December 17, 2021

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Merry Christmas! May the Light of Christ always shine brightly in our life!

Each time I put up my Christmas tree, there are a few ornaments that I put on the tree first. They include a charred manger scene, a toucan, and a nail. They remind me what a perfect Christmas really is.

You see, my first year as pastor, my parishioners had each given me an ornament to decorate my tree. The toucan was purchased in Honduras on a service trip. The manger scene, not yet charred, was made in Italy. The nail hung snug to the tree’s trunk as a quiet reminder that what we celebrate with lit trees will end at the tree of the cross.

That first Advent and Christmas as a pastor was nearly perfect for me … until I failed to blow out an Advent wreath candle on Christmas morning. As I began to preach the homily at Mass on Christmas Day, I heard the sirens of fire trucks. Radios went off in church alerting volunteer firefighters. I actually stopped after the introduction to the homily and said, “Let’s bow our heads and pray for the poor person who is suffering this fire even on Christmas morning.”

We did. Then I went on preaching the good news of the birth of Jesus.

When I finished my homily I received a note at the presider’s chair. It read, of course, “FIRE IN RECTORY! Everything ok.” As soon as I read that note, I realized my error. I suddenly felt sick, responsible and deflated. My first Christmas as pastor and I quite literally set fire to the house. I felt a little sorry for myself that day.

On December 26 — the second day of Christmas — I sat on the cold steps of that empty house in the early morning, waiting for a contractor who would clean the ductwork so that the furnace could be turned on. People began to arrive. They came with buckets, mops and brooms. One man brought tiny tools to disassemble our computers and carefully clean them. People left with armloads of curtains, bedding and more, to wash it all and return it spic and span. Workers began ripping out carpet, choosing molding and making plans for how to remake those affected rooms better than before. Christmas leftovers began showing up. By noon tables and chairs sprang up in the garage to feed the small army of volunteers who had turned out. Christmas music was playing through a set of homemade speakers. It seemed like the whole Church was there. By 3:00 p.m., the dishes were done, the house was clean and warm again, charred finishes were ripped out, and a plan was made for how to go forward.

The Body of Christ — disciples of Jesus — showed up to shine light into my darkness. It was the second day of Christmas!

As I write this, I am only learning that many of our neighbors in Western Kentucky will mark Christmas this year in the midst of loss. Some will grieve the death of loved ones. Others will celebrate as best they can from damaged homes or temporary shelters. Our hearts, prayers, contributions and service go out to them.

We celebrate a second Christmas in the shadow of COVID. Enough said about that.

In the neighborhoods of Bethlehem around the Church of the Nativity, travelers see signs of prior conflicts. Street art declares a longing for Peace On Earth. It remains elusive.

On this Earth, Christmas Days are still marred by sadness and shame. Every Christmas we notice the darkness and loss that stands out like a black brushstroke on a white sheet of paper. Every Christmas we see, somewhere, a desperate young family looking for a safe place to deliver a child who will change their world. A perfect Christmas is any moment when — because of Jesus — we can make room for that desperate couple and their child. A perfect Christmas is any moment when we can walk with someone who is soul sick, until they notice the light that shines on us all.

At Christmas, the Word of God is born into the world as the light who drives back the darkness of sin and sadness. We are at our holiest and best, when — because of Jesus — we are that light and healing for one another.

After everyone went home that December 26th, I remembered those ornaments. I climbed into the dumpster and dug out the melted tree. I managed to save about a dozen. I know exactly which ones they are. They include a charred manger scene made in Italy, a toucan from Honduras, and a nail to remind me that Christmas includes the power of the Cross. They remind me that there is a Light that can overcome the darkness!

Merry Christmas everyone! A happy and blessed New Year! I pray that each one of us will know the joy of being a light in the darkness to someone during this holy season. May we be transformed by the Light of Christ. In expectation of His coming again, I remain,

Yours in the Warmth of this Holy Season,

Most Rev. John C. Iffert
Bishop of Covington
On solemnity of Immaculate Conception, Bishop Iffert says God’s ‘grace is enough and is available’ at Mass

Laura Keener

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Dec. 8, celebrates the Church’s doctrine that Mary, from her very moment of conception, was preserved from the stain of sin. This includes original sin, which has been passed on to humanity from Adam and Eve after their fall from grace in the Garden of Eden, having eaten the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

“Mary was prepared in this unique way from the very beginning of her life, at the moment of her conception, that is what’s unique about the way Mary is prepared for the vocation God intended for her,” said Bishop John Iffert in his homily at the Vigil Mass at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington.

“What is not unique,” Bishop Iffert said, “is the love that God shows, the grace that he pours out, when you or I encounter some troubling situation that stirs us. God is eager to pour out on us the same loving presence, the same grace, the same strengthening, so that we can choose to trust God’s Divine Providence within our lives. The grace she received was the grace that flowed from the cross of her own Son and that same grace is available to us.”

Mary’s immaculate conception did not prevent her from experiencing moments of questioning or times of trouble. Bishop Iffert said. But she met those times by abandoning herself to God’s grace, trusting in God’s love for her. “May it be done to me according to your word,” Mary says to the angel who told her she would be the Mother of God.

“Now one will get through this life without anxiety,” Bishop Iffert said. “None of us are going to make it through without sincere difficulties. How do we respond to them? Demanding a sign? Or submitting ourselves to what we know is our loving Father who wants only to prepare us and to sustain us, so that like Mary, we can fulfill the vocation he is inviting us to?”

“God’s grace is enough. God’s grace is available. God’s grace is strengthening us. God’s grace is enough and is available to be able to face these anxieties,” Bishop Iffert assured those present as he closed his homily. “Today we rejoice because Mary experienced that grace, that strengthening, in a very unique way, even before her own birth into the world. The same grace is available to us. We, too, can trust in God. We can face the troubles of the world without falling into sin. Mary remains our model even in difficult times — especially in difficult times.”

Following Mass, Bishop Iffert, Bishop Roger Foyes, Father Ryan Maher and the congregation processed to St. Mary’s Park for the blessing and lighting of the Christmas tree. Students from the diocese’s Catholic elementary and high schools provided ornaments for the tree.

2023 Synod on Synodality:
We’re listening!

At the priests continuing education day, Dec. 7, (right) David Cooley, co-director, Office of Catechesis and Evangelization, discussed how the Synod on Synodality is being implemented in the Diocese of Covington. Synodality is “journeying together” — a way of living out the faith that involves shared responsibility, listening and speaking to one another, and discernment with the Holy Spirit to address the issues facing our Church today.

The diocesan consultation about how we journey together is underway, and the Church wants to hear from everyone — as many people as possible, especially those who are often excluded or who are not involved in the life of the Church.

There are two main ways to participate: Listening sessions will be held in a variety of formats during the months of January, February and March as determined by parishes, institutions and organizations. And for those unable to join in a listening session, an online survey is available at covdla.org/synod.

Continue to look for more information in parish communications, on social media or on the diocesan website covdla.org/synod.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

“For the weeks of Advent, the diocesan Worship office offers a Vespers worship aid during the Sundays of Advent. Contact Shannon Barnes at (859) 392-1500.”

— Roman Missal collect, fourth Saturday of Advent
Tuesday, December 14, 2021

Dear Clergy, Religious, and Lay Faithful of the Diocese of Covington,

Together, we grieve for our neighbors in Western Kentucky whose lives were shattered by tornadoes last Saturday morning. As I write to you, we know that at least 74 people died in the storms. More than 100 people are still missing. Thousands more have lost shelter, work, and stability. One of today's national headlines reads, "In one Kentucky town, many tornado survivors are left with just the clothes on their backs."

Many of the communities so deeply affected are in the Diocese of Owensboro. That local Catholic Church is already stepping up to provide shelter and food to many. They report that they are barely able to keep up with the calls for assistance rolling into their Catholic Center. This journey will be a long one as the people of that Catholic Church mourn and bury their dead, meet the immediate needs of those who have lost so much, assist families in repairing and rebuilding, and finally tend to their own heavily damaged churches and schools.

Our hearts are with our neighbors! On Saturday morning after the storms, many of our parishes and schools had already started to collect funds and items to help with the relief and restoration efforts. I ask each parish and mission in the Diocese of Covington to take up a collection this Saturday and Sunday, December 18 and 19, for those whose lives are affected by these tornadoes. The Diocese of Covington will collect these funds and forward them quickly to the Diocese of Owensboro to provide immediate assistance.

This holy season of Advent reminds us that the Holy Family once sought shelter in a time of crisis. They depended upon the goodwill of others as they fled King Herod's destructive wrath. May we recognize Christ in our neighbors in need and respond prayerfully and generously, as if to Christ Himself. Thank you for all you do to give glory to His name.

Yours in prayer and hope,

+ John C. Iffert
Bishop of Covington

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**2021 Christmas Season Mass schedule**

**St. Mary's Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Mass Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friday, Dec. 24</td>
<td>5:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Mass of the Vigil of Christmas Day. Mass 7:30 a.m. Ushers and Confession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, Dec. 25</td>
<td>11:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Pontifical Mass at Midnight Mass (Music: Organ, Cathedral Choir)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, Jan. 1</td>
<td>10 a.m.</td>
<td>Mass of Christmas Day. Music: Cathedral Bishop's Choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday, Jan. 2, 2022</td>
<td>7:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Mass of Christmas Day. Confession. Bishop John Iffert, Father Ryan Maher, Deacon Gerald Franzen and the Cathedral staff wish you many blessings at Christmas and throughout the New Year.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Bishop's Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 21</td>
<td>Christmas give-a-way, Rose Garden Home Mission, Covington, 2 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 22</td>
<td>Diocesan Curia office closed in observance of Christmas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 3</td>
<td>Diocesan Curia office re-opens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Tornado Disaster Relief**

Bishop John Iffert is asking pastors to take up a special collection at all Masses the weekend of Dec. 18-19 for the people of the Diocese of Owensboro devastated by the Dec. 11 tornadoes.

Make checks payable to: "Diocese of Covington – Disaster Relief." A link to make your donation online is available at www.covdio.org by clicking on the link Tornado Disaster Relief.

One-hundred percent of the money collected will be given directly to Bishop William Medley to aid in the recovery.

Please pray for all those suffering from this disaster.

(See related article page 4.)

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**Milestone wedding anniversaries to be honored at the Cathedral Basilica**

Most Rev. John C. Iffert will celebrate Vespers Sunday, Feb. 6, 2 p.m., at Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, to honor couples celebrating a significant wedding anniversary in this year. Married couples who celebrated their first, 25th, 50th, or 60-plus wedding anniversary in 2021 are invited to attend.

Anniversary couples are asked to register by Jan. 11, at covdio.org/wedding-vespers/ or contact Lisa Taylor at (859) 392-1533.

Reservations are only required for anniversary couples — family members and guests are welcome to attend.
For tornado-stricken Kentucky communities, ‘God is not in the disaster — but God is in the response’

Elizabeth Wong Barnstead
The Western Kentucky Catholic

Early in the morning of Saturday, Dec. 11, following a tornado warning for Daviess County the night before, Bishop William Medley found that his cell phone service was down — and that Gov. Andy Beshear had made an announcement about lives lost in a sudden tragedy.

The bishop became horrified and heartbroken as he realized the Kentucky governor was addressing a tragedy close to home: intense storms and tornadoes that had ripped across the southern part of the Diocese of Owensboro the night of Friday, Dec. 10.

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Bishop Iffert learned from Bishop Medley via text message early Saturday morning, Dec. 11, that the tornadoes have devastated areas of the Diocese of Owensboro. Please pray for all those suffering from this disaster.

But that morning, with massive cell phone and internet outages across Daviess County — where Owensboro, the seat of the diocese, is located — Bishop Medley could not initially communicate with anyone by phone.

“I was doing a lot of texting,” Bishop Medley told The Western Kentucky Catholic on Dec. 13.

When news began to trickle in about the destruction, which would later be confirmed as the worst tornado event in state history, multiple parishes across the diocese had been impacted in one way or another. The effects were also being felt in Arkansas, Tennessee, Missouri and Illinois.

The bishop heard about the destruction of Resurrection Parish in Dawson Springs: the roof was gone, windows shattered, and the building already guessed to be a total loss.

The parish’s Deacon Mike Marsili had later gone in to rescue the Blessed Sacrament from the miraculously-spared tabernacle amid the rubble of the church.

“He offers heartfelt prayers that almighty God will grant eternal peace to those who have died, comfort to those who mourn their loss, and strength to all those affected by this immense tragedy,” it said.

Bishop Medley traveled to St. Jerome Parish in Fancy Farm, where the parish had opened its doors for the tornado-displaced community of St. Joseph Parish in Mayfield to celebrate Mass.

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For 100 years, Thomas More has created a university for the student who wants to Be More, Do More, Seek More, Win More, Achieve More, and Create More.

Since its founding in 1921, Thomas More has provided a mission-driven, liberal arts education that is based in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition.

Serving more than 2,000 students, Thomas More aspires to be the premier Catholic university in the Midwest Athletic Conference unan- imously approved in August 2021. A provisional membership for Thomas More University, paving the way to apply for entry into NCAA Division II athletics in 2022.

As we begin our second century from a position of growth and strength, it is only right that we move forward with a bold and ambitious strategic plan centered on student success, academic innovation, and responsible stewardship," states President Chillo. "Furthermore, with the support of the Second Century Campaign we are on the path towards a future of continued growth and prosperity."

The Second Century Campaign: It’s Time for More

The new strategic plan is bolstered by the largest capital campaign in Thomas More University history, the Second Century Campaign: It’s Time for More, featuring a $30 million campaign goal to solidify Thomas More University’s commitment to student success, academic innovation and responsible stewardship seeking to elevate Thomas More University’s visibility and stature in the global community as the region’s premier Catholic University. Prior to the campaign’s public announcement, the University had already secured over $15.7 million toward its $30 million goal. All members of the Board of Trustees, over 60 major gift donors, and 30 individuals have enrolled in the Centennial Society — pledging $1,921 a year over five years — enabling the Second Century Campaign to launch with unprecedented support. Benefits from these donations alone account for 12 new endowed scholarships, marking these financial levels the highest ever achieved to date for the institution.

Thomas More also saw an outpouring of community support for the campaign on Giving Tuesday — a day of giving for non-profits around the world — with $117,645 raised in total through a variety of activities. This included a $25 per donor match up to $100,000 on Giving Tuesday, the title sponsor for Saints Serve 2021, providing t-shirts for volunteers and serving alongside University students in preparing sandwiches and meals for local organizations.

A plan to lead into the future

In the summer of 2021, President Chillo introduced Lighting the Way — the University’s new five-year strategic plan. Rooted in mission, values and vision, the plan sets forth an ambitious agenda for students, community and the institution. Included in the strategic plan are a new Academic Center transitioning the Saints Center back to its original purpose as a student union, and modifications to the Benedictine Library that will integrate the Success Center under the same roof, creating a highly advanced, contemporary learning commons.

The plan also seeks to make improvements to athletic facilities after the Great Centennial Society — pledging $1,921 a year over five years — enabling the Second Century Campaign to launch with unprecedented support. Benefits from these donations alone account for 12 new endowed scholarships, marking these financial levels the highest ever achieved to date for the institution.

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Prepare the way of the Lord

he insists, written by Venerable Prosper Gueranger: “The name Advent (from the Latin word Adventus, which signifies the coming of a guest) was given to the Church, to that period of the year during which the Church requires the faithful to prepare for the celebration of Christmas, the anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. The mystery of that great day had every right to the honor of being prepared for by prayer and works of penance. We must look to Advent in two different lights: first, as a time of preparation, properly so called, for the birth of our Saviour; by words of penance; and secondly, as a series of ecclesiastical offices drawn up for the same purpose.”

Dr. Staudt continues, “Advent is a time of extra prayer and penance for the faithful, as well as a liturgical season which guides us in our preparation.” Also, not to be a killjoy, but rather, in this writer’s opinion, to wake us up with a clear, straightforward mind-jogger, he offers, “The commercialization of the Christmas season tempts us to celebrate through food and drink and partying until the Christmas season would be a great penance in itself! If we took the preparation of Advent more seriously and truly transformed our experience of Christmas and would be a great opportunity for spiritual renewal. If we say ‘no’ to our desires a little more and take some extra time for prayer, we can recapture the original purpose of Advent to take a step back and withdraw from our attachments so that we can receive the gift that the Lord wants to give us at His Nativity.”

I can’t argue with that, can you? All of the above being said is, in my opinion, important, well and good. May I also suggest that the true magic of Advent and Christmas may be summarized in one word — reconciliation. Time flies, but much can happen, change and develop in one’s life during the fleeting days between Christmases. I don’t know about you, but I, for one, have experienced quite a few ‘dents in my fenders,’ during those days, if you know what I mean.

For example, maybe there has been too much attention and insistence given to my way instead of God’s way.

What does all this have to do with reconciliation? Please! First, let us leave you with no other information but with a reminder that Advent is not a time of penance but the way to the past.

The good doctor continues his eye-opening treatment of Advent with this explanation of the history of Advent in detail contained in “The Liturgical Year: a great work, which among which America’s Jesse Owens, a black man, took four gold medals and trashed Hitler’s Aryan supremacy myth. Anyone paying the slightest attention to world affairs is not going to happen. What, then, can be done? Make Xi Jinping and his propaganda work for a few weeks is gross moral cowardice.

The red-tapad Hitlerum is a cheap rhetorical device to be avoided. So, let’s just say that holding the Olympic Winter Games in Beijing in February 2022 will be an obscenity. There are no excuses this time. The information culture of 1989 was nothing compared to today’s world; in 1989, the truth about Nazi Germany was, if not hidden, then less glaringly apparent than it would be today, everyone knows what is going on in our relationship with China. To proceed as if that knowledge can be bracketed for a few weeks is gross moral cowardice.

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From Garmisch-Partenkirchen 1936 to Beijing 2022

In July 2016, as we were sitting on the fantail of the Swiss sidewheeler Rhone while she chugged across Lake Geneva, my host pointed out the city of Lausanne, where a massive, glass-boxed cathedral now looms over the lake. With the Rhone meandering in the summer sun, “Isn’t it the headquarters of the International Olympic Committee?” I asked, and my friend Jimmy Lai (a brave Catholic still awaiting a public hearing on charges on social media that she’d been raped by a high-grade, thank goodness. Our lapses, shortcomings, sins and assorted human failings may jeopardize our relation-
It’s been my experience that it takes time for ideas or even truths to sink in. I personally was jolted to reality about our need to care for God’s creation in new and seriu- s ways when someone brought bugs to my atten- tion — that’s right — bugs.

As a young driver I experienced small bugs zipping the windshield of my old Chevy throughout the summer as I drove. It was a nuisance to clean them off at least twice a week. A few years ago I realized after prompting that this phenomenon had stopped. The bugs weren’t any more — at least not many — What happened to them?

In 2015 Pope Francis wrote the encyclical “Laudato Si” calling all Catholics and people of good will to care for “our common home.” Whose common home? The Catechism of Daniel explains that: everything that grows on the Earth, seas and rivers, dolphins and all water creatures, all creatures wild and tame, all people of his heart — all of these are to “Praise the Lord!” When one begins to realize that Earth is home to much more than human beings and that all creation, by its very exis- tence, praises God — a shift in thinking begins to happen. Everything is precious — even my pesky bugs.

At its General Chapter of 2018 the Sisters of Divine Providence took “Laudato Si” in hand. Sisters from each area of the world spoke of what they were witnessing in terms of the sickness of our earth, and what we are doing to help to make it healthy again. In embracing our Providence spirituality and God’s loving care for every- thing he created, among other things, we called ourselves to action centered on care for the earth — our common home.

We in the Province of the United States took that recon- ciliation to heart. We completed a two-year study of “Laudato Si” with sharings in small groups and in the province for our spiritual health as well. This Vatican-led initiative has as its goal to help Catholic institutions, communities and families to reflect and to take action to address the socio-ecological crisis of our world today.

Since some of our sisters minister in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, they made us aware of the archdiocese’s Catholic Social Action Office and its challenge to its parishes, schools and religious communities to become Laudato Si Communities. We chose to apply to become a Laudato Si Community by educating ourselves on its responsibilities and benefits and committing ourselves to closely examining our province property and resources. Making the necessary changes which benefit the earth — both on the province and the local community level.

Just recently the province was designated a Laudato Si Community But it doesn’t stop there. Each of us is com- mitted to our little “bit” wherever we work, and we are committed to educate in any way we can about a Care for Creation Program in our work and parish environments.

I am blessed to work in the country. Every day as I drive to work I see the beautiful Ohio on my left. Next to it, depending on the season, the flood plain is filled with corn growing, or the stalks bent over after harvesting or barren land waiting for spring planting or maybe spring floods. As I head up the hill, I come to 12 Mile Creek on my left providing drinking water for the deer. Then I turn onto the short road that leads to the top of the hill where our parish is perched.

Before I enter the building I always turn around and see the rolling hills of Kentucky and often cows grazing on one of them. A quote from Pope Francis from “Laudato Si” comes to mind, “Once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations we look at things differently; we realize that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others. Since the world has been given to us we can no longer view it as a purely utilitarian possession but as a gift received also belongs to those who will follow us” (LS 109).

Each of our CDP Sisters has found simple ways to care for creation. We’ve cut down on the use of plastics, recycle as much as possible, we use cloth bags while shop- ping, some have started composting and we have started to buy hybrid cars. There’s always something to do to care for creation.

As our family parish, school, or institution is interest- ed in learning more about the Laudato Si Action Plan, con- tact Divine Providence Sister Kay Kramer at kkramer@cdpkentucky.org. The CDPs would be privileged to help you.

Divine Providence Sister Lynn Stenken is director of Religious Education at St. Peter and Paul Parish, California, Ky.

### Why come to church?

Believe, Teach, Practice

Deacon Michael Keller

We need each other to survive. We need to be in com- munity for our physical and emotional health. In the Gospel story the healing of the paralytic we learn the impor- tance of the community for our spiritual health as well. In each of the synoptic Gospels we read the story of the healing of the paralytic: In Mark’s Gospel we read that four men lowered the paralytic on a stretcher through the roof. Mark says that Jesus saw their faith and said to the man, “Your sins are forgiven.”

There are times in our own lives when we need help too. Times when we feel that God has forgotten us, when we feel that he isn’t hearing our prayers or when we are struggling with our faith. At these times we depend on the prayers and support of our fellow disciples to get us back on track.

There are times, too, when we see a member of the Church struggling. It is then that we step up to offer our prayers as well as our love and support to them.

It is in the Church community that we are Jesus to one another where we continue the work Jesus started and ask us to continue. In the Church we meet Jesus in the Eucharist, and in each other.

As we approach the Christmas season, let’s encourage those who we see at Mass but haven’t yet returned — our family neighbors or friends. We need to invite them to return and join us. Maybe some just need to be asked.

Deacon Michael Keller is assigned to St. John the Evangelist Parish, Carrollton, and Transfiguration Mission, Perry Park. 

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Commentary:

Father Stephen Bankemper

Isaiah (29:13): This is not a “keep Christ in Christmas” rant, nor a condemnation of any- one. This is my concern that even Catholic families are losing, or have lost, sight of the significance of this festi- val. If we lose sight of that, Christmas becomes an empty and mostly worthless feast day. Listen to this from Isaiah (29:13): “Since this people draws near with words only and honors me with their lips alone, though their hearts are far from me, And their reverence for me becomes routine observance of the precepts of men . . .” There is no condemnation here, either from Isaiah or from me, but a caution that when we pay more attention to the outer expressions of a feast than to its core mean- ing, we end up losing our connection to God. Unless Christmas is primarily a celebration of the birth of our Savior and the beginning of our salvation, all the lights, trees, visiting, food and gift giving in the world becomes “routine observance of the precepts of men . . .” and neither brings us closer to God nor brings the Good News to the world.

My second concern is for the world. If we lose sight of the meaning of Christmas, what good are we to the world? “If salt loses its flavor . . .?” Not only do we need to celebrate a true Christmas, but the world needs to redis- cover it from us. Throughout Advent, the Church tries to help us keep focused, with the words of its liturgical prayers: “O God, who see how your people faithfully await the feast of the Lord’s Nativity . . .” (Collect, Sunday Third of Advent).

“O God, see how your people faithfully await the feast of our Lord’s Nativity . . .” (Collect, Thursday of Advent).

“O God, Creator and Redeemer of human nature, who willed that your Word should take flesh in an ever-virgin womb . . .” (Collect, Friday Third Week of Advent).

Can Christians not have trees or family suppers or exchange presents? Can we not string our houses with lights? Of course we can, but these things, at one time, flowed from our understanding of what Jesus’ birth means to us, and expressed that understanding. Whatever their pagan or other origins, evergreens flowed from our understanding of what Jesus’ birth means to us, and expressed that understanding. Whatever their pagan or other origins, evergreens flowed from our understanding of what Jesus’ birth means to us, and expressed that understanding. Whatever their pagan or other origins, evergreens flowed from our understanding of what Jesus’ birth means to us, and expressed that understanding. Whatever their pagan or other origins, evergreens flowed from our understanding of what Jesus’ birth means to us, and expressed that understanding. Whatever their pagan or other origins, evergreens flowed from our understanding of what Jesus’ birth means to us, and expressed that understanding. Whatever their pagan or other origins, evergreens flowed from our understanding of what Jesus’ birth means to us, and expressed that understanding. Whatever their pagan or other origins, evergreens flowed from our understanding of what Jesus’ birth means to us, and expressed that understanding. Whatever their pagan or other origins, evergreens flowed from our understanding of what Jesus’ birth means to us, and expressed that understanding. Whatever their pagan or other origins, evergreens flowed from our understanding of what Jesus’ birth means to us, and expressed that understanding. Whatever their pagan or other origins, evergreens flowed from our understanding of what Jesus’ birth means to us, and expressed that understanding. Whatever their pagan or other origins, evergreens flowed from our understanding of what Jesus’ birth means to us, and expressed that understanding. Whatever their pagan or other origins, evergreens flowed from our understanding of what Jesus’ birth means to us, and expressed that understanding. Whatever their pagan or other origins, evergreens flowed from our understanding of what Jesus’ birth means to us, and expressed that understanding.
Christmas Eve - Friday, Dec. 24

12:30 p.m. Cristo Rey, Florence**

4 p.m.
- St. Agnes, Ft. Wright; All Saints, Walton; St. Augustine, Covington; St. Barbara, Erlanger; St. Bernard, Dayton; Blessed Sacrament, Ft. Mitchell; St. Cecilia, Independence; St. Francis Xavier; Falmouth; St. Henry, Elsmere; Holy Spirit, Newport; Immaculate Heart of Mary, Burlington; St. John the Evangelist, Carrollton; St. Joseph, Cold Spring; Mary of Heaven, Erlanger; St. Paul, Edgewood; St. Thomas, Ft. Thomas; St. Timothy, Union

4:30 p.m. St. Augustine, Augusta; St. Benedict, Covington; St. Catherine of Siena, Ft. Thomas; Holy Cross, Latonia; St. Mary of the Assumption, Alexandria; Mother of God, Covington; St. Patrick, Taylor Mill*; St. Philip, Melbourne; St. William, Williamstown

5 p.m.
- St. Anthony, Taylor Mill*; Sts. Boniface & James, Ludlow; St. Edward Mission, Owenton; St. John the Evangelist, Covington; St. Joseph, Camp Springs; St. Paul, Florence; Sts. Peter and Paul, California; St. Rose of Lima, Mays Lick; St. Therese, Southgate

5:30 p.m.
- Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington; Divine Mercy, Bellevue; St. Edward, Cynthiana

6 p.m.
- St. Barbara, Erlanger; Blessed Sacrament, Ft. Mitchell; Holy Spirit, Newport; Immaculate Heart of Mary, Burlington; St. John Mission, Dividing Ridge; St. John the Evangelist, Carrollton; St. Joseph, Cold Spring; Mary, Queen of Heaven, Erlanger; St. Matthew, Kenton; Our Savior, Covington; St. Pius X, Edgewood

6:30 p.m.
- St. James, Brooksville; St. Timothy, Union

7 p.m. Cristo Rey, Florence**

8 p.m.
- St. John the Evangelist, Carrollton**; St. Patrick, Taylor Mill

9 p.m.
- St. Charles Borromeo, Flemingsburg; St. Therese, Southgate

9:30 p.m. Ann Mission, Covington

10 p.m.
- All Saints, Walton; St. Anthony, Taylor Mill; St. Barbara, Erlanger; Blessed Sacrament, Ft. Mitchell; St. Cecilia, Independence; St. Henry, Elsmere; Holy Cross, Latonia; St. Joseph, Warsaw; St. Mary of the Assumption, Alexandria; St. Matthew, Kenton; St. Pius X, Edgewood; St. Timothy, Union; St. William, Williamstown

10:30 p.m.
- St. Thomas, Ft. Thomas

11 p.m.
- St. Agnes, Ft. Wright; St. John the Evangelist, Carrollton; St. Joseph, Cold Spring; Sts. Peter and Paul, California

11:30 p.m.
- St. Philip, Melbourne

Christmas Day - Saturday Dec. 25

Midnight
- St. Augustine, Augusta; St. Augustine, Covington; St. Bernard, Dayton; Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington; St. Catherine of Siena, Ft. Thomas; St. Edward, Cynthiana; St. Francis Xavier, Falmouth; Holy Cross, Latonia**; Immaculate Heart of Mary, Burlington; St. Joseph, Cold Spring; Mary, Queen of Heaven, Erlanger; St. Paul, Florence

8 a.m. St. Henry, Elsmere; St. Joseph, Cold Spring; Mary, Queen of Heaven, Erlanger; St. Pius X, Edgewood; St. Therese, Southgate

8:30 a.m.
- St. Agnes, Ft. Wright; St. John Mission, Dividing Ridge

9 a.m.
- Blessed Sacrament, Ft. Mitchell; St. Francis Xavier, Falmouth; Holy Cross, Latonia; Immaculate Heart of Mary, Burlington; St. Mary of the Assumption, Alexandria; St. Matthew, Kenton; St. Paul, Florence; St. Philip, Melbourne; St. Rose of Lima, Mays Lick

9:15 a.m. St. Bernard, Dayton

9:30 a.m.
- All Saints, Walton; Sts. Boniface & James, Ludlow; St. Cecilia, Independence; St. John the Evangelist, Carrollton; Mother of God, Covington; St. Thomas, Ft. Thomas; St. Timothy, Union

10 a.m.
- St. Anthony, Taylor Mill; St. Augustine, Augusta; St. Augustine, Covington; St. Barbara, Erlanger; St. Benedict, Covington; Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington; St. Catherine of Siena, Ft. Thomas; St. Edward, Cynthiana; St. Henry, Elsmere; Holy Spirit, Newport; Immaculate Heart of Mary, Burlington; St. Joseph, Camp Springs; St. Paul, Florence

11:30 a.m.
- All Saints, Walton; St. Bernard, Dayton; Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington; St. Catherine of Siena, Ft. Thomas; St. Edward, Cynthiana; St. Francis Xavier, Falmouth; Holy Cross, Latonia**; Immaculate Heart of Mary, Burlington; St. Joseph, Cold Spring; Mary, Queen of Heaven, Erlanger; St. Paul, Florence

11 a.m.
- St. Agnes, Ft. Wright; St. William, Williamstown

12:30 p.m. Cristo Rey, Florence**

*Children’s Liturgy
**Spanish
***Candlelight Mass

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**“Candlelight Mass”**

**“Spanish”**

**“Children’s Liturgy”**

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Missed an edition? Current and back issues of the Messenger are available online at covdio.org/messenger.
The Diocese of Covington’s 27th annual live nativity scene is up at St. Flus X Parish, Edgewood. The crib blessing will be Dec. 18 after the 4:30 p.m. Mass. Families, friends, groups and organizations are welcome to participate as actors, actresses to bring the events of Christ’s birth to life Dec. 18-23, 6:30-7:30 p.m. Choirs are welcome to add their gift of music; students can earn service hours for their participation. For scheduling a group or family call Doug Eifert, 384-3689 or e-mail okonfort@ecv.com.

St. Vincent de Paul Northern Kentucky is hosting two coat distributions in Northern Kentucky: Dec. 18, 9 a.m.–12 p.m. at the Life Learning Center, Covington and Cristo Rey Parish, Florence. Volunteers needed, contact Mark Bradley at 426-3616 or mark Bradley@stvdpky.org.

Bishop Brossart High School will be performing numerous songs, some of which are Christmas songs, Dec. 19, 1 p.m., Munninghoff Performing Arts Theatre. This concert is free and all are welcome.

The Pro-Life Office is organizing a trip to Washington, D.C., for the Annual March for Life, which will take place Jan. 21. Included in the trip is round-trip airfare, one night’s hotel accommodation and ground transportation to and from the airport and hotel. Limited seating available. Depart late morning, Jan. 20; return evening Jan. 21. Cost per person, double occupancy room is $412. Rooms are also available for those providing their own transportation. The Marriott Metro Center is located centrally in downtown Washington, D.C. Cost of room: $210. Limited availability. Contact Peggie Piccola in the Pro-Life office, at 392-1500 or ppiccola@covdio.org.

All of us at Citizens Federal wish to thank you for allowing us to serve you over the past year. Best wishes for a happy, healthy and prosperous new year. Warmest Regards, Citizens Federal 433 Madison Avenue-Covington, KY 41011

Do you have family or a friend in jail or prison? Are you looking for a safe, welcoming community where you will be accepted without judgement? Come to Catholic Charities, Latonia, the 3rd Tuesday of the month from 6:30-7:30 p.m. Questions, contact Dave Capella at dcapella@covingtoncharities.org or (859) 581-8974 ext. 117.

The NKU Catholic Newman Club Knights of Columbus have weekly meetings Tuesdays, 6 p.m., at the Newman Center. Contact manzo1@myemail.nku.edu if you’re a Catholic man interested in joining.

The Diocese of Covington is sponsoring a pilgrimage to World Youth Day 2023 in Lisbon, Portugal, for youth and young adults, ages 16 and up. Our shepherd, Bishop John Iffert, is hoping to join us along with a few priests from the diocese.

Our youth, young adults, and their chaperones will have the opportunity to grow in faith and experience the universality of the Catholic Church in the presence of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, and alongside millions of young Catholics from around the world. Along with WYD festivities, the pilgrimage includes several days spent in service to the local diocese of Lisbon.

The cost is $3,400 per person and includes roundtrip airfare, transportation, lodging (within walking distance of main events), meals, tours and a day trip to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fatima.

If you are interested in attending, leading a group, or making donations to help the youth of our diocese attend this powerful experience, contact Isaak Abraham Isaak at (859) 392-1500, ext. 1529 or iisaak@covdio.org.

Pen Pals and crafters
The third-grade students in Krista Schoutens’ class at St. Joseph School, Cold Spring have a pen pal — Sister Mary Margaret Agnes, a retired Sister of Notre Dame. The students each write their own personal letter to Sister telling her about their lives and she writes each individual student back. Recently, Sister Mary Margaret visited the third grade class bringing an ornament craft for them to make.

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Rugby champions
Thomas More Rugby program won its first-ever championship. Thomas More University’s rugby team defeated Adrian College to secure the title of NCAA Division II National Champions, Dec. 12, in Houston, Texas.

You’re invited — Life’s a Ball Event
Feb. 12, 2022, Airport Marriott, Hebron
Cost $70 per person.
Contact Faye Roch, director, Pro-Life Office
(859) 392-1500, froch@covdio.org

Ring in the Season on a High Note.
Wishing you a harmonious holiday filled with peace, love and joy.
We appreciate your patronage and will stay in tune with your needs for years to come.

Do you have family or a friend in jail or prison? Are you looking for a safe, welcoming community where you will be accepted without judgement? Come to Catholic Charities, Latonia, the 3rd Tuesday of the month from 6:30-7:30 p.m. Questions, contact Dave Capella at dcapella@covingtoncharities.org or (859) 581-8974 ext. 117.

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Long before daylight, on a rainy and windy morning, a celebration of joy, warmth and excitement was taking place inside the church of Cristo Rey, Florence. The celebration of Las Mañanitas was erupting inside. Parishioners gathered at 5 a.m. to take part in these festivities — live music, hundreds of people singing and flowers being set at the foot of a shrine for Our Lady of Guadalupe.

While many in the United States are unfamiliar with this celebration, Las Mañanitas is one of the most important religious celebrations for the Catholic Hispanic community.

This annual event held in dedication of Our Lady of Guadalupe begins with a pre-dawn parade and/or serenading followed by Mass. Our Lady of Guadalupe’s feast day is Sunday December 12. Las Mañanitas is a traditional ceremony for Our Lady on the vigil of her feast day. Our Lady of Guadalupe is the patron saint of Mexico, and the feast day marks her appearance to St. Juan Diego in the hills of Tepeyac in the 1500s. St. Juan Diego’s feast day is celebrated Dec 9.

On Dec. 9, 1531, the Blessed Mother, Our Lady of Guadalupe, appeared to him on Tepeyac Hill, located on the outskirts of what is now Mexico City. The Blessed Mother asked Juan Diego to build a shrine in her name on Tepeyac, but the Bishop did not believe Juan Diego, asking him to prove this appearance with a sign. Juan Diego returned to the hill where the Blessed Mother had appeared to him. There she asked him to climb to the top of the hill. At the top of Tepeyac, Juan Diego found roses flowering in the middle of winter. This was the proof presented to the Bishop, and when Juan Diego opened his mantle containing the roses, an image of the Blessed Mother appeared with them.

According to the article, “Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin” on the Vatican.va website, “The miraculous image, which is preserved in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, shows a woman with native features and dress. She is supported by an angel whose wings are reminiscent of one of the major gods of the traditional religion of that area. The moon is beneath her feet and her blue mantle is covered with gold stars. The black girdle about her waist signifies that she is pregnant. Thus, the image graphically depicts the fact that Christ is to be ‘born’ again among the peoples of the New World and is a message as relevant to the ‘New World’ today as it was during the lifetime of Juan Diego.”

This connection between Juan Diego and Our Lady of Guadalupe created the Las Mañanitas tradition. Flowers placed in front of Our Lady of Guadalupe’s shrine, usually roses, represent the flowers that Juan Diego delivered to the Bishop after plucking them from the ground.

Cristo Rey’s Las Mañanitas celebration went on throughout the morning. The band led the serenading of Our Lady of Guadalupe. A shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe with the Mexican flag was placed at the front of the church and parishioners placed flowers in front of the shrine as chants, prayers and songs continued throughout the morning. Las Mañanitas ended with Mass later that day completing the feast day tradition.


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The Savior of the world has come. Rejoice and be glad!
American Heritage Girls earn St. Joseph Patch

Tom Ziegler
Staff Writer

American Heritage Girls earned their St. Joseph Patches during the Year of St. Joseph. In his apostolic letter, “Patris Corde,” Pope Francis dedicated the time from Dec. 8, 2020 to Dec. 8, 2021 as the Year of St. Joseph. This commemorated the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of St. Joseph as patron of the Universal Church. To recognize this year dedicated to the foster father of Jesus, the AHG developed a program through which scouts could earn a St. Joseph Patch. This program educated American Heritage Girls and Catholic Youth groups who participated, on how St. Joseph’s joyful obedience and unwavering protection were a display of reverence and loyalty. The St. Joseph Patch program offered different activities for various age groups to complete.

The American Heritage Girls troop at St. Timothy Parish, Union, took the time this year to earn their St. Joseph patches and learn about the great saint.

“Working on the St. Joseph patch was a great opportunity to talk about one of the greatest American Heritage Girls work on an activity to earn St. Joseph patch at St. Tim’s parish, Union. Saints, St. Joseph,” said Cecelia Reynolds, Troop coordinator, in an email. “The girls all knew he was Jesus’ foster father, but many did not know that he was the patron of the Universal Church or that he had appeared in different apparitions.”

The girls are ages 5-12 and completed activities based on their age and experience to earn the patch. The troop has about 5-6 girls who earned the patch and are working on other AHG NCC national faith awards. The AHG NCC Catholic Faith awards are made available for girls ages 6-18.

The Year of St. Joseph in review

Father Jordan Hainsey
Messenger contributor

On the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Dec. 8, the Church formally closed the Year of St. Joseph, ending the 150th anniversary celebration of Pope Blessed Pius IX’s declaration of St. Joseph as patron of the Universal Church. The point of the year was simple: to highlight Joseph the man and Joseph the saint as a powerful intercessor for the Church and her faithful.

Festive days, prayers, reflections, devotions and activities were coordinated throughout the diocese to stir the hearts of the faithful around the foster father of Jesus. For many it was an opportunity to engage a saint who is present throughout so many of our churches through sacred art, but often overlooked. A traveling relic of the cloak of St. Joseph throughout diocesan parishes invited the faithful to experience relic devotion perhaps for the first time — to experience Joseph in a concrete, tangible way.

The whole of this anniversary year took place against the backdrop of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It also took place amidst the ebbs and flows we all experience: political upheaval, the death of loved ones, the loss of jobs and broken relationships. But how appropriate that we would all journey with Joseph in these days and experiences.

This past year-and-a-half is likely the closest we will come to knowing the first Christmas in Bethlehem. This past year-and-a-half is when nothing went according to plan. The same was true for Mary and Joseph — nothing worked out as expected. Joseph found himself right there in the middle of it all.

Joseph was not sure how God’s plan would unfold, but he trusted and kept going. Mary was a pregnant teenager who had to travel and spend weeks with her new husband’s family and try to explain to them who the father was.

And, at different points, an angel came on the scene and told each of them not to be afraid — but a lot of good that didn’t happen. The angel didn’t have to walk nearly 100 miles, meet the parents, stay in a cave, or care for a newborn baby. Angels also didn’t have to worry about the future and deal with real life.

But God did in Jesus. This is the mystery of the Incarnation.

The best way for God to show his love for us was to become one of us, in the midst of the imperfect world of real life. Jesus knew what it was like to be afraid and to be loved, God, the creator of the universe, chose to be born as a human being and enter the ordinary — “to tear open the heavens and come down.” This was the divine plan all along. A plan Mary and Joseph found themselves right there in the middle of.

The year of St. Joseph may have ended, but if we resign the celebration of Joseph to a mere year replete with outlined devotions and activities, we’ve missed the point. The point of this year, like all Holy Years in the Church, is to a commencement moment in our faith lives — to be a new beginning.

I think the real take away from the Year of St. Joseph is not what new prayers we’ve learned or even what new devotions we’ve discovered. The takeaway from this year might better be that Joseph’s story can be our story. Or, better yet, is our story. When we have faith and trust in God, even when life isn’t going our way and we’re not sure how God’s plan is unfolding, Jesus can be revealed and manifested to us and in us.

Father Jordan Hainsey is administrative assistant to the Bishop, assistant to the Chancellor and Custos of the Holy Relics of the Diocese of Covington, Ky.
The Christmas season offers many opportunities for the faithful to draw close to Jesus, Mary and Joseph through liturgical celebrations which the season provides.

We honor Mary first in her feasts of the Immaculate Conception and Our Lady of Guadalupe. We celebrate Our Lord's incarnation at Christmas and honor the Virgin Mary in her motherhood, along with St. Joseph in his role as father, husband and protector. Then on Dec. 26, the Church honors all three together in the Feast of the Holy Family. Among the ways the faithful can celebrate this feast is with a visit to the Cathedral Basilica's new Relic Shrine of St. Paul, which offers a particularly “up close and personal” devotional encounter with actual relics of the Holy Family.

We sometimes forget that Jesus, Mary and Joseph were real, flesh and blood people who lived real lives as a family at a particular time and place in history. When Joseph died, and later when Jesus and the Virgin Mary departed this world, they inevitably left behind personal effects such as clothing, belongings and other artifacts that their friends and other early Christians collected and kept first as heirlooms in their memory. Then later, as the Church grew, they became objects of veneration.

But the Holy Family didn't become the focus of any formal veneration by the Church until fairly recently. Although honored for centuries, widespread Christian interest in the Holy Family didn't become popular in art until the 1400s, and the practice of veneration wasn't formally established until the 17th century by St. François de Laval, the first bishop of New France. As a liturgical celebration in the Catholic Church, the feast day wasn't even observed until 1921, when it was inserted into the Roman Calendar by Pope Benedict XV.

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family on the Sunday that follows Christmas, and the Church proposes the Holy Family as the model for all families everywhere. In his 1989 apostolic exhortation Redemptoris custos, Pope St. John Paul II explained it this way: “In this family, Joseph is the father: his fatherhood is not one that derives from begetting offspring, but neither is it an ‘apparent’ or merely ‘substitute’ fatherhood. Rather, it is one that fully shares in authentic human fatherhood and the mission of a father in the family.” [Redemptoris custos §21]

The faithful have a unique opportunity to encounter the Holy Family on their feast day through prayer and veneration of the relics of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. They are on permanent display in the Cathedral Basilica and can be seen at the Relic Shrine of St. Paul, located in the cathedral’s apse beneath the baldachin. There is ample space for meditation and prayer, where faithful can sit or kneel for those wishing to pray to the Holy Family. Their relics are contained in four large reliquaries within the Shrine. Three reliquaries are specific to Jesus, while the fourth contains personal effects of his mother Mary and St. Joseph.

The left display on the center shelf is our first reliquary, which appears in the shape of a cross. Within its protective glass are contained actual pieces of the True Cross on which Jesus was crucified.

Excavating to a considerable depth beside the rock of Golgotha, three crosses (Patibula) were found, along with the sign (Titulus) that had been over the Savior’s head and the nails (Clavi) with which he had been crucified. In order to identify the True Cross, St. Helena had all three crosses touched to a deceased youth to see what effect each might have. The first two did nothing. But upon being touched by the third cross, the youth came back to life. It is a fragment of this cross found by St. Helena that the Shrine contains today.

Another reliquary on the same shelf contains additional relics of Jesus. These include a fragment of the manger in which he was born, a relic of the cave which housed the manger, an ornate mother of pearl crucifix containing soil taken from the location of each of the 14 stations that Our Lord walked on his way to Golgotha, a fragment of the manger, and the True Cross.

Another reliquary contains a piece of the rock of Golgotha and relics specific to Jesus that were collected by early Christians.
scourging column, another piece of the True Cross, and a relic of his tomb. On the bottom shelf in the right display case is a reliquary containing three crucifixion nails. In the 18th and 19th centuries, small shavings of Holy Nail relics were given out in a limited number by Rome’s Holy Cross Basilica. The nails on display are exact copies of the ones St. Helena found and were cast to include metal shavings taken from the real nails in the Basilica’s reliquary. Seals attached to the top of the nails indicate their authenticity.

The relics of the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph are also found in the left display case. In a large reliquary are displayed three personal effects from St. Joseph — one is a fragment from his house in Nazareth, one from his cloak and another from his clothing. There are also three relics of the Virgin Mary — a fragment of her veil, another from her house in Nazareth, and one taken from her blouse. Even from the earliest days of the Church, relics of St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary were highly venerated by Christian faithful. Sts. Joachim and Anne, the parents of Mary and the maternal grandparents of Jesus, are also represented in the same reliquary.

Various pious practices have developed over the centuries that show appropriate veneration to the Holy Family through their relics. One faithful practice is simply a pilgrimage to the Shrine where the relics are housed. There, the faithful are invited to spend time in prayer before them and are encouraged to meditate upon their holy lives, ask for their intercession, or offer thanks for favors received. The faithful may also touch holy cards or cloth to relics, thereby making these items third class relics. These should be treated with respect and remind the person of their moment with the relics of the Holy Family.

Someone venerating a relic can also kiss or touch the case that houses it. But at the Relic Shrine of St. Paul, (Continued on page 14)
simply standing or kneeling near the relic in a prayerful attitude is sufficient, raising one’s heart and mind to God while invoking the intercession of Jesus, Mary or Joseph. Other acceptable gestures include signing oneself with the sign of the cross or kneeling in front of the relic in prayer. However, a person should not genuflect before a relic in the same way as genuflecting before the Blessed Sacrament; Christ alone is reserved that gesture of adoration.

To find out more about the relics of the Holy Family and other saints in the Shrine, one can browse through a beautiful Relics Book kept at the Shrine that identifies all the relics and their locations within the Shrine. One can also read more about the origins and practice of relic veneration as well as learn the stories of every saint represented in the Shrine.

Parishioner at the Shrine of St. Paul.

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Christ, the Lord,
the new-born King!
Second chances: Vatican Christmas stamps feature work of homeless artist

VATICAN CITY — Adam Piekarski, a homeless man from Lodz, Poland, never imagined that the sketches he would draw in his free time while waiting for the public showers near Bernini’s Colonnade would lead to the opportunity of a lifetime.

In November, the Vatican Philatelic and Numismatic Office announced that its 2021 set of commemorative Christmas stamps would feature images of the Magi and the Holy Family painted by Piekarski.

For the painting of the three Magi, Piekarski based their likeness on two friends who are also homeless; the third, he explained, was an original image meant to represent all homeless men and women.

Piekarski left Poland six years ago and, like many migrants, made his way to Rome seeking a better life.

The Eternal City, he explained, is a place that remains in the heart of many Polish people as a source of inspiration for some of Poland’s greatest artistic icons, such as Henryk Siemiradzki, whose paintings often depicted life in ancient Rome.

However, upon his arrival, the harsh reality of finding work, coupled with a fondness for Italian wine, led Piekarski down the dark path of alcoholism that he continues to fight.

His work drew the attention of Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, papal almoner, who then introduced Piekarski to K. K. Siemiradzki, whose paintings often depicted life in ancient Rome.

However, upon his arrival, the harsh reality of finding work, coupled with a fondness for Italian wine, led Piekarski down the dark path of alcoholism that he continues to fight.

With Father Ruben serving as translator, Piekarski told CNS that his life began to change after meeting the Polish priest while waiting in line for the public showers for the poor at the Vatican.

Father Ruben told CNS that when asked by Father Mazzitelli to design the 2021 Christmas stamps, Piekarski’s answer was an emphatic “no.” However, the Italian priest’s persistence finally moved the Polish artist to finally do it.

For the painting of the three Magi, Piekarski based their likeness on two friends who are also homeless; the third, he explained, was an original image meant to represent all homeless men and women.

Piekarski credits the public showers for not only being the starting point of his journey as an artist, but the place where he decided to confront his battle against alcoholism.

He went to a technical school in Poland and studied gardening in Lodz,” added Redemptorist Father Leszek Pys, known by many as a philanthropic gesture that makes us feel good about ourselves,” the Polish priest said.

However, upon his arrival, the harsh reality of finding work, coupled with a fondness for Italian wine, led Piekarski down the dark path of alcoholism that he continues to fight.

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Father Ruben told CNS that, at the time, he was trying to figure out a low-cost option for a painting of St. Clement Mary Hofbauer, co-founder of the Redemptorist congregation, to commemorate the 200th anniversary of his death.

Explaining his dilemma to Pallottine Sister Anna, a nun who volunteers helping the poor at the public showers, he was introduced to Piekarski, who would often spend his time sketching while waiting for his turn at the showers.

Father Ruben then provided Piekarski with paints, brushes and found a workspace in the crypt of the Church of Santa Maria in Monterone, where the burgeoning artist honed his artistic abilities.

His work drew the attention of Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, papal almoner, who then introduced Piekarski to Father Francesco Mazzitelli, then-deputy director of the Vatican Philatelic and Numismatic Office.

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Glory to the New Born King

Oh holy day, oh joyous day;
He sent His son, to who the way.
And wherever you may go,
May you bask in His holy glow
For those who seek, will see the light
And it will illuminate all that is right.

Thank you for the good faith you’ve shown to us.
damaged or destroyed, there is significant damage in 18 countries, and ages of those lost range from 5 months to 86 years old.

But the response has been powerful. In the morning of Dec. 13, the switchboard phone was ringing nonstop at the McRaith Catholic Center (the pastoral center office of the

“But the wood of the manger gives way to the wood of the cross. And the cross is in our churches year-round,” said the bishop. “We can make our sufferings one in communion with Christ on the cross.”

He pointed out that the parish church that had suffered the most damage was named after the Resurrection.

“The theme of the Resurrection will be core to our thoughts during this very difficult process,” he said.

Montalvo-Gesser agreed: “God is not in the disaster. But God is in the response.”

The Messenger and Catholic News Service contributed to this article.

Bishop William F. Medley greets a family while at St. Jerome Parish in Fancy Farm on Dec. 12, 2021, where the parish had opened its doors for the tornado-displaced St. Joseph Parish in Mayfield community to celebrate Mass. St. Joseph Parish was one of many buildings in western Kentucky critically damaged in the tornadoes and storms during the night of Dec. 10, 2021.

Diocese of Owensboro with calls from people across the United States wanting to send assistance.

The diocese even received a message from Archbishop Fabio Martínez Castilla of the Archdiocese of Tuxtla Gutiérrez in Chiapas, Mexico — hometown of Diocese of Owensboro priest Father Carmelo Jimenez of St. Michael Parish in Sebree.

The bishop of the Mass in Fancy Farm, Bishop Medley told the congregation that in a few days, many had planned to have a nativity set decorating their homes in celebration of Christmas.

Some of the tornado damage at St. Joseph Parish in Mayfield. St. Joseph Parish was one of many buildings in western Kentucky critically damaged in the tornadoes and storms during the night of Dec. 10, 2021.
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St. Joseph’s quiet humility teaches value of silence, pope says

Jumno Arocho Esteves  
Catholic News Service  

VATICAN CITY — The absence of any words attributed to St. Joseph in the Gospels speaks volumes about the importance of silence, Pope Francis said.

St. Joseph’s silence was “not mutism,” but a quality that allowed him to listen to the word and will of the Holy Spirit, the pope said during his weekly general audience Dec. 15.

“This is why we must learn from Joseph to cultivate silence — that space of interiority in our days in which we give the Spirit the opportunity to regenerate us, to consoles us, to correct us,” he said.

During his audience in the Vatican’s Paul VI hall, Pope Francis continued his series of talks on St. Joseph, reflecting on his silence which is “an important personal aspect” that even Christ incorporated in his own life and ministry.

“Jesus was raised in this ‘school,’ in the house of Nazareth, with the daily example of Mary and Joseph.”

He encouraged people “to rediscover the true worth of Christmas.”

1. Remind yourselves that we are celebrating the birth of Jesus. Go so far as to use that phrase. I find it instructive that the Church entitles this feast in the Roman Missal “The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas),” not “Christmas (The Nativity of the Lord).”

2. Make the celebration of Mass the central part of your Christmas. The Church calls this Mass a solemnity — the highest rank of a feast. To go even further, I would encourage you to celebrate on Christmas Day I know the Church allows a Vigil Mass, but it was never intended to supplant the Mass for Christmas Day. Very few people go to Mass on Christmas Day. Over and over I hear people tell me that the Vigil Mass is more convenient. I am not condemning anyone, but when you choose from convenience, you put the spiritual and liturgical side of the celebration second. Make Mass the central part of your Christmas. By the way, the Church offers three different Masses for the solemnity with different sets of readings, meditating on different aspects of Jesus’ birth and what it means. Why not celebrate more than one Mass?

3. Refuse to use the word “holiday,” refuse in particular the phrase, “Happy Holidays.” While the root of the word “holiday” is “holy day,” it has ceased to mean that.

“Many people are afraid of silence, they have to speak, and speak and speak, or listen to the radio or television; but they cannot accept silence because they are afraid,” the pope said.

Another challenge, he continued, is to incorporate in his own life and ministry.

“Jesus was raised in this ‘school,’ in the house of Nazareth, with the daily example of Mary and Joseph,” the pope explained. “And it is not surprising that he himself sought spaces of silence in his days and invited his disciples to have such an experience.”

Like Jesus, he said, all Christians should follow St. Joseph’s example “to recover this contemplative dimension of life.”

At the same time, the pope said that often “silence frightens us a little because it asks us to delve into ourselves and to confront the part of us that is true.”

Christmas scenes and symbols, Magi and shepherds and the star and the Holy Family. These cards remind us and those to whom we send them what this feast is truly about, and express the wondrous facets of the feast.

5. Put a nativity scene in your house. I hear from the children in my parish that there are Catholic homes without a crèche. Put it front and center, and use it with your children for prayer and conversation.

The Church has tried to prepare us throughout Advent for the “coming festivities.” May you be blessed in your celebration of Christ’s birth, and may your observance of this feast open the eyes of others to its meaning.

Pater Stephen Bankemper is pastor, St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Ft. Thomas, Ky.
“Being the Ricardos” (Amazon). Writer-director Aaron Sorkin’s biographical drama portrays the set of the iconic 1950s sitcom “I Love Lucy” as a toxic workplace with stars Lucille Ball and her then-husband, Desi Arnaz, support- ing players Vivian Vance and William Frawley as well as producer and head writer Jess Oppenheimer and co-writer Madelyn Pugh all completely miserable. Sorkin doesn’t hesitate to mash up real-life events to suit his dramatic purposes. Thus he packs the weeklong process of filming one episode check-to-check with crises, including the threatened disclosure that Ball, and her immediate family, had registered as members of the Communist Party in the 1930s, the challenges of her second pregnancy and the revelation of one of her then-husband’s extramarital affairs in a scandal magazine. Dramatically, the tartness works, but viewers in search of something as innocuously tuneful as Ball and Arnaz’s ground- breaking show may come away bewildered.

Fleeting sensuality, references to adulterous affairs in a scandal magazine. CNS: A-III; MPAA: R.

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Catholic News Service (CNS)
Cathedral Basilica publishes reference book ‘Relics of the Shrine of St. Paul’

St. Mary’s Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption announces the release of “Relics of the Shrine of St. Paul,” a new reference book that explains relics, their place in Catholic devotion, and a history of the saints that are a part of the cathedral’s relic shrine. Published in conjunction with the Office of the Custos of Holy Relics, the new book is available for reference use at the Cathedral Basilica’s St. Paul Relic Shrine.

Bound in a large glossy format, the 94-page book explores details from the St. Paul Relic Shrine’s concept and construction, to the symbolism of the altarpiece that graces the central reredos niche. The text also contains an easy to use diagram of the reliquaries’ layout so the faithful can easily see where each relic is located. An alphabetized saint name index is located at the back of the book so the viewer can easily reference which saints are contained in the display.

Containing over 300 relics, the Relic Shrine of St. Paul is considered one of the largest holdings of relics in the United States. (See related article page 12.)

May the season bring much harmony and bliss,
For family and friends near, and those you will miss,
With the blessings of Heaven’s goodwill and grace,
Reflected in the shining smiles on every face!
National/World

Pope: Through Mary, Latin America can move toward conversion, renewal

VATICAN CITY — Festive music, dancing and prayers in honor of Mary brought much-needed warmth on a chilly Roman morning Dec. 12 to honor the patroness of the Americas and the Philippines whose apparition to St. Juan Diego on Tepeyac hill in Mexico continues to bring hope in uncertain times. “This experience must be repeated over and over again,” Pope Francis told pilgrims during his Sunday Angelus address. “In this way, God, who is communion, will move us toward conversion and the renewal of the church and of society that we need so much in the Americas — the situation in many Latin American countries is very sad — as well as throughout the world.”

WAshington — A majority of the Supreme Court justices viewed a Maine school choice program that excludes religious schools as discriminatory Dec. 8. In oral arguments that took nearly two hours, several of the justices found fault with the state’s decision process in determining just how religious a school was to decide if it could participate or not. Those deemed as schools that could potentially “infuse” religion in classes were excluded while other schools deemed by the state’s board of education to be the “rough equivalent” of public schools — or religiously neutral — could take part in the tuition program. “That’s discrimination based on doctrine.”

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That’s unconstitutional,” Chief Justice John Roberts said. Justice Samuel Alito questioned if a school that is religious — that says everyone is equal and worthy of respect and does charitable work but doesn’t have dogma — would be disqualified. Christopher Tash, Maine’s chief deputy attorney general, said such a school would be similar to a public school. “Maybe, but close to Unitarian Universalism,” Alito replied, questioning why that would qualify but other religious schools wouldn’t, to which Tash countered by saying Unitarianism is a religion and a school promoting that would not qualify for the state program.

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NEWS BRIEFS

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Catholic bishops visit victims of attacks in Nigeria’s Plateau state

LAGOS, Nigeria — Three Catholic bishops visited victims of recent attacks in Plateau state to show solidarity, pray with them and donate food and other items. Archbishop Matthew Ishaya Audu of Jos and Bishops Michael Gobal Gokum of Pankshin and Philip Dorou Dung of Shendam — three dioceses in the state — visited Dec. 10, hoping to cushion the hardships from the attacks, in which gunmen killed several people, injured dozens, and destroyed farmers’ houses and crops in late November. “We are here to tell you that you are not alone,” said Archbishop Audu. “We have also come to pray with you so that God will heal your wounds and grant total peace to this land, the state and Nigeria in general.” The attacks and killings are beyond human comprehension, so, only God can come to our aid,” he said. Bishop Gokum advised the people to forgive their attackers. “You must not seek revenge; you must not carry out reprisals, because it will only make things worse,” he advised. The visit by the bishops came a day after prominent Christian and Muslim leaders condemned what they described as the rising waves of killings in Nigeria.

New documentary chronicles ministry of papal preacher

RICHMOND, Va. — Most Catholics probably know there are specific roles within the papal household that support the papacy. Many may not be aware that the preacher to the papal household, also known as the apostolic preacher, is one of those official roles, a role established by Pope Paul IV in 1555. Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, a Capuchin Franciscan friar, is the longest serving person in that position. He was appointed by St. John Paul II in 1980 and was reappointed by Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. The faithful around the world will soon be introduced to the cardinal in “The Preacher to the Popes: Raniero Cantalamessa,” a documentary that aims to foster authentic relationships among Christians of every tradition. The worldwide premiere will be Dec. 18 at St. Patrick’s Theatre in Norfolk, Virginia. There will be an in-person audience for the film and it also can be viewed online at https://cantalamessamovie.com. “He’s an orthodox charismatic, so he has this deep understanding of the roots of the church and church teaching and Scripture, but he’s also very in tune with the gifts of the Holy Spirit,” Ashley Zahorian, director and producer of the film, told The Catholic Virginian, newspaper of publication of the Diocese of Richmond.

It’s the season of sparkling lights and joyful tunes.
We hope your holidays will resound with the spirit of Christmas!

Thank you for making our year a ringing success!
In massive volunteer effort, Peace Light makes its way across U.S.

A flame of light from the grotto in Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity is making its way around the world, including across the United States.

Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and other volunteers carry the light and transfer it — sometimes in lanterns, sometimes with small candles. Volunteer drivers travel across the U.S., meeting groups at truck stops and other places. Some volunteers post their whereabouts in a Facebook group so others can meet them and spread the flame.

The flame arrived at John F. Kennedy International Airport in Jamaica, New York, Dec. 11. At the airport, numerous lanterns were lit by the flame and began their journey to houses of worship, hospitals, senior citizen homes, homeless shelters, prisons and other locations in cities and towns and other venues across North America.

The Staten Island Chapter of the Polish Scouting Organization shared the Peace Light at 11 a.m. Mass at St. Stanislaus Kostka Church Dec. 12. It has been shared at Our Lady of Lourdes Church and School in Indianapolis and St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church, the Catholic university parish at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, and at St. Michael's Church in Orland Park, Illinois.

The Peace Light's journey can be traced back to a tradition in Austria. For 35 years, an Austrian Scout has traveled to Bethlehem, West Bank, to kindle a flame from the oil lamps hanging above Christ's birthplace at the Church of the Nativity.

The fire is kept in two explosion-proof British mining lamps, fueled by smokeless paraffin oil, and flown with a safety adviser to Austria. There it is distributed at a service of dedication to delegations who take it back, with a message of peace, to their own countries for use at ecumenical services.

Canadian Scouts first brought the Peace Light to ground zero in New York in 2001 after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

In 2002, DHL delivered the Peace Light as a gift from Belgian Scouts and Guides to the Boy Scouts of America in New York. In 2003 the light didn't make it to the U.S.; however, members of the Brooklyn Diocesan Scouting Committee had kept the 2002 Peace Light burning and spread that around the diocese. Since then, Austrian Airlines has continued to bring the Peace Light to the United States each year.

The welcoming ceremony for the light at JFK was sponsored and coordinated by the Catholic Committee on Scouting of the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens.

Boy Scout leader Chris Deno, a parishioner at Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church in Brooklyn, N.Y., lights a lantern held by his son Thomas, 14, using a flame transferred from the International Peace Light during a welcoming ceremony following the Peace Light's arrival at John F. Kennedy International Airport in Jamaica, N.Y., from Vienna Dec. 11, 2021. Boy and Girl Scout leaders, along with other volunteers, form a network to drive the flame — which originated in the grotto of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, West Bank — to houses of worship, homes and other venues across North America.