


The article was first reported by The Catholic Free Press.

By Tanya Connor

STURBRIDGE – The Augustinians of the Assumption observed their 175th anniversary differently than planned – and the St. Anne Novena was altered – because of coronavirus restrictions.

“I call it a blessing in disguise,” said Assumptionist Father Alex Castro, pastor of St. Anne and St. Patrick Parish and director of St. Anne Shrine there.

Because of crowd limitations, ethnic communities that usually help lead the annual novena at

the shrine were not invited, he said.

An average of 75 people attended weeknight Masses and there were more than 100 the first and last nights, which were on the weekends, Father Castro said.

The Assumptionists' June plenary general council, a highlight of the jubilee year to be held at Assumption University in Worcester, was cancelled, Father Castro said. Because of the virus, the university was closed and the superior general and his council in Rome, and provincial superiors from around the world, could not come.

Next June's meeting may be held in Worcester, said Assumptionist Father Dennis Gallagher, provincial superior of the North American Province.

Massachusetts Assumptionists opened the anniversary year last Christmas with Mass at Assumption University, and they will welcome the public to a jubilee Mass at 5 p.m. Aug. 28, the feast of St. Augustine, in St. Anne's Shrine outdoor pavilion, Father Casto said.

He invited Masschusetts Assumptionists to preach at the novena, calling it "an opportunity for us to share … our identity, our mission and vocation at the service of God's kingdom."

Father Castro opened the novena July 18, preaching about Jesus' parables of the small mustard seed and little bit of leaven producing large results.

"We remember the seeds that were planted 175 years ago," when Father Emmanuel d'Alzon founded the Augustinians of the Assumption on Christmas in 1845, at Assumption College in Nimes, France, he said.

"It continues to grow," he said, adding that there are now about 1,000 Assumptionists and lay associates in 32 countries.

Father Castro read from an anniversary letter from Assumptionist Father Benoît Grière, superior general: “I would like to see this year marked by joy … I believe that joy is the best witness we can give to our world today. … I am … proposing a return to our commitment to follow the Lord until the end, as good and faithful servants.”

Father Castro said this year also marks a 65th anniversary: on Dec. 14, 1955, Bishop (later Cardinal) John J. Wright entrusted St. Anne and St. Patrick Parish and St. Anne Shrine to the Assumptionists.

Father Castro expressed thanks to God for that and to people who have helped “so that all of us become part of that Assumption family … so that when the Master comes, he will tell us, ‘Enter into the joy of your Lord,’” the jubilee and novena theme.

Assumptionist Father John Franck, associate pastor at the parish, preached about Father d’Alzon’s vision. He said Father d’Alzon lived “in a France devastated by the French Revolution,” which unleashed the evils of unbelief, indifference to the things of God and ignorance of the faith.

These “are for us … reasons to surround Jesus with a love that is more ardent, more active and more tender,” Father d’Alzon wrote. He said that unless France rediscovered its commitment to the coming of God’s kingdom, it would fall apart. The Assumptionists’ rule of life says their community exists for the coming of the kingdom, Father Franck said. Listing moral evils today, he noted that Christians could lose heart, but said Jesus pointed out that God is in control.

Youth night bore a vocations theme, with Assumptionist Father Jerome Lively, director of faith formation at the parish, and Brother Brian Verzella, pastoral assistant at St. Anne and St. Patrick Parish, sharing about their own vocations and the importance of listening to God’s call.

Assumptionist Brother Blair Nuyda, director of vocation ministry for the U.S. region and the Assumptionist Center in Brighton, told The Catholic Free Press about the artwork he created, reproduced on banners hung in the pavilion and cards with a jubilee prayer and a prayer used

to ask for Venerable Emmanual d'Alzon's beatification.

One picture shows Father d'Alzon and the Assumptionists' motto: Adveniat Regnum Tuum (Thy Kingdom come). The other has a jubilee horn symbolizing joy, for the year's theme, and an olive branch, symbolizing hope, Brother Blair said.

"We're talking about what's in store after 175" years, he explained. "I am very hopeful about the future of Assumption, the mission, and future of the Church."

What gives him hope?

"Jesus' presence," he replied. "I am confident that God has been with us all this time." Brother Blair said the Assumptionists keep moving forward, despite uncertainties, such as as how to educate students and keep them safe.

Education, a key Assumptionist mission, was the topic of the homily by Father Richard E. Lamoureux, Assumption University's vice president for mission and superior of the Emmanuel House community there. He said he thought that topic fit with the novena because young people's best educators are their grandparents and parents. (The novena honors St. Anne and St. Joachim, Jesus' grandparents.)

Father Lamoureux said education includes teaching people skills, teaching them to think for themselves and teaching them to wonder, which involves approaching reality with reverence rather than trying to take control.

Father Gallagher touched on a similar theme at the closing Mass July 26. He told of college students appreciating their grandparents, and said Scriptures read for SS. Joachim and Anne's feast day call for reverence for ancestors and for heroes and heroines of the faith.

While acknowledging the need for justice, he said that today such reverence is under siege as

statues are toppled and efforts are made to cancel the imperfections of the past.

Father d'Alzon felt that the "rights of God had been pretty much cancelled out," Father Gallagher said. He wanted to found a religious congregation to work with laity to build up (not tear down) God's kingdom.

Father Gallagher spoke of the Assumptionists building up the community of faith in Sturbridge, preparing students at Assumption University to build up their own communities, and preparing to build up the dignity of migrants on the Mexican border with a new jubilee year foundation in the Diocese of El Paso, Texas.