reveals his conviction that re-enchantment comes through stories that give flesh to theology and heart to doctrine. Replete with examples, *Dilexi Te* leads readers into the Church’s teaching on her preferential love for the poor while weaving the document itself into a story. In both content and structure, *Dilexi Te* becomes a narrative about divine love that makes poverty its teacher and humanity its subject.


Leo opens his exhortation by placing it within the living continuity of the Church’s two-thousand-year tradition. The document completes a project begun by Pope Francis before his death (DT 3), just as Francis had completed Benedict XVI’s *Lumen Fidei* after his resignation. This handing-on of texts forms not merely an administrative or symbolic chain but a narrative of ecclesial continuity that mirrors the transmission of faith itself (cf. 2 Thess. 2:15).

Leo titles chapter one, “A Few Essential Words,” and draws upon two key Gospel scenes that anchor his theology of poverty. The first recounts the woman who poured costly perfume upon Jesus (Matthew 26:8–11). The apparent extravagance of her gesture reveals a paradox at the heart of *Dilexi Te*: there are forms of poverty deeper than the merely financial. The point is not to oppose the two, but to unite them in the Christian heart (DT 4).

This unity reappears in Christ’s identification with the poor in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25; DT 5). While natural charity can serve philanthropically, only the theological virtue of faith perceives Christ substantially present in the poor. To give alms alone still sees the poor as “other.” Only in seeing Christ in them does one perceive their evangelical power as a means of grace.

Reflecting on the Old Testament, Leo traces how God’s concern for the poor develops through revelation. Paragraphs 24–34 explore scriptural themes in which care for the poor expresses authentic love of God (DT 24–26), becomes an act of true worship (DT 27–28), and testifies to genuine faith (DT 29–30). In DT 32–33, examples from the early Church illustrate this continuity. Paragraphs 38–49 then present voices of early Fathers whose writings demonstrate that love for the poor has always been integral to both orthodoxy (“right belief”) and orthopraxy (“right practice”).

A pivotal moment in the text quotes Pope Francis’s desire for “a Church that is poor and for the poor” (DT 35). The order of those words matters. The Church can only truly be for the poor if she herself is poor. This follows from Christ’s identification with the poor and the Church’s own identity as his Bride (Jn 3:29; Eph 5:25; Rev 19:7–9) and Body (Col 1:18). Her capacity to share in Christ’s poverty is revealed most vividly in her saints.



Throughout *Dilexi Te*, Leo illustrates abstract points accessibly with saintly stories. Saint Lawrence presenting the poor to the emperor as the Church's treasures (DT 38); John of God and Camillus de Lellis founding religious orders to heal the sick and poor; the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul continuing their works (DT 50–51); Basil and Benedict enshrining care for the poor in their rules (DT 53, 55); and John of Malta, Felix of Valois, Peter Nolasco, and Raymond of Peñafort laboring to redeem captives (DT 60). Francis and Clare of Assisi, Dominic de Guzman, and Mother Teresa all sought to identify with poverty as Christ did (DT 64–66, 77).

Leo rejects the utilitarian approach to alleviating poverty. The Church's mission is not efficiency but charity. The goal is love itself. "Charity has the power to change reality," Leo writes (DT 91). This is not a pious sentiment but a metaphysical truth. Charity does not merely transform reality; it constitutes it. Even the smallest act done with great love participates in the structure of being.

Leo turns to the laity to close, recognizing their role amid the "acceleration of technological and social change in the past two centuries" (DT 82). Yet his final emphasis remains incarnational: "The Church experiences the lives of the poor as her very 'flesh'" (DT 103). He reiterates, "The poor cannot be seen as a sociological category, but the very 'flesh' of Christ" (DT 110). Between these two passages Leo reflects on the multi-dimensional nature of Christian charity using the parable of the Good Samaritan—a story that embodies (DT 105–107).

Dilexi Te carries a narrative rhythm both in content and in construction. The structure itself reflects a narrative. Leo concludes with the same verse from Revelation with which he began. This brings us full-circle just as Christ is "the Alpha and the Omega" (Rev 1:8). The symmetry is fitting: Christian poverty begins with God's self-emptying in the Incarnation and culminates in his revelation among "the least of these" (Matthew 25). In *Dilexi Te*, Pope Leo helps us recognize Christ in both.

Mike Schramm is a theology and philosophy teacher living in southeastern Minnesota with his wife and seven children. He also is the managing editor of The Journal of Absolute Truth. You can also find his writing at Busted Halo, Deep Down Things, Catholic Insight, Catholic Exchange, and the Voyage Comics Blog.

A Grateful and Honest Conversion Story

By David McWilliams

I've begun the most important journey of my life this past month when my first article on faith (in interview form) was published in *The Empty Tomb Project*. I was compelled to share my thoughts with the people I love as well as with a wider audience. I wanted to explain the very recent and significant changes in my life, changes which have shaped how I view our one true God and how I am trying my best to live for Him.

Less than two years ago, if you had told me that I would be writing for a religious magazine and speaking about faith the way that I do, I would have called you crazy. That would have been impossible and I would have laughed at you. It is this unbelievable transformation in the importance of faith that makes me even more certain that God is real and that you can meet Jesus as a real living person today.

I clearly remember the days of having religious people come up to me to speak about faith and Christ and Church. They tried to convince me of their beliefs, and I always shunned their approaches and ultimately disregarded what they said. As I now sit on their side of the table, it is a constant consideration of mine to reflect on how one appears when they speak publicly about the faith. In all honesty, I know that the difference was made for me when I truly began to pray. I wasn't always certain of God's existence. If I was asked if I was a believer I always thought so and answered in the affirmative. However, in truth, I realize that I was mostly a believer, but not 100% believer.

The growth of faith began during a time of tremendous anxiety and stress about work. At first, I prayed sporadically. But, the more and more I prayed, the more and more I began to see that the effects of prayer was complete freedom from that anxiety I was experiencing as well as a feeling of great joy. That joy sparked a deeper desire to pray and then those prayers made me seek to understand what was changing me as I prayed. Ultimately, I have come to realize that it was Jesus himself who brought me peace and joy. It was through this daily commitment to prayer, reflection and writing about my prayer time that radically changed me. That grace that changed me has compelled me to touch as many like-minded people as I can through my humble interpretation of God's holy and perfect will.

Never have I been more convinced that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit exist and pour out their grace upon all those who wish to receive it. The only thing we must do is begin, begin to pray more consistently and deeply. As I continue my journey of faith, and as I begin my chapter of trying to spread the faith to my best humble ability, it is this meeting with the living God in prayer that I am most grateful for.

A prayer that has truly aided me in entering into relational time with God is the following words:

“Oh, my Lord, King of Heaven and Creator of the universe, please hear your humble servant’s prayers. Open my eyes, ears, and heart to let knowledge and understanding of Jesus Christ’s teachings enter me so that I may see and feel His love for me in my uniqueness. Allow me to feel the goodness and strength of Him in me.”

If you prefer something shorter, then the repetition of the words, “Jesus I trust in you,” have also helped center my time of prayer and launch it into something meaningful.

Along with the power of prayer it has been growing in my understanding of free will and how the Devil can attempt to cloud our judgment that has aided me in taking the experiences of prayer into my practical life. So, I begin hopefully with God’s grace received in prayer. From there, it provides me guidance on how to best decipher the many never-ending noises buffeting our minds and hearts these days. Noises causing doubt to our conclusions on how best to live our lives for Him. Noise which undoubtedly makes it difficult for all of us to settle on the good rather than be tempted to choose evil.

We make so many decisions each day of our lives. Each and every single one of these decisions is a chance to choose good over evil and become more Christ-like. For example, being the first to say, “good morning” or being the first to say, “I love you” to a spouse or close relative, is a simple chance to love as Jesus loves. Because if you are not the first one to do so, the words might never be said. Even being interrupted by an inconsiderate person or an inconsiderate driver can be a very small way to accept a little suffering as Jesus did while remaining calm and loving. Holding the door for a stranger or offering help to someone in need, even though it might inconvenience your schedule, allows us to give of ourselves freely and with joy in a way that slowly forms us into Jesus. Then these seemingly miniscule choices become habits and form the roadmap for our lives to become centered on holiness.

So, that is the genesis of my faith story. So far, it has all been about prayer and the power of our seemingly insignificant and small choices. This transformation is something I am beyond grateful for. So, I ask you as we approach Thanksgiving: what is your faith story and what about it are you most grateful for? Let’s name it and move forward together with our eyes pierced on Christ, the one who seeks to meet us each day and form us into his own likeness in the process.

David McWilliams is the founding partner and former CEO of a construction management firm in New York City. He is a man of deep faith and has played a large role in supporting the Empty Tomb Project’s capacity to print, distribute and grow its reach over the course of these last 4 years. Most importantly, he is a disciple who seeks to grow in his relationship with God each day.



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St. Peter the Apostle (Islip Terrace) | St. Patrick (Huntington) | St. Raphael (East Meadow) |
Maria Regina (Seaford) | St. Aidan (Williston Park) | St. Martin of Tours (Amityville) |
Our Lady of Lourdes (Massapequa) | Our Holy Redeemer (Freeport) |
Our Lady of Hope (Carle Place) | Our Lady of Grace (West Babylon) |
St. Martin of Tours (Bethpage) | Church of St. Joseph (Ronkonkoma) |
Our Lady of Lourdes (Malverne) | St. Frances de Chantal (Wantagh) |
Blessed Sacrament (Valley Stream) | Our Lady of Mt. Carmel (Patchogue) |
St. Francis de Sales (Patchogue) | St. Joseph (Garden City) |
Church of St. Mary (Manhasset)

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