Most Rev. John Iffert  
Bishop of Covington  

Last Christmas, my first Christmas with you here in Northern Kentucky, everything was so new and busy that I almost forgot to get a Christmas tree. The night before we were to host a gathering for seminarians, I said to Father Jordan Hainsey, “I guess we ought to have a Christmas tree.” Father Jordan went to a lot where he had seen dozens of trees a few days before and found only three trees left, all marked for clearance. He paid three dollars for a tree no one else wanted and brought it home to the house on Wallace Avenue. That tree was about four feet tall. Shaped like an Aspen leaf—it was as round as it was high. There was a bare spot on one side. We propped it up in the big bay window at the front of the house and did our best to turn the bare spot toward the corner. We decorated it with colorful lights, glass bulbs, and handmade ornaments—rounds cut from a tree branch on which someone had stamped symbols of Advent and Christmas. I loved that little tree.

This year, I shopped for an artificial tree. It was a disappointing experience. I stood pondering a line of bare, green, plastic trees, perfect in their uniformity. I chose a pre-lit, nine-foot “Majestic Montana Fir” for the spot in front of the bay window. It wasn’t everything I had hoped for. There were little bits of pinecone that stood out too much against the green. The tree’s greatest virtue is its being able to have a Christmas tree.” Father Jordan went to a lot where he had seen dozens of trees a few days before and found only three trees left, all marked for clearance. He paid three dollars for a tree no one else wanted and brought it home to the house on Wallace Avenue. That tree was about four feet tall. Shaped like an Aspen leaf—it was as round as it was high. There was a bare spot on one side. We propped it up in the big bay window at the front of the house and did our best to turn the bare spot toward the corner. We decorated it with colorful lights, glass bulbs, and handmade ornaments—rounds cut from a tree branch on which someone had stamped symbols of Advent and Christmas. I loved that little tree.

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When I took the little card for the Majestic Montana Fir to the counter the perfectly helpful cashier pulled a microphone from under the register and announced to the store, “Bishop, bring artificial Christmas tree ‘R’ to the front of the store, please. Artificial Christmas tree ‘R’” So the “Majestic Montana Fir” will, for Christmases future, be branded in my mind simply as “R.” That’s what was stamped on the plain brown box, so “R” is what I call it.

The juxtaposition of majestic and not so majestic trees reminds me of a theological discussion. Some theologians speculate that the sin of pride that led the fallen angels to rebel against God happened when God revealed to the angels His plan for the Incarnation. The angels who fell, says this explanation, simply could not accept that God would take on human nature and become so directly associated with all our human frailty. They loathed that the Lord of the Universe who commanded the loyalty of their magnificence, should be born in Bethlehem, a squat, squishy, little human thing, dependent on mother and foster father for protection and every need. Why, they wondered, should God love these varied little human creatures and offer for them, what He had never imagined offering for the glorious host of angels?

I unboxed Christmas tree R. Last Saturday morning, friends from the chancery came by to set up the tree. They brought ornaments and cheer. We made a morning of decorating the big tree. It tops out so close to the ceiling that we had to bend it up a bit and surgically remove a couple pinecones to get the angel topper on. Her hair just brushes the ceiling. During this work, we shared stories of Christmas traditions and Christmases past with family and friends. Their joyful affection, along with morning cups of strong coffee in the glow of Christmas Tree R, help me to warm to this new Christmas addition. I begin to see the appeal and the charm of another Christmas tree, so different from last year’s squat little friend.

This Christmas and every Christmas we proclaim that, for love, “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). My Christmas tree journey reminds me that the love that inspires such a great gift is not merely abstract. God loves each one of us with a love and intensity that is shocking and immensely impressive—even to the angels.

Whether you are four foot tall or closer to nine, a little squat or majestic, God loves you so much that he emptied himself, becoming a human person, being born into the world, embracing even death on a cross for love of you and me. Nothing can ever separate us from the love of God.

Merry Christmas, everyone! Dwell this Christmas in the knowledge that you are loved personally, deeply and profoundly by the one who knows you better than you know yourself. Could there be any better gift?

May the peace and joy of Divine Love be with you always. Merry Christmas and a very Blessed New Year!
On a cold Advent night, Dec. 10, families within the Diocese of Covington gathered at St. Mary’s Park, Cathedral Square, Covington, to witness the blessing and lighting of the diocesan Christmas tree, and to be a part of the diocese’s first ever Bambinelli blessing. The Blessing of the Bambinelli was first introduced by St. John Paul II, and is still celebrated in Vatican City and around the world, especially in Europe. This tradition involves the blessing of figurines of the infant Jesus, or “Bambinellis,” commonly used in Nativity sets during the Christmas season.

Families in the diocese were encouraged to bring their Bambinellis from their home to be presented by themselves or their children for Bishop Iffert to bless. During the blessing, Bishop Iffert prayed that the baby Jesus’s would be a sign of God’s “abiding presence and love” to all who attended. In addition to this extra special blessing, youth choirs from diocesan schools including Covington Catholic High School, Covington Latin School and St. Augustine School, Covington, sang carols to accompany the event. Hot chocolate was served along with cookies baked by Curia staff.

The Christmas tree in St. Mary’s Park was also blessed by Bishop Iffert, who also would light up the tree for the first time this season. This tree is decorated with ornaments designed by various schools, organizations and parishes in the Diocese, and will remain in the park for the Christmas season.

At the event, Bishop Iffert emphasized the importance of comradery and coming together as a diocese. “Back in September, we had a gathering here in the park and a nice picnic celebration. We said, we want to get together more as a Church and have these kinds of events and be together, especially this place here at St. Mary’s Park.”

“Drop down dew from above, you heavens; and let the clouds rain down the Just One; let the earth be opened up and bring forth a Savior.”
—Roman Missal fourth Sunday of Advent, Entrance Antiphon
On the feast of St. Juan Diego, Dec. 9, Bishop John Iffert joined the Thomas More University community in celebration of the 10th anniversary of the dedication of its Mary, Seat of Wisdom Chapel.

Benedict XVI wrote, “Our Lady of Guadalupe was not someone who appeared to a worldly man.” Msgr. Kurt Kemo, Msgr. Kurt Kemo, Deacon Gerald Franzen, and all of the Catholic universities — we are also living in a time of cultural transition and that Catholic universities present, women religious, administrators, faculty and staff — are on the front lines of that change.

“We can no longer assume a shared cultural identity of Christ,” Bishop Iffert said.

Saturday, Dec. 24
4:30 p.m. Mass of the Vigil of Christmas
Music: Organ, Violin, and Cantor
Sunday, Dec. 25
Sunday, Dec. 25
Pontifical Mass at 12 Midnight
Celebrate: Bishop John Iffert
Doors open at 11 p.m.
 Prelude Music: organ begins at 11:30 p.m.
Music: Organ, Cathedral Choir
Midnight Mass will be live streamed and broadcast live on
The CW at 12 a.m.

10 a.m. Mass of Christmas Day
Celebrate: Bishop John Iffert
Music by the Cathedral Choir
(The Cathedral will be closed after
10 a.m. Mass on Christmas Day)

Corrections

December 16, 2022

Correction

In the article entitled “Parishes collaborate in development of Walking With Moms in Need initiative” in the Dec. 9 edition of the Messenger, 11 parishes (not 10) are collaborating. St. Henry Parish, Elsmere, the organizing parish, was omitted from the count. The Messenger apologizes for the error.
The Christmas season — 12 days of celebration

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

With Christmas, the celebration does not end on Christmas day. Rather, the liturgical season of Christmastide lasts for 12 days following the 25th, as described in carols such as the “12 Days of Christmas,” during which occur a number of feasts and celebrations within the Church.

— The 26th of December, the second day of Christmas, is the Feast of St. Stephen. This feast is notably mentioned in the classic Christmas carol, “Good King Wenceslas,” a story of a Bohemian king on his way through winter weather to deliver alms to the poor. St. Stephen is celebrated as the first named martyr of Christianity and is the patron saint of altar servers, bricklayers, casket makers and a handful of places, including Owensboro, Kentucky.

— The 27th of December, the third day of Christmas, is the Feast of St. John the Apostle, or John the Evangelist. St. John is one of the 12 apostles of Jesus and the patron saint of friendship, authors, editors and publishers. He is attributed as the author of the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelations.

— The 28th of December, the fourth day of Christmas, is the Feast of the Holy Innocents. This feast commemorates the massacre of the Holy Innocents, regarded traditionally as the first of Christian martyrs, in which King Herod ordered the execution of all male children under 2 years old following Jesus’s birth. In the Roman rite, before 1955, the feast day featured elements of the liturgy normally ascribed to penitential days, such as the omission of the Gloria and the wearing of violet vestments. In medieval times, it was a common tradition not to work on the feast of the Holy Innocents, and Spanish-speaking nations use the feast as a day for pranks, similar to April Fools’.

— The 29th of December, the fifth day of Christmas, is the Feast of St. Thomas Becket. St. Thomas Becket was the archdeacon of Canterbury and chancellor of England under King Henry II. However, as the king attempted to usurp the rights of the Church, St. Thomas Becket fought back against his tyranny. As a result, King Henry II had St. Thomas Becket executed by four knights in the Canterbury cathedral. He is celebrated as the patron of several English institutions and abbeys.

— The 31st of December, the seventh day of Christmas, is New Year’s Eve, along with St. Sylvester’s Day. St. Sylvester, a former pope, was known for building fabulous churches during his papacy, as well as serving as pope at the time the Nicene Creed was formulated. This feast day is commonly celebrated with a Midnight Mass, fireworks, parties and feasting, as is common with secular New Year’s traditions.

— The 1st of January, the eighth day of Christmas, is the Solemnity of Mary. This Marian feast day celebrates the Blessed Virgin in her role as the mother of Christ, and as a Holy Day of Obligation in the Catholic Church.

— The 5th of January, the twelfth day of Christmas, is known as “Twelfth Night,” or an Epiphany Eve. Observances for this celebration include practices such as singing carols, chalking the door or having one’s house blessed for the new year. In some traditions, it is Twelfth Night or the day after, the celebration of the Epiphany, that Christmas gifts are exchanged.

(Left) The painting “The Virgin and Child Surrounded by the Holy Innocents” by Peter Paul Rubens, c. 1618.
The eucharistic symbolism of the manger

Philip Kosloski
Aleteia

One of the most profound symbols associated with the birth of Jesus is the manger. St. Luke narrates how the Virgin Mary, “wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7).

A manger is a feeding trough for animals and was likely the cleanest place in the stable where the Virgin Mary could place the baby Jesus. Christians would later reflect on this profoundly symbolic action and find a connection to the Holy Eucharist, where Jesus himself becomes food for humanity.

St. Cyril of Alexandria in the 5th century explains, “The setting of Christ’s birth points us to the Eucharist. Since through sin man becomes like the beasts, Christ lies in the trough where animals feed, offering them, not hay, but his own body as life-giving bread.”

Earlier, St. John Chrysostom in the 6th century encouraged his congregation to attend Mass on Christmas Day, where they could approach the altar as if they were going to the manger. “For if we approach with faith we shall surely behold him lying in a manger. His holy table will supply the place of a manger. For there will be spread the body of our Lord, not wrapped in swaddling clothes as then, but then on all sides surrounded by his Holy Spirit.”

St. Bede in the 7th century also saw this symbolism. “He is confined in the narrow space of a rude manger, whose seat is the heavens, that He may give us ample room in the joys of His heavenly kingdom. He Who is the bread of angels is laid down in a manger, that He might feed us, as it were the sacred animals, with the bread of His flesh.”

This is why the feast of Christmas is often labeled a “eucharistic feast,” on account of the rich symbolism of the manger scene.

As you kneel before the Nativity scene this Christmas, dwell upon the beautiful gift of the Eucharist and how we can prepare to receive Jesus into our hearts.

Philip Kosloski graduated from the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota with a bachelor’s degree in philosophy and Catholic studies and a master’s degree in theology from the Augustine Institute. He is currently a spirituality writer for Aleteia.org.

Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption celebrates the Feast of the Immaculate Conception

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

A vigil Mass was held the evening of Dec. 7 at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, celebrating the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

This annual Dec. 8 feast celebrates the belief that the Blessed Virgin was conceived without the stain of Original sin and is a holy day of obligation in the Catholic Church.

Like other Marian feasts, priests may wear blue vestments during this celebration, and the statue of Mary on display at the front of the Covington cathedral was dressed in gold and blue, and wearing a crown on her head.

Bishop Iffert of the Diocese of Covington celebrated this vigil Mass. In his homily, Bishop Iffert reflected on the mystery of the Immaculate Conception focusing on two words: grace and eternity.

“The rest of Jesus is the kind of rest you might experience when you’re carrying a heavy footlocker, and you’re carrying it by yourself, and someone who is stronger than you comes along and says ‘Let me help you with that,’ and takes the other end — the heavier end, and helps you carry. That kind of rest that Jesus gives us,” said Bishop Iffert. “He works along with us, journeys along with us… that gift of Jesus giving himself to us, that’s what we call grace.”

Bishop Iffert describes God’s eternal nature by describing God as “experiencing the whole timeline,” not just having a long life. “He was present at Jesus’s conception, and mine and yours,” he said.

“From the very beginning,” he said, God was preparing Mary, living in relationship with her from she was conceived. “Always and everywhere this woman, Mary, lived in the loving gaze of her son. And just as being a parent changed you, the loving gaze of her son changed her.”

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Aleteia

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Drawing into the mystery of the Incarnation

The full story of how Jesus Christ came to be born includes elements that we do not easily imagine when we sing our Christmas hymns. Jesus' family tree and bloodline were far from perfect and this, according to the renowned biblical scholar, Raymond Brown, needs to be kept in mind whenever we are tempted to believe that our own lives, even if they are marked by weakness and imperfections, scandals and bad history, are not comparable to the lineage that gave us Jesus.

The gospel story that produces equally by the great and the small, the talentless and the talentful. Nobody is so bad, so insignificant, so devoid of grace that our own lives are not an essential part of the story of Christ.

Jesus' dysfunctional ancestry

Rahab, also a Canaanite woman, and an outsider, bore a child to Judah, so that she can have a child. She mentions Sarah, Rebekah or Rachel — all of whom were regarded as holy women. Whom do they mention? Jesus explicitly connects himself to whom Jesus explicitly connects himself, committed to cover up an unwanted pregnancy in order to marry her.

The Gospel's make clear, there is much in its origins that is as jolting as any contemporary church scandal.

For example, in giving the origins of Jesus, the Gospels point to so many sinners, liars and schemers in his genetic and historical lineage as they do to saints, honest people and men and women of faith.

We see, for example, in Jesus' genealogy a number of men who didn't exactly incarnate the love, justice and purity of Jesus. Abraham unjustly banished Ishmael and his mother, Hagar, recognizing that God favours some people over others. Jacob, by scheming and dishonesty, stole his brother Esau's birthright; and David, to whom Jesus explicitly connects himself, committed adultery and then had the husband of his mistress murdered to cover up an unwanted pregnancy in order to marry her.

Moreover, the women mentioned in Jesus' background don't fare much better. It is interesting to note, as Raymond Brown does, which women don't get mentioned in reference to Jesus' origins. The Gospels don't mention Sarah, Rebekah or Rachel — all of whom were regarded as holy women. Whom do they mention?

They mention Tamar, a Canaanite woman, someone outside the Jewish faith, who seduces her father-in-law, Judah, so that she can have a child. They mention Rahab, also a Canaanite woman, and an outsider, who is in fact a prostitute. Next, they mention Ruth, a Moabite woman who is also outside the official religion of the time. Then they mention Bathsheba, a Hittite woman, an outsider who commits adultery with David and then has the husband of his mistress murdered. Further still, beyond these less-than-saintly characters in Jesus' lineage, we see as well that some of the institutions that shaped the Jewish faith were also less than saintly. Institutionallized religion back then suffered from many of the same problems it has today, including the corrupt use of power. Indeed, Israel itself suffered from many of the same problems it has today, than saintly. Institutionalized religion back then suffered from many of the same problems it has today, including the corrupt use of power. Indeed, Israel itself suffered from many of the same problems it has today, including the corrupt use of power. Indeed, Israel itself suffered from many of the same problems it has today.

What's to be learned for all of this? Perhaps Raymond Brown captures it best. What all this tells us, he says, is that God writes straight with crooked lines, also writes the sequence with crooked lines also writes the sequence with crooked lines.

In the list of names that makes up the lineage that shaped the Jewish faith were also less than saintly Institutionallized religion back then suffered from many of the same problems it has today, including the corrupt use of power. Indeed, Israel itself suffered from many of the same problems it has today.

Finally, and not insignificantly, we see, too, that the lineage that gives us Jesus built itself up not just on the great and the talented, but equally on the poor and insignificant. In the list of names that makes up the ancestors of Jesus, we see some that are famous but also others who can make no claim to specialness or significance. Jesus' human blood, Scripture tells us, was produced equally by the great and the small, the talent-ed and the talentless.

What's to be learned for all of this? Perhaps Raymond Brown captures it best. What all this tells us, he says, is that God writes straight with crooked lines, that we shouldn't accept an overly idealized Christ, and that our own lives, even if they are marked by weakness and insignificance, are important in continuing the story of the incarnation.

As Brown puts it: "The God who wrote the beginnings of crooked lines also writes the sequence of crooked lines, and some of those lines are our own lives. The story of Jesus, who did not hesitate to use the crooked as well as the noble, the impure as well as the pure, the one on whom the world harped and women upon whom the world frowned — this God continues to work through the same melange. If it is a challenge to recognize in the last part of Matthew's genealogy that totally unknown people were part of the story of Jesus Christ, it may be a greater challenge to recognize that the unknown characters of today are an essential part of the sequence."

Christianity isn't just for the pure, the talented, the good, the humble and the innocent. The story of Jesus Christ was also written and keeps being written by the impure, by sinners, by calculating schemers, by the proud, by the dishonest and by those without worldly talents. Nobody is so bad, so insignificant, so devoid of talent or so outside the circle of faith, that he or she is outside the story of Christ.

Oblate Father Ron Rolheiser is a theologian, teacher, and award-winning author.
In the moment with Jesus

Whenever my best friends and I get together the world seems to fall away. For a few hours the clock seems to stop, and we are solely focused on each other. We are together, “in the moment.” We talk, laugh, and of course, eat. Through thick and thin (mostly thick!), we have been together supporting each other through life over the past 40 plus years. Recently, we met at a local restaurant for my birthday. We had not been together for quite some time and we were so excited to see one another. After four hours (yes, four full hours!) we finally hugged our goodbyes and headed to our vehicles.

As I was preparing to leave, I got a text. I assumed it was one of them saying how fun it had been that we had eaten too much. “I left my car running!” it said. I immediately began laughing. Four hours my friend’s car had been running, keys left behind. She had been so excited, she just jumped out and ran in. I pulled up to a stoplight and looked over and she was right next to me. I rolled the window down, we looked at each other and howled with laughter. Pears were streaming down our faces. My stomach hurt from laughing so hard. When I got home, I related the tale to everyone. I wanted them to share in the humor and joy that her faux pas had brought me when I entered Mass the following morning. I did so with little enthusiasm. I would catch my thoughts drifting to my grocery list, my upcoming meeting or if I had remembered to feed the cat. I went through the motions rather than focusing on my time with the Lord. When I returned from Communion, my thoughts began to wander back to the previous day. I wondered if I would see my friend again. I was given the chance to receive the Eucharist — to consume the Body and Blood of our Lord! What could be more important to share with our loved ones, friends and family?

So let the world fall away, and the clock stop — if only for an hour. Be “in the moment” with Jesus, and you will find that your dearest friend has a place ready at his table for you.

Julie Femauser is director of the Safe Environment Office, Diocese of Covington, Ky.

And then the angel left her

(Luke 1:26–38)

And then the angel left her. Bag yanked unceremoniously from under her feet. No warning, no gentle transition, no skirt raised to allow the vision to pass. No sound, now, of fluttering wings, no reassuring words shouted or whispered into her ear. No halo, no light emanating from messenger of the divine. No vision to light her path. No dove hovering. No scents of lilacs professed from above. Most of the beautiful artistic presentations of the annunciation depict Mary as a modest peasant woman, or even a vir- tue with elegant pillars and a view of a city They are so clean and bright, so filled with grandeur. There is no hint in them of the straw-covered floor in a messy stable, no view of the roadway to Egypt, no donkey, no cross, no words of Simonce.

My reflections on Scripture are often influenced by famous DaVinci’s “The Last Supper” comes to mind. It hardly depicts the historical reality — Why would all the participants be on the same side of the table unless someone asked them to gather for a picture? Yet, it is often what comes to mind when we think of the Last Supper. The famous paintings portraying the event of the annunciation show Mary in an elegant setting, hardly the reality for a poor peasant woman of her day. Yet they flash before my mind when the annunciation is celebrated.

None of the great artistic renditions of the annuncia- tion depict the moment of terror when the angel unceremo- niously disappears and leaves Mary standing with her commitment. For me would have been a natural response. In the masterpieces, Mary is serenely praying, the angel is surrounded with light or lilies. The depictions invite calm, and confidence. They are not like ordinary life for most of us and do not speak about my experience of God’s daily invitations to fidelity. Never has a winged being with an aura of light come to me in the midst of invitations to com- mitment.

It is the moment of departure that speaks to me — the moment Mary is left with the life of commitment. It is here that she gains the model of Mary be the model of how to listen after the angel leaves. Am not alone, not abandoned. God speaks to her as the assur- ance is found in the daily comings and goings of the child, to participate in the ritual of purification, to a life that is sometimes filled with passion and sometimes love. There are no spoken words. There is only commitment. Terror would have been a natural response. How else can she be a model for my life? She lives by faith in a God who has not left. How else can she be a model for my life? I hear and see no winged, other-worldly being coming to me from God. There are no words spoken. There is only fidelity to a commitment made in a moment of awaken- ing.

God’s voice is in the voice of the needy; in the duties of a life that is sometimes filled with passion and sometimes love. God calls Mary to assist an elderly relative who is with child, to participate in the ritual of purification, to attend to the duties of her situation. The voice, the vision, the assurance is found in the daily comings and goings of neighbors and relatives, in the temple and in the home.

Mary is not alone, not abandoned. God speaks to her as God speaks to all those committed to a life of devotion. I am not alone. God speaks in the voice of a friend. Angel wings appear in the presence of the needy. And the assure- ing words are heard in the voices of companions.

When life leads to a road on the way to Calvary, may God be with us. May we be ever more the model to listen after the angel leaves.

Divine Providence Sister Fidelis Tracy is a retired theolo- gy professor at Thomas More University, Creston Hills, Ky.
Thomas More University alumni are inspired to serve community

About Thomas More University
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. Students learn to harness the power of human reason to solve problems and discover truth, which allows them to begin the journey to become the person they were created to be.

Entering into the second century, it’s time for More. Serving more than 2,000 students, Thomas More aspires to be the premier Catholic university in the Kentucky (2019 Georgetown study) #1 ranking for long term gain in student’s time on campus. The mission of the Catholic liberal arts education offered at TMU is to encourage students to examine the ultimate meaning of life, their place in the world and their responsibility to others. Service opportunities are important avenues for students to grow as individuals and to connect with their community. As students build a foundation of service and come to understand their responsibility to others, they go on to become leaders in the community, continuing to seek opportunities to help those in need.

Thomas More alumni are inspired to serve community.

For more information about Thomas More University, visit www.thomasmore.edu.
Saints on top in NAIA

Nov. 30 was a historical day for the Thomas More University men’s and women’s basketball teams, as for the first time in school history, they were both ranked number one in the latest NAIA Coaches’ Polls released that morning. It is the seventh time that the women have been ranked number one since joining the NAIA during the 2019-20 school year, after gaining the top ranking 28 times during their tenure in NCAA Division III. It’s the first time in school history that the men are ranked in the top spot.

The prayer intention for January, as recommended by Pope Francis, is that educators may be credible witnesses, teaching fraternity rather than competition and helping the youngest and most vulnerable above all.

The weekly TV Mass from the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption is broadcast locally on The CM Sunday, noon to 1 p.m. Viewers can tune-in on the following channels: antenna 12.2, Spectrum 117 or 20, Cincinnati Bell 17 or 517, and DirectTV 25.

The Newport Central Catholic Theatre Department presents “Noises Off,” Dec. 9, 10 and 11, at its Caufmkind Family Blackbox Theatre. “Noises Off” is a slapstick farce about actors rehearsing for their upcoming play. Tickets are $10 adults, $8 students and may be purchased on GoFan or at the door.

“12 Dates of Christmas” presented by the Thomas More University Villa Players in conjunction with the American Legacy Theatre, Dec. 9-11, Thomas More Theatre, Crestview Hills. This heartwarming, one-woman play offers a hilarious and modern alternative to the old standards of the holiday season. Bring a gift to donate to Toys 4 Tots. A portion of the proceeds benefit the Ron Miechel ’75 Scholarship fund at Thomas More. Show times vary, tickets available at americanlegacytheatre.org.

Bishop Brossart High School, Alexandria, 9th annual International Nativity Display, Dec. 11, 17, 18, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. and Dec. 19, 11 a.m.-noon. The display features over 160 nativity sets made by artists and craftsmen from 70 different countries. Free and open to the public.

St. Augustine Parish, Augusta, winter bingo, Dec. 11, beginning at 1 p.m. There will also be pull tabs, a split the pot raffle, and a Spanish Mass, Dec. 27, 7 p.m. Alumni and one guest admitted free.

Father Thomas Picchioni will lead a talk on “Praying with Power,” Dec. 21, 7-8:30 p.m., St. John Parish, Carrollton, in the parish hall. Increase the efficacy of your prayer and move your prayer closer into the heart of Jesus.

Healing Masses, St. John Parish, Carrollton, Dec. 22, 7 p.m. and a Spanish Mass, Dec. 27, 7 p.m. (St. John Parish, Carrollton), Dec. 31, 5, 6 and 7:30 p.m. Alumni and guest admitted free.

Thinking about separation or divorce? Is your marriage or that of a relative or friend heading for divorce? Do you know how to save that marriage? Or do you feel helpless? Retrouvaille is designed to help troubled marriages regain its health by helping spouses uncover or re-awaken love, trust and commitment. The program is highly successful in saving hurting marriages, even bringing reconciliation to couples who have already separated or divorced. Confidential information or to register for the Jan. 7 weekend call (513) 486-6222 or visit www.HelpOurMarriage.com.

Diocese of Covington Regional Dual-Credit Information Night presented by James Catehen, Feb. 21, 6-7:30 p.m., Thomas More University Steigerwald Hall, Saints Center, Crestview Hills, for high school students and their guardians, who would benefit from dual-credit courses. During the presentation, attendees will hear from WebGLA on scholarship opportunities to pay for dual-credit courses as well as how dual-credit courses can impact students after high school. You’ll also hear from dual-credit representatives from Thomas More, Gateway, and NKU on available dual-credit opportunities. Visit thomasmore.edu/preview.

Note Dame Urban Education Center (NDUEC) is seeking adult and high school volunteers to tutor children in grades K-10 for its Homework PLUS program from 3-5 p.m., Monday through Thursday. Come and make a difference in the life of a child. Call NDUEC at 502-448-7, or e-mail Sister Maria Theresa at umberlies@nec.edu. Volunteers 16 and older must be VIRTUS compliant.

The St. Joseph Pio Prayer Group meets on the 4th Thursday of each month, 7 p.m., St. Joseph Church, Crescent Springs, for the recitation of the rosary and discussion. To be added to the Pio Pio Prayer Group e-mail distribution list, e-mail a request to bsmaracko@fuse.net.

The Madonna House of NKY is looking for Thursday evening babysitters from 6-8 p.m., all four Thursdays in a month or just one Thursday a month, whatever works for you. Call 344-1391.
Our Lady of Guadalupe

On the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Dec. 12, Bishop John Iffert joined Father Allan Frederick, pastor, and about 300 worshipers at Cristo Rey Parish, Florence for Mass. As part of the celebration, a Marian procession was held before Mass, with parishioners carrying a statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe adorned with roses. The celebration commemorates the appearance of Mary to the Mexican peasant Juan Diego in 1531, which brought about the conversion of millions of people, ending the cultural sacrificing of innocent children to Aztec Gods.

Her message was one of hope and comfort, especially to the poor and those who are hurting. “Listen and understand, my littlest son, let nothing frighten and afflict you or trouble your heart … Am I not here, I, who am your mother? Are you not under my shadow? Am I not your health? Are you not by chance held in my mantle?”

The feast day of Dec. 12 was first established by Pope Benedict XIV in 1754; Pope John Paul II declared Our Lady of Guadalupe as “Patroness of the Americas” and “Star of the New Evangelization” in 1999.

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

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Notre Dame sister remembered as beloved teacher

Notre Dame Sister Mary Elaine Krebs (formerly Sister deAngelo) was born into the loving family of Stephen and Carolyn Krebs on June 6, 1930. She was third in a family of five children. The family was happy and faith-filled. Their Catholic religion was valued and became a very important element in their everyday life.

Elaine received her elementary education at St. Stephen School, Newport, and graduated from Notre Dame Academy, Covington. After high school, Elaine studied cosmetology and became a successful beautician for several years. After God’s constant reminders, she answered the call and entered the Sisters of Notre Dame community in September 1956. Sister Mary Elaine made her profession of vows on Aug. 16, 1959.

Sister Elaine received her Bachelor of Arts at Villa Madonna College (Thomas More University), and her Master of Education at the University of Kentucky. Her classroom teaching ministry spanned over 45 years, starting with the first grade at St. John School, Covington. She continued to teach primary grades in the Diocese of Covington and the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, Ohio. In addition, her ministry took her as far as Our Lady of Fatima Home, and with the Catholic Children’s Congregation of the Providence, with whom she volunteered, said Mr. Murray. “We had a priest conversation,” he said. “With Matt Hollenkamp and Linda Rawe, we are well represented in our faith community and we’re very involved in the upcoming appeal.”

When Sister Elaine was diagnosed with dementia, she moved to St. Joseph Heights in 2006. Though some days were harder than others, she was always delighted by visits from her sister Bernice, to whom she was especially close. Visits with other family members also brought her much joy.

As time went on, Sister became less communicative but kept her gentle manner. She was truly God’s constant reminders, she answered the call and entered the Sisters of Notre Dame community in September 1956. Sister Mary Elaine made her profession of vows on Aug. 16, 1959.

Sister Elaine received her Bachelor of Arts at Villa Madonna College (Thomas More University), and her Master of Education at the University of Kentucky. Her classroom teaching ministry spanned over 45 years, starting with the first grade at St. John School, Covington. She continued to teach primary grades in the Diocese of Covington and the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, Ohio. In addition, her ministry took her as far as Our Lady of Fatima Home, and with the Catholic Children’s Congregation of the Providence, with whom she volunteered, said Mr. Murray. “We had a priest conversation,” he said. “With Matt Hollenkamp and Linda Rawe, we are well represented in our faith community and we’re very involved in the upcoming appeal.”

Happy Holidays


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The Savior of the world has come. Rejoice and be glad!

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

The Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal is the Diocese of Covington’s annual fundraiser; bringing in capital for many of the diocese’s programs, charities, schools and parishes every year.

For the 2023 appeal, Matt Hollenkamp will be serving as the DPAA General Chair. A parishioner of St. Thomas, Ft. Thomas, he said, “With Matt Hollenkamp and Linda Rawe, we are very involved in the Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal, having served as the Leadership Gifts Chair in 2022.

“We’re real happy to have Matt return as our General Chair,” said Mike Murray, director of the Office of Stewardship and Mission Services for the Diocese of Covington. “Matt was very involved with their capital campaign at St. Thomas and works for St. Elizabeth Healthcare. He is just very involved in the community so we’re blessed to have him as General Chair for this coming year,” said Mr. Murray.

The 2023 Leadership Gifts chair is Linda Rawe, a parishioner of St. Joseph Parish, Crescent Springs. “Linda has been very involved in the community with the Diocesan Catholic Children’s Home, and with the Congregation of Divine Providence,” with whom she volunteers, said Mr. Murray.

“We had a priest committee meeting in August, and we were talking about a number of names, but Linda’s name came out of that conversation,” he said. “With Matt Hollenkamp and Linda Rawe, we are well represented in our faith community and we’re very much looking forward to working with those two volunteers in this upcoming appeal.”
Cathedral window recounts the story of a star and its mysterious visitors

Stephen Enzweiler  
Cathedral Historian

The stories of Christmas are ever present to us this time of year. No matter our ages or backgrounds, we can all remember those wee days growing up with stories told to us about the mysteries of Christmas and the coming of the Christ child. As young children, who among us didn’t gaze upon a Nativity scene with an empty manger and feel a sense of expectation? Who didn’t look forward to staying late the one night of the year we were allowed to attend Midnight Mass? Or who among us didn’t look up at least once into the night sky on the way home from church and search for that star mentioned in the Gospel account of Matthew?

In the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, is a stained-glass window that tells us of one of the more mysterious episodes of the Christmas story. It measures 21-feet high by 9-feet wide and can be found in the nave’s south wall above the fifth Station of the Cross. Called “The Adoration of the Magi,” it is one of a grouping of four windows that illustrate the early life of Jesus. Its story is taken from the passage of Matthew’s Gospel (2:1-11) and illustrates the moment when “Magi from the east” arrive in Bethlehem and pay homage to the baby Jesus with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

“The Adoration of the Magi” window is the creation of the studio of Mayer & Company of Munich, which produced stained glass for Covington’s new cathedral from 1905 to 1922. Like all Mayer windows of the period, it is made in the Munich Style which became popular in 1927 during the reign of Bavaria’s King Ludwig I. The window itself is a “four-light” window, meaning it contains four vertical panels across its central width. The tracery in the top portion is curvilinear in its styling, a kind of intersecting pattern elaborated with queen (double curves) creating a complex rectilinear or net-like pattern. Red-winged seraphim play instruments amid the blinding stars of heaven to announce the birth of the new king. Surrounding them are ornamental windows of red roses that are the symbol of the shedding of Christ’s blood.

Below the tracery is the main scene. It tells a simple story and delivers a simple message. The eye is immediately drawn to the center of the scene — to the Virgin Mary and the Christ child on her lap. We immediately notice that the Virgin and child are the brightest figures in the entire window as if they are the sole source of light. The artists chose this visual dominance over the other figures for two reasons. First, it communicates the close bond of mother and son, reminiscent of what Pope Pius IX described in his encyclical Ineffabilis Deus: “To be held in the Father’s arms is the only-begotten Son. It was she whom the Son himself chose to make his Mother.” Secondly, their brightness communicates both the purity of the immaculately conceived virgin Mary and the sinless purity of the child born from her.

Mary’s gaze is directed downward in humility, and she draws back his swaddling clothes to reveal the baby messiah. He looks directly at us and blesses us. His hand gesture communicates both the purity of the immaculately conceived virgin Mary and the sinless purity of the child born from her.

Matthew’s account doesn’t specify how many Magi there were or give any names or details of their origin except to say they were “from the east.” The East at the time of Christ’s birth meant Media, Persia, Assyria or Parthia (formerly Babylonia). The first three centuries of Christian art consistently present only three Magi. The oldest known image depicting them is from a 3rd century Roman catacomb which shows three men in Phrygian (Persian) caps approaching Mary and the child with gifts.

By the fifth century, as Christianity continued to grow, interest in the Magi story also grew. Old Testament Scriptures were identified as foreshadowing the Magi’s visit: “The kings of Tarshish and distant shores will bring tribute to him. The kings of Sheba and Seba will present him with gifts. All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him.” (Psalm 72:10,11). By the 8th century, texts like the Excerpta et Collectedanen elaborated even further on the tradition of the three Magi, making them kings and giving them names. By the 9th century, they are three kings: Balthazar, Caspar, and Melchior.

Matthew had names for the Magi, and the tradition of the three Magi may have been adopted from a mid-4th century Christian work, the Protevangelium of James. By the 9th century, the names of the three Magi are established: Caspar (or Caspar), Melchior, and Balthazar. The tradition of the three Magi, making them kings and giving them names, is well-established in Christian art and tradition.

There is Melchior, King of Arabia, the eldest of the three Magi. He was given a long, grey beard and presents the gift of gold, the symbol of kingship. Balthazar, the King of Ethiopia, was middle-aged, swarthy (sometimes depicted as black), and bore the gift of frankincense, symbolizing Christ as the healer and Divine Physician. Myrrh is also viewed as a prefiguration to Jesus’ death and burial — an interpretation made popular in the well-known Christmas carol “We Three Kings.”

Artists through the centuries have been known to add...
their own interpretations and artistic variations to the Magi story, and Mayer & Company is no exception. One such variation can be found with the addition of servants attending each king. In the center is Melchior; his crown taken off and set upon the ground in a gesture recognizing the Christ child’s kingship over his own. Behind him is his servant bearing a second coffer of gold.

Above and to the right is Caspar in his red Phrygian cap carrying a small chest of pearls, the Christian symbol for the Kingdom of Heaven and an allusion to the parable of the pearl of great price (Matt 13:45). In front of him is his turbaned servant carrying the vase containing the actual myrrh.

At far left is Balthasar on his knees holding a thurible of fragrant frankincense, while behind him is his servant carrying a fan of peacock feathers, the peacock being a Christian symbol representing resurrection and eternal life. Lastly, we see St. Joseph, who stands quietly in the background gazing upon the entire scene with an expression of wonder.

The entire scene is supported beneath by a foundation of ornamented grisaille work typical of the Mayer style. It is decorated throughout with white roses, violets and fig leaves arranged as flower blossoms. In Christian art, white roses represent the Virgin Mary. Because of its three leaves, violets were called “the herbs of Trinity” or “flow- ers of Trinity” by medieval monks. It is also said that violets symbolize the Virgin Mary’s humility and purity. The lowly fig had always been a symbol of Israel and foretold the health of the nation both spiritually and physically. “When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your ancestors, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree.” (Hosea 9:10)

The Adoration of the Magi will always remain one of the most intriguing and mysterious chapters of the Christmas story. Horne out of history, with details filled in over 2,000 years by Christian artists and writers, it continues to fascinate us even today. More importantly, it teaches us about the true kingship of Jesus, of how the Father so loved the world that he sent his only son so that we might have life, and that even in the darkest of times, there is always a reason to have hope.

We can always be reminded of these things each time we visit the Cathedral Basilica and spend a little time with this window, or perhaps when we let the child in us look up into the night sky on our way home from Christmas Mass in hope of seeing the Magi’s star.

We can always be reminded of these things each time we visit the Cathedral Basilica and spend a little time with this window, or perhaps when we let the child in us look up into the night sky on our way home from Christmas Mass in hope of seeing the Magi’s star.

“The Adoration of the Magi” window.
problems the mom and dad are facing. This begins with making sure that our own hearts are open to all life and that we see each child as a miracle of God, rather than a problem to be solved.

As the crusade for the dignity of all human life continues, there will be victories and there will be defeats. Let us not lose heart when the defeats come, nor embrace false optimism when victories come (as I think many did after the Dobbs decision). And most of all, Pray! Pray! Pray! for the unborn, for their parents, and that the Gospel of Life will take root in people’s hearts and in our culture.

Father Michael Comer is pastor of Mother of God Parish, Covington, Ky.

Catholic Charities introduces new program for high school-aged girls

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Starting in January of 2023, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Covington will begin its new in-person gathering group for high school aged girls. The PEACE Gathering Group will consist of eight sessions over eight weeks, focusing on “discovering peace” through purpose, esteem, acceptance, coping and engagement.

The program was created by Heidi Haddad, a graduate student currently contracted with Catholic Charities.

“We identified challenges with self-esteem in young ladies, and social interaction skills, really as an ongoing result from COVID,” said David Durr, clinical director of Counseling Services at Catholic Charities, who will also be providing clinical oversight for the program, “because you’ve missed some critical moments in development socially.”

The PEACE program aims to tackle this issue in a safe environment, each session building off of the previous sessions in a sort of “journey.”

“They will do a series of interactive activities that will help them identify and learn who they are, and gain self-esteem and confidence,” said Mr. Durr. Should the first set of sessions go well, Catholic Charities hopes to continue the program, or add sessions for girls of other age groups.

The first meeting for the PEACE fostering group will be held Jan. 10, 5 p.m., at Catholic Charities in Covington. Those interested in the program can contact Heidi Haddad at hhaddad@covingtoncharities.org.

After Issue #2

(Continued from page 7)

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Father Michael Comer is pastor of Mother of God Parish, Covington, Ky.
Extension features Nativity art, letters by children of Ukraine, Uvalde

Catholic News Service

CHICAGO — The cover of the winter issue of Catholic Extension’s magazine is a colorful patchwork of Christmas drawings by children from Ukraine and Uvalde, Texas.

A poignant message printed by one of the children also has a place on the cover: “Dear Pope Francis, I need advice on how to make the world more safe for others.”

Extension’s cover story is about Christmas through the eyes of these children who “come from different cultures and parts of the world, but what they share in common is faith — faith in the midst of terror, violence and war,” the story said.

The “violence” refers to the mass shooting at a Uvalde public school in May and the Russian war against Ukraine, which began in February.

“In the midst of the brutality that they have witnessed, these children of Uvalde and Ukraine give witness to their faith in a tender God, born in a manger, who is capable of bringing them heavenly peace,” it said.

The first group featured is from Sacred Heart Catholic School in Uvalde, which Catholic Extension has supported with scholarships and healing ministries.

Many of these children were directly impacted by the mass shooting that took the lives of 19 children and two teachers at Robb Elementary School May 24 in the deadliest school shooting in Texas history.

In addition to facilitating a project in which the Texas children wrote letters to Pope Francis in the fall, Catholic Extension asked the children to draw a picture of the Nativity answering the question: “If Jesus came today, where would he be born?”

In one drawing, a Uvalde student imagines Jesus coming not to a faraway land but “being born next to me.” In another, the artist “envisions baby Jesus’ manger in our hearts,” and still another shows baby Jesus cradled in his mother’s arms.

“In almost all the renderings, the doctor tells Mary, ‘Your baby is healthy,’” the story said, adding that many of the children “clearly spent too much time in hospital rooms” after the shooting.

The first order of business for the Uvalde children “would be to take the baby Jesus to see Pope Francis,” it said. “One child would ask the baby Jesus to come and bless Uvalde.”

The Extension story noted these children are “big fans of the pope and feel that Jesus and Pope Francis would get along just fine.”

In October, a Catholic Extension news release announced that the Vatican responded to letters the Uvalde children wrote to Pope Francis after the mass shooting.

Some of the students were wounded during the shooting; others lost loved ones. All were harmed by the violence and they shared their “sorrows and hopes,” asking the pope to pray for their friends, family and community.

As chancellor of Catholic Extension, Chicago Cardinal Blase J. Cupich personally delivered the letters to the pontiff.

“His Holiness will remember the students, their families and all of those suffering from the recent act of violence in Uvalde,” the Vatican said. “Commending each of them to the protection of Mary, Mother of the Church, His Holiness imparts his blessing.”

The second group of children featured in Extension’s winter issue were displaced by war in Ukraine and found shelter in the convent of the Basilian sisters in Lviv.

Among those contributing drawings and letters were Ukrainian sisters Vlada-Maria Hohlochova, 11, and Khrystyna Hohlochova, 8.

“P.S. Ukraine will prevail!” they added.

Another child’s drawing shows the baby Jesus protected by his parents, angels and a sturdy roof over his head.

Catholic Extension has supported the Ukrainian Catholic Church in the United States since 1979. “This relationship provided us an immediate and effective pathway to help the Catholic Church in Ukraine as it cares for vulnerable people in the war-torn nation,” a news release said.

Since its founding, Catholic Extension’s mission has been to build up Catholic faith communities in underserved regions by raising funds to help these communities, like Uvalde.

It helps construct churches in U.S. mission dioceses, many of which are rural and cover a large geographic area. Many have limited personnel and pastoral resources.
YOUTH MINISTRY COORDINATOR
The Diocese of Covington’s Office of Catechesis and Evangelization is adding the new full-time position of Youth Ministry Coordinator, whose primary purpose will be to launch, support, and coordinate vibrant youth ministry programs in our parishes and in our nine high schools. We seek faith-filled, energetic, dynamic candidates with the communication and organizational skills to jump-start this venture and then to shepherd it as it grows and expands. The Youth Ministry Coordinator will be generally responsible for spiritual enrichment, networking, and formation opportunities for youth ministers across the diocese. Other key duties will include regularly corresponding with parish, school, and diocesan university leadership; updating a webpage; utilizing appropriate avenues of social media; and occasionally writing in the diocesan newspaper, the Messenger. Candidates must be actively-practicing Catholics with strong knowledge of the Faith and previous experience in ministry. A minimum of a bachelor’s degree in Theology or Pastoral Ministry is preferred. Interested individuals may send a cover letter and resume, including compensation history and references with contact e-mail addresses, to Stephen Koplyay, SPHR, at skoplyay@covdio.org or by fax to (859) 392-1589.

Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker re-elect Mother Christina
The Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker, Walton, gathered Dec. 10 to elect the Superior General of the community. Bishop John Iffert offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in honor of the Holy Spirit before the election. Mother Mary Christina Murray, the current Superior General, was re-elected for another six-year term.
Pope: Joyful revolution: Happiness takes courage, rebellious spirit

Carol Glatz
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Like his predecessors, Pope Francis repeatedly has encouraged the faithful to “go against the tide” to follow Jesus.

Pope John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis all have spoken about the resolve needed to go against the dominant current of secularism or “worldliness” and to avoid the deceptive and tempting pull of a superficial or hypocritical Christianity.

But, according to Pope Francis, it takes courage and the grit of a “revolutionary” not only to follow Christ in today’s world, but also to be genuinely happy along the way.

Happiness is an essential ingredient in a Christian life, as Pope Francis has memorably described with his admonishments against sad faces — sour like “pickled peppers” — and against angry or bitter religious and priests who “drink vinegar for breakfast,” giving birth to nothing but a corrosive atmosphere.

After all, “the first sign Jesus accomplished was not an extraordinary healing or a miracle in the temple of Jerusalem,” the pope said in an Angelus in January Jesus’ first miracle was discreetly turning water into wine at a wedding feast in Cana, “a gesture that responded to a simple and concrete need of common people” to celebrate with joy.

“Jesus makes sure that the feast ends with the best wine,” he said.

“God did not desire our lives by mistake, obliging him self and us to experience harsh nights of anguish. He instead created us because he wants us to be happy,” the pope said in a general audience talk in 2017.

“We are speaking of the beauty that never fades because it is a reflection of divine beauty. Indeed, our God is an incorruptible, true and beautiful God. And beauty is one of the privileged ways of finding him.,” the pope said in his album of the Advent Excerpt of the Catechism.

4. Learn to not take yourself too seriously: “Narcissists constantly look at themselves in the mirror,” he said. “My advice is look in the mirror every now and then and laugh at yourself. It will do you good!”

5. Live a healthy restlessness: “It opens to a restlessness that always pushes you to keep on walking” and pursue dreams and projects, he said. “Do not cut yourselves off from the world by locking yourselves in your room like a Peter Pan, who does not want to grow up.”

6. Learn to forgive: “Everyone knows that he or she is not the father or mother that they should be, the bride or groom, the brother or sister, the friend we should be. We are all ‘in deficit’ in life and we all need mercy.”

7. Learn how to interpret sadness: “Sadness can be an indispensable alarm bell for life, inviting us to explore richer and more fertile landscapes,” he said. “Like a red traffic light, sadness signals a possible danger or a disregarded benefit” and “protects us from harming ourselves and others.”

8. Dream big: “Let us not settle only for what is necessary,” he said. “God wants us to race boldly and joyfully toward lofty goals” and to make “God’s dreams come true in this world.”

9. Pay no heed to those who peddle illusions: “Dreaming is one thing; having illusions is another. Those who peddle illusions by speaking about dreams use happiness as a play for something else. We were created for a joy that is much greater.”

10. Be revolutionaries — swim against the tide: “Many preach the importance of ‘enjoying the moment’ and avoiding any lifelong commitment, he said. “Instead, be revolutionaries ... swim against the tide ... rebel against this culture that sees everything as temporary and that ultimately believes you are incapable of responsibility.”

11. Take risks, even if it means making mistakes: “Dream freely and make good decisions,” he said. “Cast out the fears that paralyze you ... open the door of the cage, go out and fly!”

12. Walk with others: “Walking in community, with friends, with those who love us, this helps us arrive at our destination ... And if you fall, get back up.”

13. Be generous: “We received life freely” and, consequently, “all of us are capable of giving without expecting anything in return, to do good to others without demanding that they treat us well in return.”

14. Look beyond the darkness: “Never stop seeking the light amid whatever darkness. ... Lift your gaze from earth to heaven, not in order to flee but to resist the temptation to remain imprisoned by our fears.”

15. Remember that you are destined for the best: “Jesus makes sure that the feast ends with the best wine,” he said. “God wants what is better for us, he wants us to be happy and he brings a joy that is complete and never ‘watered down!’”

Vatican announces Pope Francis’ end-of-year liturgical schedule

Robert Duncan
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — With most of the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic removed, Pope Francis is scheduled to return to a full slate of public liturgies in December and January.

— On Dec. 24 at 7:30 p.m., the pope will celebrate the Mass of the Nativity of the Lord. While the Mass is commonly referred to as “midnight Mass,” the Vatican celebration gradually has been moved earlier to make it easier for people to attend.

— At noon Dec. 23, the pope will give his traditional Christmas blessing “urbi et orbi” (to the city and the world) from the loggia of St. Peter’s Basilica.

— At 5 p.m. Dec. 31, he will preside over an evening prayer service in St. Peter’s Basilica for the feast of Mary, Mother of God. Vespers will be followed by eucharistic adoration, benediction and the singing of the “Te Deum” to thank God for the year that is ending.

— At 10 a.m. Jan. 1, he will celebrate Mass for the feast of Mary, Mother of God, in St. Peter’s Basilica.

— At 10 a.m. Jan. 6, he will celebrate Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica for the feast of the Epiphany.

Tickets can be requested online at the Vatican website (vatican.va) through the Prefecture of the Papal Household.
The Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington seeks faith-filled individuals who are interested in working with young adults to serve in the capacity of Campus Minister at Northern Kentucky University. The work week will be full time, nominally thirty-seven and one-half hours. The Campus Minister and NKU’s Catholic Newman Center (www.nkunewmanclub.org) offer an evangelizing presence along with spiritual support and opportunities for a full living and development of the Catholic faith among Catholic students, especially the support of spiritual life and formation opportunities. Responsibilities include providing support, leadership, and spiritual guidance to participating students; proactively engaging prospective participants, especially freshmen; presenting an timely and effective communications with students and parents, including regularly updating the website, Facebook page, and database; regularly interfacing with Diocesan, local Parish, and University staff; and overseeing maintenance and upkeep of the Newman House. Requirements include a minimum of a Bachelor’s degree, preferably in Theology or Pastoral Ministry, and previous experience in young adult ministry and management.

Interested individuals may send a cover letter and resume, including compensation history and references with contact e-mail addresses, to Stephen Koplyay, SPHR, by email to skoplyay@covdio.org or by fax to (859) 392-1589.

ST. JOSEPH SCHOOL COLD SPRING AFTERCARE DIRECTOR
St. Joseph School in Cold Spring is looking for an aftercare director, Monday through Friday from 3:00pm-6:00pm. During the aftercare program students have a snack, complete their homework, play games, and participate in any other activities planned by aftercare staff. The director is also responsible for keeping records of attendance, payment and communicating with parents and aftercare workers. If interested please contact principal, Emily Urlage at 859-441-2025.
PLEDGE COORDINATOR
The Diocese of Covington’s Stewardship and Mission Services Office invites qualified individuals to apply for the support position of Pledge Coordinator. This role requires an individual who takes pride in performing detailed work with an absolute minimum of errors. Primary responsibilities include recording financial pledges, gifts, payments, etc. for the Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal, and also fund-raising campaign reporting, implementation, monitoring, and follow-up. Ideally, we are seeking Catholic candidates who relate well to others, are extremely detail- and confidentiality-oriented, are comfortable with a team approach to projects, and can manage deadlines under a steady workload. Interested individuals may send a resume with a cover letter, compensation history, and at least three references with contact email addresses to Stephen Koplyay, SPHR by email to skoplyay@covdio.org, or by fax to 859/392-1589.

Thomas More University announces plans for softball complex

Staff report

Thomas More University’s softball field is getting a makeover. The University announces plans for extensive renovations to the current field and new construction, creating a state-of-the-art complex for its softball athletes.

“This upgrade continues our commitment to elevating the reputation and brand of Thomas More Athletics as we begin our transition to the NCAA DII and to creating a student experience that is designed for success in the classroom and on the field,” said Dr. Joseph Chillo, president, TMU.

The softball field’s location will remain the same, with selective demolition and improvements being made to and around it. Enhancements will be made to the field itself, including replacement of existing outfield grass with turf. Many new additions will be added to create an upgraded complex including four turfed batting cages, two turfed bullpens, a new scoreboard, netting along the 3rd baseline, a new outfield fence with windscreen, a new backstop and netting, set bleachers and concrete walkways.

The softball complex will also feature a new, free-standing, approximately 3,125 square-foot locker room and concessions building. The building is expected to be wood framed with a sloped, shingled roof, and masonry façade. General contractor proposals are currently being accepted for the softball project, with a selection and finalized agreement scheduled to take place in March 2023. The project is slated for completion in June 2024.

“I’m very excited for this facility upgrade that will greatly benefit our student athletes and coaches,” says Terry Connor, Thomas More athletic director. “Thomas More supports its population of student athletes by ensuring that they have the best facilities and opportunities to succeed.”

Thomas More announced a major comprehensive fundraising campaign in Fall 2021 in support of a five-year strategic plan that includes enhanced athletic facilities for many of the Saints intercollegiate sports teams.
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Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Vigilance is an essential part of the spiritual life because the devil will try to sneak in when one is not paying attention or, especially, when a Christian thinks he or she is making a lot of progress on the road to holiness, Pope Francis said.

“When we trust too much in ourselves and not in God’s grace, then the Evil One finds the door open. So, he organizes an expedition and takes possession of that house,” which is a person’s spiritual life, the pope said Dec. 14 at his weekly general audience.

Since late August, the pope has been using his general audience talks to explain the process of spiritual discernment according to the teaching of St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits.

When discernment has led to a good decision, one that increases spiritual growth and brings one closer to doing the Lord’s will, he said, the process is not complete.

“If vigilance is lacking,” the pope said, “there is a very high risk that all will be lost. It is a danger not of a psychological, but of a spiritual order, a real snare of the evil spirit.”

Part of discernment is being watchful to safeguard one’s heart and soul, he said. Vigilance “is the frame of mind of Christians who await the final coming of the Lord; but it also can be understood as the normal attitude to have in the conduct of life, so that our good choices, taken at times after challenging discernment, may proceed in a persevering and consistent manner and bear fruit.”

In greeting French speakers at the audience, the pope noted how Advent reminds Christians of the importance of watchfulness or vigilance.

“We await the coming of the Lord, and we remain attentive to our more fragile brothers and sisters who knock at the door of our hearts,” the pope said. “This is how we build our lives with discernment and consistent with the Gospel.”

“Let us ask the Lord to keep us vigilant in humility and in availability” to those in need, he said.

When one does something good, the pope said, there often is a temptation of pride, “the presumption of being righteous, of being good, of having everything in place. Often, we will hear someone say, ‘Yes, I was bad before, but I converted and now my house is in order, thanks be to God,’ and they relax.”

At moments like that, the pope said, the devil will not overpower a person, but will be very “polite” and ask to come in, then he will make himself at home.

“Watch over your heart because vigilance is a sign of wisdom, it is above all a sign of humility” and of knowing that without God’s help, one can fail, the pope said. “Humility is the high road of the Christian life.”

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USPS ‘Virgin and Child’ stamp features one of world’s most revered images

“Virgin and Child.”

Attributed to a Florentine artist known since the late 1960s as the Master of the Scandicci Lamentation, the painting is in the Robert Dawson Evans Collection at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

The stamp was designed by Greg Breeding, co-founder and creative director of the Journey Group design firm in Charlottesville, Virginia. He is one of four art directors who regularly work with the USPS.

The painting depicts Mary gazing downward at the Christ child, with one of her arms holding him protectively at his waist and the other tenderly touching his arm, while the Christ child turns his head to look out of the frame to the left.

“I am honored to represent the Postal Service as we dedicate a Christmas stamp that features one of the most revered images in the world — the Virgin Mary holding her infant child, Jesus,” Jenny Utterback, USPS organization development vice president, said when the stamp was unveiled Sept. 22 at the Boston museum.

The Postal Service has released religion-themed stamps since the 1960s.

The 2022 religious Christmas stamp is “a beautiful piece of art, with particular meaning this time of year,” Utterback said. “I choose my holiday cards with care, sign them with love or best wishes, and may write a personal note inside,” she added. “Holiday cards are a special way to connect with family and friends. The stamp on the envelope holds significance as well.”

“Virgin and Child” is a first-class, 60-cent stamp. It carries the “forever” designation, as do the other new releases from the USPS for the 2022 holiday season: “Holiday Elves,” “Snowy Beauty,” “Winter Blooms,” “Hanukkah” and “Kwanzaa.” The USPS said popular holiday stamps from years past also continue to be available.

The new Hanukkah stamp features a bright, multicolored menorah, or “hanukkiah,” which is a nine-branched candelabrum lit during the eight-day Jewish holiday of Hanukkah. Also known as the festival of the lights, Hanukkah is Dec. 18-26.

It commemorates the miraculous victory of Judah Maccabee and a small group of Jewish freedom fighters who defeated their vastly more powerful Syrian oppressors in the second century B.C., regaining control of the temple in Jerusalem and the freedom to practice their religion.

The stamp for Kwanzaa, celebrated Dec. 26-Jan. 1, depicts two children standing together with a “kinara,” or candleholder, and seven lit candles, called “mishumaa saba,” in front of them. The candles represent the seven principles of Kwanzaa: unity; self-determination; collective work and responsibility; cooperative economics; purpose; creativity; and faith.

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Protecting God’s Children for Adults
Safe Environment Trainings

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Step 2: Go to www.virtus.org and click on Registration. Follow the prompts to create an account and to request a background check. Selection.com is a secure site; the background check is posted on your account and you receive a copy if you request it during the registration process. You will sign up for a VIRTUS training class during the registration.

Step 3: Your account becomes active when your background check, VIRTUS session and Acceptance Form are posted on your account. You will receive 12 bulletins per year. You will receive e-mail notices at system@pub.virtus.org unless your computer program blocks them.

Bulletins: December bulletin: posted Sunday, Dec.4; due Tuesday, Jan. 4. www.virtusonline.org, enter user id and password.

Training: Tuesday, Jan. 10, 9-11:30 a.m., Diocesan Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington

Note: If your Training Tab is missing or you cannot access your account, contact your parish, school or institution.

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Christ, the Lord, the new-born King!
Keep the creche in Christmas, pope urges

Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Stopping to gaze at and perhaps pray before a Nativity scene is one of the best ways to remember the real meaning of Christmas, Pope Francis said.

“In its genuine poverty,” the pope said, “the creche helps us to rediscover the true richness of Christmas and to purify ourselves of so many aspects that pollute the Christmas landscape.”

Pope Francis met Dec. 3 with the artisans who carved the 18-piece Nativity scene in St. Peter’s Square; the donors of the white pine Christmas tree; the residents of a psychiatric rehabilitation center who, along with a group of students and grandparents, created the ornaments; and with representatives of the government of Guatemala, which set up another Nativity scene in the Vatican audience hall.

“Simple and familiar, the Nativity scene recalls a Christmas that is different from the consumerist and commercial Christmas. It is something else. It reminds us how good it is for us to cherish moments of silence and prayer in our days, often overwhelmed by frenzy,” Pope Francis told them during a midday gathering.

The group was scheduled to gather in St. Peter’s Square in the evening for the official unveiling of the Nativity scene and the lighting of the Christmas tree. But a major rainstorm with a forecast for more caused the Vatican to move the evening festivities indoors, although hundreds of people still were in the square for the lighting.

Meeting with the donors, Pope Francis encouraged everyone to find some quiet time to spend before a creche at Christmas.

“Silence encourages contemplation of the child Jesus,” the pope said, “and helps us to become intimate with God, with the fragile simplicity of a tiny newborn baby, with the meekness of his being laid down, with the tender affection of the swaddling clothes that envelop him.”

“If we really want to celebrate Christmas,” he said, “let us rediscover through the crib the surprise and amazement of littleness, the littleness of God, who makes himself small, who is not born in the splendor of appearances, but in the poverty of a stable.”

To truly encounter Jesus, the pope said, people must meet him in the manger, leaving their own vanity and pretense behind.

“Prayer is the best way to say thank you before this gift of free love, to say thank you to Jesus who desires to enter our homes and our hearts,” he said. “Yes, God loves us so much that he shares our humanity and our lives.”

“Even in the worst moments,” the pope said, “he is there, because he is the Emmanuel, the God with us, the light that illuminates the darkness and the tender presence that accompanies us on our journey.”

The lights on the Christmas tree, he said, are a reminder that Jesus came “to lighten our darkness, our existence often enclosed in the shadow of sin, fear, pain.”

But, the pope said, the tree also should make people think about the importance of roots.

“Like a tree, he said, only a person who is ‘rooted in good soil remains firm, grows, matures, resists the winds that shake him and becomes a point of reference for those who look upon him.’

The Christmas tree, Pope Francis said, is a reminder of the need to remain rooted in Christ.

And the magic of this holy season. May this year hold the birth of new blessings and the promise of lasting peace.
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