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Pope Benedict: Eight years as pope capped long ministry as teacher of faith

Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Retired Pope Benedict XVI, who had an impressive record as a teacher and defender of the basics of Catholic faith, is likely to go down in history books as the first pope in almost 600 years to resign.

He died Dec. 31 at the age of 95, nearly 10 years after leaving the papacy to retire to what he said would be a life of prayer and study.

Pope Francis was scheduled to celebrate his predecessor's funeral Jan. 5 in St. Peter's Square. Matteo Bruni, director of the Vatican press office, said the funeral rites would be simple in keeping with the wishes of the late pope.

As the retired pope neared death, he was given the anointing of the sick Dec. 28 in his residence, Bruni said.

(Continued on page 16)

CNS photo/Nancy Wiechec
Pope Benedict XVI appears on the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica after his election April 19, 2005. Pope Benedict died Dec. 31, 2022, at the age of 95 in his residence at the Vatican.

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January 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

With faith and hope in eternal life, we give thanks for the life of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. As the funeral liturgy teaches us, the blessings of his life are signs to us of God's goodness and of our fellowship with the saints in Christ.

As teacher of the Christian faith and Universal Shepherd of the Church on Earth, Pope Emeritus Benedict, taught us above all to keep our hopes and desires focused firmly on Jesus Christ. Jesus is the source of our trust and confidence. He emphasized Sacred Scripture (the Bible) as an essential starting point for theology and the spiritual life.

In continuity with St. John Paul II and in union with Pope Francis, Benedict explicitly called us to the work of evangelization — sharing the Gospel of Jesus with others. He demonstrated by his life that worshiping and glorifying God is the central purpose of life and the key to happiness and fruitfulness. He taught us to follow the path of Love, Hope, and Faith. After laying down the papal ministry for selfless reasons with the good of the Church in his mind, Benedict lived out his life in humility and prayer.

I encourage everyone to pray daily in thanksgiving to God for the precious gift of Pope Emeritus Benedict's life, scholarship, sanctity, and leadership. Pray also that one who has taught us so powerfully about the centrality of Jesus may now know the mercy and joy of eternal life with Christ. I invite Catholics to offer at least one Our Father, one Hail Mary, and one Glory Be for the Pontiff Emeritus each day through January 13, 2023 (nine days of prayer beginning on the day of the Funeral Mass). It is a worthy practice to offer some work of direct service for the poor during this time of mourning. I welcome all who love Christ and all people of good will to join your prayers and works of mercy to those of your Catholic neighbors. Thank you for your kindness.

With confidence in Divine Providence and certain hope in the Resurrection, I remain . . .
Yours in Christ,

+ *John C. Iffert*

+Bishop John Iffert
Bishop of Covington



(above) Bishop Iffert smiles as he preaches his homily.
(above right) Bishop Iffert prays before the nativity scene erected in the Cathedral.
(below) Deacon Michael Elmlinger, seminarian, proclaims the Proclamation of the Birth of Christ at the beginning of Midnight Mass at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, Dec. 25.
(right) Before the Mass, the Cathedral choir sang Christmas hymns and carols for the congregation.

Baker photos



Like characters in a nativity scene — faithful draw to Christ at Midnight Mass

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

On a snowy Christmas night, family and friends gathered to the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, to celebrate the Nativity of the Lord at Midnight Mass. Bishop John Iffert of the Diocese of Covington was the celebrant.

The doors opened at 11 p.m., and by 11:30 the Bishop’s Choir, dressed in blue, sang a concert of Christmas hymns and carols welcoming the congregation — including traditional French and German carols. The Cathedral was decorated in red ribbons and evergreen, with a scene of the Nativity displayed beside the altar.

As Mass opened, with lights lowered, Deacon Michael Elmlinger, seminarian, chanted the Proclamation of the Birth of Christ, and Bishop Iffert kneels before the scene of Christ’s Nativity, anointing it with holy water and incense.

During his homily, Bishop Iffert equated the diverse attendees of the Mass with those figures present at the Nativity, asking the congregation the question, “Why are you here?”

“Some people come to this Mass, I know, because of family connections,” said Bishop Iffert. “You know who else thought family was important? Jesus, Mary and Joseph.”

It was a family connection that brought them to Bethlehem, Bishop Iffert continued. “If you are here because of a family connection, you have a friend in Jesus. He’s the one that was born into the world, bonded to a human family with his own body and blood ... family is important, and God gives himself to nourish our families and build us in the gospel.”

“Sometimes it is beauty that draws us to this Mass,” Bishop Iffert would continue his connection, mentioning how he knew individuals who were not even religious, but still attended the Mass for the “beauty of the night” and the “glorious music.”

Bishop Iffert compares these individuals to the shepherds in the field.

“Seeing the glory of the Lord — this magnificence surrounding these shepherds ... their response is fear, followed by curiosity ... and, when they are approaching the manger and the child they are moved to worship the most

beautiful, commanding, peaceful and gentle presence they have ever seen.”

In the third connection, Bishop Iffert addresses the members of the congregation who “may not know” why they were present at the Mass, drawing connections between them and the Magi who followed the star in the sky to Bethlehem.

“They saw the rise of the star and recognized that meant the birth of a new king for the Jews — who knows what instigated them to follow that star all the way to Bethlehem. Perhaps they were so disillusioned with the state of the empire they were a part of, that they just had to look for something else, someone else, a worthy leader to receive their loyalty,” he said.

“You don’t have all the answers, and you don’t know why you’re here ... but, I’m grateful that you are.”

Concluding his homily, Bishop Iffert would unite all three of these comparisons together.

“These things draw us together this Christmas. They lead us here. They respond to the question, ‘why?’ In fact, they pose a new question for us. Why would we be anywhere else?”

“Christ responds to our human minds. Not just on Christmas day, but on every day of our lives. He came to us today to be our Christ ... Today, Christ is born for you. Whatever your reason, I’m so grateful for your company.”

2022 — A year in the life of the Diocese of Covington

Items are listed in the month they occurred; in several cases, the news appeared in the *Messenger* the following month.

January

At his first midnight Mass celebrated at the Cathedral, Bishop John Iffert repeats the message of the angel to explain the message of Christmas, “For you the Savior came into the world — for you.”

After 20 years of broadcasting on WLWT’s MeTV and its local cable channels, the Cathedral’s Sunday Mass moves to Local12’s subchannel The CW, Sundays from noon to 1 p.m.

As temperatures dipped into the single digits the first five days of January, Mother of God Parish, Covington, offers its undercroft as emergency shelter for overflow guests of the Emergency Shelter of Northern Kentucky.

“Be Witnesses,” the feature page of the Office of the Vicar for Religious, highlights the peace and justice work of Sister Alice Gerdeman, CDP.

Our Savior Parish, Covington, hosts its annual Martin Luther King breakfast. This year speakers Joan Ferrante and Lynnis Hillman of the Mourning the Creation of Racial Categories of Northern Kentucky gave a presentation sharing the history of the Margaret Garner family; Phil Stowers talked about the racial disparity of the healthcare system, which was heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kentucky Refugee Ministries, Covington, prepares to welcome and resettle 30 Afghan refugees to the Northern Kentucky area and seeks volunteers and supplies.

Dave Schroeder, executive director of Kenton County Public Library, discusses the history of how nuns shaped Northern Kentucky at the Behringer-Crawford Museum virtual NKY History Hour.

Villa Madonna Academy High School, Villa Hills, is named a Cognia School of Distinction.

Nearly 300 pilgrims, including Bishop Iffert, from the Diocese of Covington were among the thousands gathered in Washington, D.C., Jan. 21, for the 49th annual March for Life. This is Bishop Iffert’s first trip to the March for Life.

EdChoice Kentucky kicks off its celebration of National School Choice Week at the Old State Capitol in Frankfort. A group of educators, parents and students congregate that morning to show their support for educational opportunities in Kentucky.

Notre Dame Sisters Maria Francine Stacy and Anita Marie Stacy return from Mayfield, Ky., after helping in the tornado relief efforts there. The sisters reflect on what they had seen.

Bishop Iffert sends a check for \$357,549.20 to Bishop William Medley, proceeds from a special Disaster Relief Collection in parishes, for tornado relief in the Diocese of Owensboro.

Over 35 members of the Deanery Pastoral Council meet virtually with Bishop John Iffert for a meet and greet. With Pope Francis calling a worldwide Synod on Synodality, Bishop Iffert

pauses the annual planning process so that diocesan and parish resources can concentrate on the synod.

Catholic Schools Week kicks-off in the Diocese of Covington.

Bishop Iffert joins the Blessed Sacrament School community in celebration of its fourth National Blue Ribbon designation from the U.S. Department of Education.

CareNet Pregnancy Care Centers of Northern Kentucky opens a new location in Williamstown, the organization’s third care center. The Knights of Columbus donate a new ultrasound machine for the location and Bishop Iffert blesses the new location and ultrasound machine.

After six years as director of the Office of Liturgy and Worship, Deacon Peter Freeman retires.

Obituary

Sister Mary Bonita Schack, S.N.D., Jan. 22

February

The *Messenger* highlights the Northern Kentucky University Knights of Columbus, a new council that began in the summer of 2021.

The Notre Dame Urban Education Center, Covington, receives new iPads acquired through a grant from the Kentucky Colonels, helping to achieve the goal of technology parity for students.

Bishop Iffert celebrates Catholic Schools Week and Candlemas Mass at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, encouraging students to be light to the world.

Bishop Iffert honors nearly 50 couples who gathered for Wedding Anniversary Vespers celebrating milestone years of marriage in 2021. The celebration, typically celebrated in the Fall, was delayed due to the pandemic.

Pope Francis announces the appointment of Bishop Shelton Fabre as the tenth bishop and third archbishop of the Archdiocese of Louisville. He succeeds Archbishop Joseph Kurtz who has served the archdiocese for 14-and-a-half years.

“Be Witnesses” highlights the Benedictine Sisters of St. Walburg Monastery and the Sisters of Divine Providence assist Kentucky Refugee Ministries, Covington, by accepting refugee families.

The sixth Life’s a Ball, hosted by the diocesan Pro-Life Office, honors three local pregnancy centers — Care Net, New

Hope and the Rose Garden Home Mission.

The Safe Environment Office announces the adoption of the VIRTUS Empowering God’s Children program to educate children on how to identify and avoid people who would choose to harm them. The program replaces all children’s programs previously in place.

Parish listening sessions and the online survey for the

(Continued on page 6)



April – Deacon candidates Michael Elmlinger (transitional) Kevin Cranley, Adam Feinauer and Eric Ritchie (permanent) are called before the faithful and in the name of the local Church, requested the bishop ordain the candidates.

MLK Discussion Breakfast

Our Savior Parish, Covington, hosts its annual Martin Luther King Discussion Breakfast, Jan. 14, 9:30–11:45 a.m. Speakers include Divine Providence Sister Alice Gerdeman, who will provide information on The Doctrine of Discovery, along with Joan Ferrante, Sociology professor, Northern Kentucky University and John Fisher, field supervisor, Kentucky Human Rights Commission, will examine the roots and growth of White Supremacy in America. The breakfast is free and open to the public.



Bishop’s Schedule

- | | |
|--|---|
| Jan. 6
Celebrate all-school Mass, Notre Dame Academy, Park Hills, 9:30 a.m. | Jan. 16
Diocesan Curia offices closed in observance of the Martin Luther King holiday |
| Jan. 8–12
Region V Bishops retreat | Confirmation, Holy Cross Parish, Latonia, 7 p.m. |
| Jan. 14
Vigil Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 4:30 p.m. | |

Holy Spirit community comes together to provide shelter to those in need

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

The Wednesday before Christmas, Dec. 21, the Greater Cincinnati area was preparing for a winter storm. Beverly Merrill, director of Housing for Welcome House Northern Kentucky, reached out to Msgr. William Cleves at Holy Spirit parish, Newport, seeking shelter for the homeless.

Msgr. Cleves agreed to let Welcome House use the gym at Holy Spirit as a temporary shelter for the homeless of Northern Kentucky, who would otherwise be stuck out in the oncoming snowy and life-threateningly cold weather.

“We had some tables set up in one end of the gym from a family party that had been there, they still had the holiday tablecloths and flowers,” said Msgr. Cleves. “We kept those out, and we opened the concession stand. Our first night we had 34 people,” he said, with their biggest night consisting of over 70 individuals sheltering in Holy Spirit’s gym.

Local parishes, protestant and Catholic alike, “chipped in the food,” reported Msgr. Cleves. As a result, the com-

munity was able to serve three hot meals a day to the homeless staying at Holy Spirit. The menu included vegetable and chicken noodle soup, chili, pizza, breakfast sandwiches — as well as two coffee machines going 24/7.

“Volunteers from Welcome House and from our parish staffed the shelter, and we kept the doors open around the clock,” said Msgr. Cleves.

The doors were open until Dec. 28, with volunteers attending to the guests day and night even through Christmas day. Msgr. Cleves spent Christmas Eve at the shelter, between Masses and confession.

“My feet were sore, my back was killing me,” he said, “But I thought, this is the best Christmas I’ve ever had. There was something really wonderful about the community, about the way people helped each other, took care of each other. We were a community for those days, and, by Wednesday morning, after Christmas, everybody was gone. It was difficult to say goodbye. We had formed a really deep, tight-knight community over those few days.”

COMMENTARY

The true Joseph Ratzinger

The Joseph Ratzinger I knew for 35 years — first as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, later as Pope Benedict XVI and then Pope Emeritus — was a brilliant, holy man who bore no resemblance to the caricature that was first created by his theological enemies and then set in media concrete.



The cartoon Ratzinger was a grim, relentless ecclesiastical inquisitor/enforcer, “God’s Rottweiler.” The man I knew was a consummate gentleman with a gentle soul, a shy man who nonetheless had a robust sense of humor, and a Mozart lover who was fundamentally a happy person, not a sour crank.

The cartoon Ratzinger was incapable of understanding or appreciating modern thought. The

Ratzinger I knew was arguably the most learned man in the world, with an encyclopedic knowledge of Christian theology (Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant), philosophy (ancient, medieval and modern), biblical studies (Jewish and Christian), and political theory (classic and contemporary). His mind was luminous and orderly, and when asked a question, he would answer in complete paragraphs — in his third or fourth language.

The cartoon Ratzinger was a political reactionary, discombobulated by the 1968 student protests in Germany and longing for a restoration of the monarchic past; his more

vicious enemies hinted at Nazi sympathies (hence the nasty sobriquet Panzerkardinal). The Ratzinger I knew was the German who, on a state visit to the United Kingdom in 2010, thanked the people of the U.K. for winning the Battle of Britain — a Bavarian Christian Democrat (which would put him slightly left of center in U.S. political terms) whose disdain for Marxism was both theoretical (it made no sense philosophically) and practical (it never worked and was inherently totalitarian and murderous).

The cartoon Ratzinger was the enemy of the Second Vatican Council. The Ratzinger I knew was, in his mid-30s, one of the three most influential and productive theologians at Vatican II — the man who, as CDF prefect, worked in harness with John Paul II to give the Council an authoritative interpretation, which he deepened during his own papacy.

The cartoon Ratzinger was a liturgical troglodyte determined to turn back the clock of liturgical reform. The Ratzinger I knew was deeply influenced, spiritually and theologically, by the 20th-century liturgical movement. Ratzinger became a far more generous pope in his embrace of legitimate liturgical pluralism than his papal successor, because Benedict XVI believed that, out of such a vital pluralism, the noble goals of the liturgical movement that formed him would eventually be realized in a Church empowered by reverent worship for mission and service.

The cartoon Ratzinger was yesterday’s story, an intellectual throwback whose books would soon gather dust and crumble away, leaving no imprint on the Church or on world culture. The Ratzinger I knew was one of the few contemporary authors who could be certain that his books would be read centuries from now. I also suspect that some of the homilies of this greatest papal preacher since Pope

St. Gregory the Great will eventually find their way into the Church’s official daily prayer — the Liturgy of the Hours.

The cartoon Ratzinger craved power. The Ratzinger I knew tried three times to resign his post in the Curia, had zero desire to be pope, told fellow churchmen in 2005 that he was “not a man of governo [governance],” and only accepted his election to the papacy in obedience to what he regarded as God’s will, manifest through the overwhelming vote of his brother cardinals.

The cartoon Ratzinger was indifferent to the crisis of clerical sexual abuse. The Ratzinger I knew did as much as anyone, as cardinal prefect of CDF and then as pope, to cleanse the Church of what he brutally and accurately described as “filth.”

The key to the true Joseph Ratzinger, and to his greatness, was the depth of his love for the Lord Jesus — a love refined by an extraordinary theological and exegetical intelligence, manifest in his trilogy, “Jesus of Nazareth,” which he regarded as the capstone of his lifelong scholarly project. In those books, more than six decades of learning were distilled into an account that he hoped would help others to come and love Jesus as he did. For as he insisted in so many variations on one great theme, “friendship with Jesus Christ” was the beginning, the sine qua non, of the Christian life. And fostering that friendship was the whole purpose of the Church.

The last of the monumental figures of 20th-century Catholicism has gone home to God, who will not fail to reward his good servant.

George Weigel is a senior fellow of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C.

Pope Benedict XVI: A committed but principled ecumenist

Pope Benedict XVI was a notable contributor to the ecumenical scene from the beginning of the Catholic Church’s dramatic entry into the Ecumenical Movement at the time of the Second Vatican Council. As one of the periti, or consultants, at the Council, then-Father Joseph Ratzinger’s subsequent writings and speeches reveal his involvement



with several of the Council’s documents including “Lumen Gentium” (“Constitution on the Church”), “Unitatis Redintegratio” (“Decree on Ecumenism”) and “Dei Verbum” (“On Divine Revelation”).

In differing ways and degrees, he carefully balanced both the ecclesiality of Christian communities separated from the Catholic Church and concerns over what they lack due to this separation, all whilst acknowledging how such separation affects the Catholic Church, itself, in expressing its catholicity in its fullness. He also demonstrated how close attention to the Word of God can draw Christians, of different kinds, closer together.

As Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith throughout the 1980s and ’90s, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was responsible for the congregation’s responses to the ecumenical agreements of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) on a range of doctrinal, ecclesial and moral issues that were seen as obstacles to restoring sacramental communion between the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion — including agreements on Eucharistic doctrine, the ministerial priesthood, the Blessed Virgin Mary, authority in the church and moral issues. The CDF’s responses affirmed what had truly been achieved in the dialogue but did not flinch from questioning ambiguity or lack of clarity. They also foresaw fresh difficulties arising from a lack of a proper ecclesiology in the Anglican Communion, the unilateral decision to ordain women to the presbyterate (and, later, to the episcopate itself), as well as fresh disagreement within

the Anglican Communion and with the Catholic Church on a host of moral issues having to do with the beginning and end of life, marriage and divorce, sexuality and other matters.

The landmark, carefully researched agreement on the nature and application of the doctrine of Justification by Faith with the Lutheran World Federation took place under Pope Benedict XVI’s watch. Here, both sides acknowledged their common faith in this keystone doctrine, whilst recognizing the differences in language and emphases which continue in each tradition. In Pope Benedict’s little book “Paul of Tarsus,” originally presented as addresses during his Wednesday General Audiences in 2006, he uses Martin Luther’s insights creatively whilst setting out a fully Catholic view of the relation between Faith and Love.

Those orthodox Anglicans who found themselves distressed by the theologically and morally revisionist attitudes beginning to prevail in their provinces, found a ready and sympathetic ear in Cardinal Ratzinger, who sent them a message of solidarity at one of their first gatherings in Plano, Texas. It was this sympathy with their plight which led him to establish a commission, with two Anglican bishops as full members, to consider how Anglicans desiring full communion with the See of Peter could be accommodated. The commission offered some very far reaching recommendations, only some of which were found acceptable to the whole Roman Curia. The resulting Apostolic Constitution, “Anglicanorum Coetibus,” provided for Anglicans to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church through personal ordinariates, whilst keeping their legitimate patrimony of liturgy, music, pastoral method, ways of doing theology and much else intact. It is yet a work in progress as some of its provisions have not been fully implemented, and it needs further development if it is to be witness to what early ecumenists in the Catholic Church saw as a “united but not absorbed” model of future unity.

The constitution is, nevertheless, an important mile-

stone in achieving Pope St. Paul VI’s vision that nothing of the full legitimate patrimony of the Anglican Communion would be lost in the cause of greater unity between Anglicans and Catholics.

The document “Dominus Iesus,” produced by the CDF under Ratzinger, acknowledges the ecclesial reality of the separated Christian communities, especially of the West whilst noting what prevents them from being fully “church” in the Catholic sense of the term. As Pope Benedict is supposed to have said to an Anglican bishop, “It is never nothing.” This is fully in accord with the teaching of Vatican II which recognizes the reality of life and worship in these communities, whilst also noting what, from a Catholic point of view, remains lacking.

As both cardinal and pope, Benedict was especially interested in healing the breach with the Eastern Orthodox and the Ancient Oriental churches, which Vatican II recognized as having a very close relationship with the Catholic Church in terms of ministry, sacramental life and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints. In this connection, his remark that nothing should be required for full communion with the Orthodox — a position rejected in the first Christian Millennium — should be considered by ecumenists in dialogue with different Christian traditions.

Pope Benedict was a committed but principled ecumenist who didn’t believe in a shallow ecumenism but one that was firmly grounded in the Scriptures, the Fathers and the ancient Councils of the Church. Let us pray that such principles will continue to guide the Catholic Church’s ecumenical relations in the years to come.

Msgr. Michael Nazier-Ali is a Roman Catholic priest of the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham, and former Anglican Church of England bishop of Rochester who participated in the ARCIC dialogues. He is currently the director of the Oxford Centre for Training, Research, Advocacy and Dialogue. His commentary has been provided by OSV News.

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One day at a time

Social media is a buzz this time of year with chants of “New Year, New Me!” and “Your Best Year, 2023!” We all start out with great intentions, but most of these self-improvement plans won’t even be thought of by the end of the month. Any day beyond the first day of a new endeavor is the most challenging part. It is not the initial start.

I have often heard people say, “Anyone can do anything for a day!” At the heart of all these resolutions is a longing for renewal, a longing to be the best you can be. As Catholics we are called to better ourselves, to seek holiness, not just January 1st, but all year long.

It is easy to say that we are going to live a Christian life, but when we must answer for the way we have hurt, degraded, lied to or cheated another, even without them knowing, then we are really understanding what it means to be Christian. In the sacrament of reconciliation, we are given the ultimate gift of renewal, a chance to be forgiven of the sins we have committed. The difficulty is first admitting and then second seeking forgiveness so we can heal, make amends and move forward.

VIEWPOINT



Julie Feinauer

As Christians we are also called to renewal in our baptismal promises. Each time we enter a church we are reminded of these promises as we bless ourselves with holy water. We symbolically cleanse ourselves, to wash away the worldliness that separates us from God, our Father. This worldliness leads us to believe that we must never suffer, that we should live lives of perfect happiness, but this is not the reality of humanity.

People today are afraid of self-sacrifice. It is understandable, as it is undesirable, can be difficult, exhausting or painful. But it is through sacrifice that people stretch and grow to become more. My childhood priest, Father David Shockey, used to say, “We must die to ourselves.” In this he meant that these self-sacrifices are in a small way, our daily “cross” to bear. Through these acts of self-sacrifice, we are strengthening our resolve to become more Christlike. In our search for renewal, we must be willing to challenge ourselves and not fall back into old patterns that keep us from transformation. The road less traveled often leads us to the perfect destination.


To make it the “Best Year Ever,” make each day “The Best Day Ever!” Treat each day like the first day on your life’s journey. Wake each morning and start anew, resolving to truly belong to the Lord. Daily, request the love and favor of the Lord. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with light and love and begin the day in prayer that you will be able to “take up his cross.” Take it one day at a time and remember, you can do anything for a day.

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

The advent of population decline

As we celebrate the birth of the Savior Child, it seems fitting to note that in many parts of the developed world, the lack of babies is a growing concern.

VIEWPOINT



Greg Erlandson

This is a surprising change for those of us raised on “The Population Bomb,” a wildly inaccurate prediction that the world’s population would bring the earth to a miserable collapse. The book appeared in 1968, and its author, Paul Ehrlich, with help from a largely uncritical media, for years convinced many countries that children — in the form of population growth — were the problem.

So imminent was this disaster, in Ehrlich’s mind, that he predicted the starvation death of hundreds of millions of people in the 1970s.

In 1968, the world’s population was 3.5 billion. This past November, planet Earth’s population surpassed 8 billion.

Which makes a recent population editorial in *The Washington Post* noteworthy for its lack of handwringing. While recognizing the impact of the population growth on environmental and man-made infrastructures as well as on Africa and Asia, it concluded that “living standards around the world have vastly, though unevenly improved” in the years since Ehrlich’s book was published.

Earth’s population expanded when farmers and workers were able to produce more and support more people, the Nov. 19 editorial said. In fact, as living standards improve, both birth rates and death rates shrink, suggesting that when the advancements that the Northern Hemisphere enjoys spread more widely in the Southern Hemisphere, population stability will occur there as well.

Where population growth is occurring, there are implications. For one, if job creation does not keep pace with people creation, migration is likely to follow.

Compounded by pressures like climate change and war, we are seeing this impact now on the flow of migrants to wealthier countries.

The *Post* notes that sometime in this century we are likely to see population growth plateau, and the editorial ends with a warning that Paul Ehrlich certainly did not foresee: “Instead of population growth and growing birthrates, the fast-approaching new demographic challenge is societal aging.”

Indeed, populations in several European countries are now shrinking, meaning more and more people over 65 and fewer under 18. Even the U.S. is not immune, although its immigration rate can mask its decline in births. This foretells what demographers call a “demographic winter.”

Exhibit A would be Japan, where some say the country is irreversibly withering. Notoriously hostile to immigration, Japan has no ready means to increase its population, which will put the economy and social services under grave stress as its population ages. Diapers for the elderly now outsell diapers for babies there.

Italy also has had a below average birth rate for generations. There are almost twice as many deaths as births in Italy, and a birth rate of 1.24 births per woman is lower than Japan’s. Maternity wards are being shut down.

Pope Francis has taken notice, and he has been sounding the alarm about the declining number of births. In a speech to Italian family associations this December, the pope warned Italy about “a serious demographic winter” that he called “awful” and “horrible.”

For the pope, the first priority, he told the Italian Forum of Family Associations, is to bear witness to “the joy of being a family.” He also called for more family-friendly services and government policies. U.S. church leaders are calling for similar action in the United States, where maternity, childcare and family leave policies are woefully behind most developed countries.

As we celebrate the Christ Child this Christmas season, let’s pray for parents and would-be parents and a greater recognition of “the joy of being a family.”

Greg Erlandson is former director and editor-in-chief of Catholic News Service. His commentary has been provided by OSV News.

The Star is a vocation

The readings for the feast of the Epiphany of the Lord — Cycle A — are: Isiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6; and Matthew 2:1-12.

The story of the Epiphany reminds us of a great event in the life of Christ, indeed for the Magi and all who witnessed what had come to pass.

A vocation is a calling of some sort. It can be in the soft, gentle breeze of the wind or accompanied with trumpet blasts, it can be in the voice of someone we know or during our time of prayer, or any way in which God wants to get your attention. We can be led to our vocation by a way that is unique to us.

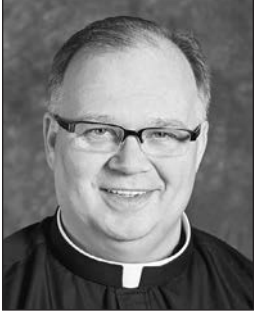
The Magi were given a star to follow but not just any star, the star of a newborn king. They set out on a journey not knowing what to find. They took up the hard path that was placed before them and followed it to the place where it rested — right over Jesus’ head.

We have heard story after story of saints who have gone before us, who have entered and accepted the call from God. Over these days in the Christmas octave, we hear the story of Stephan, the first martyr: Stephan had received his vocation and was working great works and deeds among the people. Stephen heard another call — to be faithful. He gave up his life as a witness to Jesus Christ.

Have you heard your call, your vocation? In the stillness of your heart or in the noise of the world can you hear the voice of God? It’s not going to be plain and simple as an angel coming to you, or the voice of God booming across the mountains. Who knows, maybe it will be. It doesn’t matter how; it just matters that we hear and respond to our great God who wants us to live with him and do great works and perform signs among the people.

Father Gregory Bach is assistant director of seminarians for the Diocese of Covington and pastor, St. Benedict Parish, Covington, Ky

GO AND GLORIFY



Father Gregory Bach

Reporting Misconduct in the Diocese of Covington

Anyone who has experienced sexual misconduct by a cleric, employee or volunteer of the Diocese of Covington is asked to contact Ms. Julie Feinauer, diocesan victims assistance coordinator (859) 392-1515. Professional assistance and pastoral support will be provided in confidentiality and with respect.

A copy of the “Diocesan Policies and Procedures for Addressing Sexual Misconduct” is available by contacting the Chancery, (859) 392-1510 or visiting www.covdio.org and going to “Sexual Misconduct Policy.”

Informando sobre conducta inapropiada en la Diócesis de Covington

Cualquier persona que haya experimentado conducta sexual inapropiada por parte de un clérigo, empleado o voluntario de la Diócesis de Covington está invitada a ponerse en contacto con Ms. Julie Feinauer, coordinadora diocesana para dar asistencia a las víctimas. Teléfono (859) 392-1515. Asistencia profesional y apoyo moral serán ofrecidos de una manera confidencial y con respeto.

Una copia de “Normas y Procedimientos sobre Conducta Sexual Inapropiada” está disponible poniéndose en contacto con la Cancillería, Teléfono (859) 392-1510, o visitando www.covdio.org y marcando “Sexual Misconduct Policy.”

(Continued from page 1)

Synod on Synodality opens in the Diocese of Covington. Msgr. Gerald Twadell’s “Pondering Patriotism” is Thomas More University’s inaugural Wilbert L. and Ellen Hackman Ziegler Endowed Chair in Philosophy lecture — TMU’s first and only endowed chair.

The *Messenger* collaborates with the diocesan Schools Office on a five-week series “Tech Tuesdays,” looking at the effects of technology at school and home on students.

Father Conor Kunath welcomed nearly 30 people, including 16 discerners, to the February Sacred Heart Discernment Dinner with Bishop Iffert. The quarterly dinners are a casual way to build a network and fraternity among young men considering a vocation to the priesthood.

The Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal kick-off dinner in Maysville welcomes record crowd. This year’s theme is “Stand Firm in the Lord.”

“The Problem with Religious Liberty” was the topic of Thomas More University Institute for Religious Liberty’s spring lecture. The event’s keynote speaker was Dr. Patrick J. Deneen, Ph.D., chair of Constitutional Studies, University of Notre Dame, joined by Dr. Jeanne Schindler, research fellow of the John Paul II Institute, Catholic University, Washington, D.C., and Dr. John T. Spence, professor of political science at Thomas More University.

The Curia staff recognize Alice and Dale Saner for 12 and eight years, respectively, of service to the Diocese of Covington, as the husband and wife duo begin retirement.

Thomas More University and the Florence Y’alls partner to rename the home of the Florence Y’alls “Thomas More Stadium.” As part of the agreement, the stadium will also become the home of the Thomas More Saints’ baseball team starting in spring 2023.

Tara Kelly, second grade teacher, and Sara Chalfant, third grade teacher, St. Paul School, Florence, have been recognized as 2022 Teachers of the Year by the Florence Rotary Club.

Obituary

Sister Mary Martha Beiting, S.N.D., Feb. 19

March

Bishop Iffert celebrates Ash Wednesday Mass at the Cathedral.

Pastors from 32 parishes in the Diocese of Covington presented 65 catechumens and 134 candidates to Bishop John Iffert during the Rite of Election. “May this Lent be that kind of a season for you, where God draws you in,” he said.

“Living Christ,” a new *Messenger* feature shares the experience of several people preparing to fully join the Catholic Church through their parish RCIA program. First up, Damien Tepe, parishioner, Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish,

Burlington, who is eager to share in the faith of his wife and children.

Notre Dame Sister Marla Monahan is appointed Vicar for Religious. She succeeds Divine Providence Sister Fran Moore.

The CatholicTV Network adds the praying of the Stations of the Cross from the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, to its lineup of online offerings. The Stations of the Cross are led by Bishop Robert Reed, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Boston.

In the second installment of “Living Christ,” readers meet Amanda Heineke, St. Mary Parish, Alexandria, who came to love the faith through its teachings.

Benedictine Sisters of St. Walburg Monastery, closely follow the stories surrounding the Russian attacks in Ukraine by following posts shared on Facebook by the Benedictine Sisters of Immaculate Conception Abbey, Zhytomyr, Ukraine, who were sheltering from attacks and Missionary Sisters of St. Benedict, Otowck, Poland, who are caring for refugee children.

Thomas More University parents with the Amazon Career Choice program, allowing Amazon employees to take course work toward any Thomas More program, with tuition waivers provided by the company.

The Supreme Court, in an 8-1 ruling March 3, said Kentucky’s Republican attorney general could continue to defend a law banning the dilation and evacuation abortion procedure often used during the second trimester. The law passed in 2018; after abortion providers filed suit against the abortion ban, a trial court permanently blocked it, and that decision was upheld in 2020 by a panel of the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Over 100 people, half of them high school students, traveled to the Kentucky State Capitol for Catholics at the Capitol. Jason Hall and Andrew Vandiver of the Catholic Conference of Kentucky greets the contingency and reviews legislation important to Kentucky’s bishops. Bishop Iffert is invited to offer the invocation for the Senate.

“Living Christ” introduces readers to Jay Bowen, a former atheist whose path to Catholicism was inspired by the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas.

“Be Witnesses” asks recently retired sisters, Notre Dame Sister Shannon Kriege and Divine Providence Sisters Fidelis Tracy and Judith Riese, to reflect the life transition.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Diocese of Covington announce a second collection for the weekend of March 26/27 to support the Church’s response to the war in Ukraine.

Bishop Emeritus Roger Foys reflects on the gift of age and the value of not doing but being.

Post-COVID, Immaculate Heart of Mary School, Burlington, introduces two new academic programs — Learning Advancement Block and Connect — designed to close learning

gaps and keep siblings under one school-roof.

Passion relics from the Relic Collection of the Diocese of Covington — a copy of the “Veil of Veronica,” a stone from Mount Calvary, a stone from the Upper Room and a stone from the cave where the Apostles slept during the agony, are on view during the Lenten season.

Over 250 people attend a candlelight Mass celebrated by Bishop Iffert as Young Adult Ministry thrives as events resume after COVID break.

Oblates of St. Walburg Monastery celebrate 35th anniversary.

Bishop Iffert congratulates the top three finalists of the 2022 Eighth-grade Pro-Life Essay Contest: Lila Harris, Blessed Sacrament School, first place; Alex Chadwick, Villa Madonna Academy, second place and Rylee Huss, St. Agnes School, third place.

New Beginnings, a program for individuals experiencing or who have experienced separation and/or divorce to find comfort, resumes.

Thomas More University’s Women’s basketball team wins the NAIA tournament defeating Dordt University.

From Buddhism to Catholicism, Lalita Forsthoefel, St. Joseph Parish, Cold Springs, shares her faith journey in the “Living Christ” feature.

Tom Rose is awarded the 2022 Noll Service Award at St. Joseph Parish, Crescent Springs. Mr. Rose said all the men of the Holy Name Society deserve the Noll Award.

Troy “TJ” Cherry, a fifth grader at St. Cecilia School, Independence, honors his mom, his faith and the military with one service project — “Bibles for the Brave.”

In a ceremony drawing over 600 worshipers to the Cathedral, Bishop Iffert consecrates Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, an international event celebrated in Rome by Pope Francis and all dioceses throughout the world.

In a letter to Alan Pickett, executive director, Catholic Charities – Diocese of Covington, Bishop Iffert accepts the recommendation to discontinue Catholic Charities’ adoption program.

Bishop Iffert celebrates a farm blessing in Flemingsburg. Seminarians Joshua Heskamp and Justin Schwarz are instituted into the Ministry of Lector at St. Vincent Seminary by Bishop Larry J. Kulick of the Diocese of Greensburg.

David Cooley, director, Catechesis and Evangelization, gathers parish Synod leaders to the Pre-Synodal meeting to share information gathered at parish listening sessions.

Bishop Iffert attends the installation ceremony of Archbishop Fabre in Louisville.

Obituaries

Father Robert Rosing, March 4
Divine Providence Sister Mary Karen Bahlmann, March 23
Divine Providence Sister Mary Thomas Harvey, March 29
Notre Dame Sister Mary Norene McCormack, March 31

(Continued on page 7)



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April

Bishop Iffert celebrates Chrism Mass, Holy Week, Easter Vigil and Easter at the Cathedral

St. Timothy School, Union, breaks ground on a gymnasium and classroom expansion project.

Julie Feinauer and Marylu Steffen of the Diocese of Covington Safe Environment Office and Msgr. William Cleves were among the attendees of the Child Abuse Prevention Month kick-off event at Tom Gil Chevrolet. Kentucky's First Lady Brittainy Beshear was the keynote speaker.

Over 200 parish altar servers are recognized for their service receiving ribbons from the Serra Club for Vocations, Northern Kentucky.

In the final installment of "Living Christ," Mirianna Asman, Blessed Sacrament Parish, Ft. Mitchell, shares how her grandson led her to the faith.

Bishop Iffert blesses the new four-room addition at St. Patrick Parish, Taylor Mill, that is home to St. Patrick Primary School.

"Fleeing for Freedom: Local Impact and Responses," is the topic for TMU's Institute for Religious Liberty spring panel discussion featuring guest speakers: John A. Koehlinger, executive director of Kentucky Refugee Ministries; Dennis Caffrey, Spanish-speaking volunteer medical interpreter with Siloam Health in Nashville, Tenn.; and Father Athanasius Habtu Ghebream, Ph.D.

Bishop Iffert ordains Kevin Cranley, Adam Feinauer and Eric Ritchie permanent deacons for the Diocese of Covington. In the same ceremony, seminarian Michael Elmlinger is ordained a transitional deacon.

Catholic Charities hosts its volunteer appreciation and awards dinner: On behalf of the RC Durr Foundation, Will Ziegler accepts The Community Award; the Marcella Strategier Angel of Hope Award is awarded to Joe and Sheila Peeno.

ACUE donors welcomed to St. Augustine School, Covington, for "A Day at School" and the ACUE donor appreciation luncheon.

TMU breaks ground on a 34,000-square-foot academic center.

St. Augustine School, Covington, donates \$1,200, proceeds from its Penny War, to the Sisters of Notre Dame Uganda Mission.

Kentucky General Assembly closes with pro-life victories and losses for financially vulnerable Kentuckians. Highlights include: HB 269, which prevents criminal defendants with certain diagnosed mental health conditions from the death penalty; HB 499, creates a pilot program assisting business in offering childcare; HB 3, broad set of regulations of abortion and requirement for disposal of fetal remains, also establishes regulations on abortion inducing pharmaceuticals, prohibiting their distribution through the mail; bills that failed included: HB 197, which would have provided easier access to state-issued IDs to the homeless; HB 31, prohibiting discrimina-



June – Through the laying on of hands by Bishop John Iffert and the praying of the prayer of ordination, the gift of the Holy Spirit is conferred on Father AJ Gedney.

tion based on hairstyles and similar race related traits. A trio of bills passed that could have significant negative impact on the financially vulnerable: HB 4 limits access to unemployment benefits, reducing the number of weeks of eligibility; HB 7

places significant new paperwork requirements on those receiving public benefits; HB 8 moves Kentucky toward a consumption-based system of taxation and away from a progressive system.

"Be Witnesses" traces the founding of the Benedictine Sisters of St. Walburg Monastery; Carmel Manor; Ft. Thomas by the Carmelite Sisters for the Aged and Infirm; Sisters of the Congregation of Divine Providence, Melbourne; the Passionist Sisters, Erlanger; Sister of Notre Dame, Covington and the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker, Walton.

All 31 high school students, from each of the nine Catholic high schools in the diocese, who applied were accepted to the 2022 Governor's Scholars Program.

Father Raymond Enzweiler is awarded the "Good Shepherd Award" from the Pontifical College Josephinum, Columbus.

Newlyweds Adam and Hannah Wessels share the importance of faith community in strengthening their bond of marriage.

Benedictine Sister Aileen Bankemper is re-elected prioress for the Benedictine Sisters of St. Walburg Monastery. It is a four-year term.

Official Assignments

Father Eric Andriot to parochial vicar, St. Paul Parish, Florence

Msgr. Daniel Vogelpohl to vicar for Retired Priests
Kimberly Halbauer to Board of Trustees, TMU, three-year term

Obituaries

Divine Providence Sister Ruth Marie Flynn, April 6
Divine Providence Sister Dorothy Ann Dzurissin, April 14
Benedictine Sister Mary David Ruschmann, April 19
Notre Dame Sister Mary Dolores Giblin, April 23

May

"Maes: 107 Years," an artifact exhibit observing the 107th anniversary of the death of Bishop Camillus Maes, is available through the month of May at Cathedral.

CareNet Pregnancy Services of Northern Kentucky welcomes record crowd and speaker Pam Stenzel to its annual "Changing, Healing, Saving Lives" banquet.

The Sisters of Divine Providence welcome three new associate members: Emily Piatt, Molly Morgan and Robin Kelly.

Father Paul Prabel celebrates Mass at his alma mater

(Continued on page 8)



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(Continued from page 7)

Newport Central Catholic High School in recognition of his 50th jubilee.
Bishop Iffert blesses the new Mary grotto at St. Augustine Parish, Augusta, a gift from the Charles and Mary Rita Appleman family.



October – Bishop John Iffert announces his vision for the With One Heart strategic pastoral plan and leadership development initiative, Sept. 30, at St. Mary’s Park, Covington. Nearly 300 people attended the event, which included a celebration of Bishop Iffert’s first year in Covington.

Foster parents David and Katy Sullivan share the rewards and challenges of foster parenting.
Foster care and adoption services are just two of the many supportive programs DCCH Center for Children and Families offers for individuals and families at every age.
Donna Hampton, Chancery secretary, retires after 28 years of service.
Mike Murray, director, Stewardship and Mission Services,

announced that \$26,000 has been collected for the Church in Central and Eastern Europe to assist the Church in its response to the Ukraine war.
Baby formula is among the items in short supply due to supply chain disruptions caused by the COVID pandemic. Rose Garden Home Mission, Covington, continues to provide for mothers and their babies thanks to a large donation of formula right before the shortage began.
“Be Witnesses” highlights Divine Providence Sister Kay Kramer and her senior nursing students on a recent mission trip to The Humanitarian Respite Center, Texas.
Bishop Iffert presides at the graduations of TMU and all nine Catholic high schools. “It is fascinating to learn about the traditions and the character of our schools,” he said.

Official Assignments
Ward Blakefield, Diocesan Finance Council
Father Daniel Schomaker, director, Office of Worship

June
Bishop Iffert ordains AJ (Alexander) Gedney a priest for the Diocese of Covington. Father Gedney celebrates his first Mass at his childhood parish, St. Paul Parish, Florence.
After a two-year hiatus, nearly 2,000 people gather for the Cross the Bridge for Life, Newport.
On the feast of Pentecost, Bishop Iffert confirms 21 adults.
Sts. Boniface and James Parish, Ludlow, kicks off its 150th anniversary.
The Notre Dame Urban Education Center, Covington, transforms its parking lot into an interactive outdoor space for student activities.
On feast of Corpus Christi, Bishop Iffert leads a Corpus Christi procession, which included the introduction of a tradition decorating the path with saw dust carpets. The celebration also launches the national three-year Eucharistic Revival in the diocese.

Bishop Emeritus Roger Foys consecrates the altar at the Franciscan Daughters of Mary new formation house chapel.
The Serra Club for Vocations Northern Kentucky hosts the annual picnic for women religious.
The sixth phase of the

International Commission for Dialogue between the Disciples of Christ and the Catholic Church, begun in 2021, continued its discussion on “The Ministry of the Holy Spirit,” at St. Anne Retreat Center, Melbourne.
The Supreme Court issues its decision in the Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, overturning Roe v. Wade and returning the issue of abortion to State legislators. “The Supreme Court’s decision in Dobbs, that there is no constitutional or human right to artificially abort an unborn child, is an achievement for our nation. I add my voice to so many who are grateful to God this day,” wrote Bishop Iffert in his response.
Catholic Charities makes its first mobile food pantry stop in Owen County at St. Edward Mission. “Food for Friends” provides canned and fresh food for low-income residents. On its first visit, 12 volunteers served 202 people in 60 households.
Bishop Iffert consecrates a new altar at the Franciscan Daughters of Mary Convent, Covington. The altar was crafted by Marty Butler a volunteer and supporter of the Sisters and the Rose Garden Home Mission.

Official Assignments
Father Ryan Maher to rector, Oratory of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Franciscan Daughters of Mary House of Formation

Obituary
Benedictine Sister Victoria Eisenman, June 28

July
The Kentucky Colonels award a grant to the Rose Garden Center for Hope and Healing, Covington, for eye exams and glasses.
St. Ann Mission, Covington, continues a long-standing devotion by celebrating its 135th annual novena to St. Ann.
Bishop Iffert receives a letter from Bishop William Medley of the Diocese of Owensboro, Ky, thanking the people of the Diocese of Covington for their generous donation in support of
(Continued on page 9)

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Bishop Iffert and Jamie Schroeder, chancellor, call members of the Deanery Pastoral Council together for a meet and greet and an update on upcoming changes to the diocesan planning process.

Welcome House, a nonprofit that provides resources and housing to the homeless, celebrates its 40th anniversary. Additionally, services are expanded to not only encompass an emergency shelter; but to take a holistic approach to ending homelessness and construction is underway for a new campus and shelters guests.

Official Assignments

- Father AJ Gedney to adjunct Master of Ceremonies, Diocese of Covington
- Father Gregor Bach to pastor, St. Benedict Parish, Covington and Assistant Director of Seminarians
- Father Michael Grady to parochial vicar, Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Burlington and chaplain, Covington Latin School
- Father Joshua Lange to pastor, St. Henry Parish, Elsmere
- Father Samuel Owusu to parochial vicar, St. Timothy Parish, Union
- Father James Schaeper to full-time instructor, Covington Latin School; residence, Mary, Queen of Heaven Rectory, Erlanger
- Father Matthias Wamala to parochial vicar, Mary, Queen of Heaven Parish
- Father Alexander Gedney to parochial vicar, Holy Cross Parish
- Father Kevin Kahmann to pastoral administrator, St. Henry District High School
- Father Jason Bertke to chaplain, St. Henry District High School
- Father Michael Black to chaplain, St. Patrick High School
- Father Edward Brodnick to chaplain Bishop Brossart High School
- Father Michael Hennigen to chaplain, Covington Catholic High School
- Father Baiju Kidaagen to chaplain, Villa Madonna Academy
- Father Conor Kunath to chaplain, Notre Dame Academy
- Father Thomas Robbins to chaplain, Holy Cross District High School
- Father Jeffrey Von Lehmen to chaplain, Holy Cross District High School

August

Bishop John Iffert accepts the candidacy of two seminarians to the priesthood — Hank Bischoff and Brad Whittle.

At Mass opening the school year, Bishop Iffert expresses thanks to the teachers, staff and administrators. “I know that it is a difficult time to be any kind of leader in our society, and that has been growing over the last decades ... especially the last few years with COVID,” he said.

The Equestrian Order of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, Diocese of Covington, hosts its annual Bishop’s Mass and dinner and present Bishop Iffert with the Pilgrim Shell.

St. Patrick Parish, Maysville, kicks-off a yearlong celebration of the parish’s 175th anniversary with Mass celebrated by Bishop John Iffert. Concelebrants included Father Andrew Young, pastor and parish son; Father Michael Black, parochial vicar; Father Joseph Gallenstein, parish son; and Father Albert Ruschman.

Bishop John Iffert appoints Father Mark Keene vicar general and Deacon James Fortner chief operating officer for the Diocese of Covington.

The St. Henry District High School community pulls off in one year an athletic field feat that typically would be expected to take three years — the installation of an artificial turf field.

Supporters of the Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal (DPAA) gather for a reception to celebrate the success of the 2022 campaign. Service grants are awarded to schools, parishes and charitable organizations to continue to serve the people of the Diocese of Covington.

As major scouting organizations begin to adapt policies that oppose Catholic teachings, and with COVID-19 affecting overall attendance, scouting in the Diocese of Covington had entered a period of decline. With COVID-19 on its way out, Bishop Iffert hopes to revitalize the scouts’ role in the diocese. These efforts began with a “Scouting Summit” held at the Curia.

Obituary

Msgr. Ronald Ketteler, Aug. 26

September

For the first time in the school’s history, St. Therese School, Southgate, has been honored as a Blue Ribbon School by the US Department of Education for 2022.

Close to 200 bishops at the beginning of their ministries in dioceses and eparchies around the world, including Bishop John Iffert of the Diocese of Covington, meet Pope Francis Sept. 19 at the end of a week of conferences.

The Most Rev. John C. Iffert, KGCHS, is invested into the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem by His Eminence Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, KGCHS, Archbishop of Chicago and the Order’s Lieutenant Prior.

The diocesan-wide “With One Heart” campaign launches at St. Mary’s Park, Covington, on the one-year anniversary of Bishop Iffert’s installation as Bishop of Covington. Nearly 300 people attended the event, including Bishop Emeritus Roger Foys, to celebrate Bishop Iffert and to hear his vision for WHO — an initiative that’s goal includes the bolstering of diocesan parishes and priests. A special edition of the *Messenger* is published alongside the event.

Official Assignments

Father Mark Keene to vicar general, Diocese of Covington

Obituary

Edgar Nicholas Cleves, Sept. 28

October

The second annual Walk for Life at the Kentucky state capital in Frankfort, had a singular, focus and urgent mission — the passing of the Kentucky Constitutional Amendment #2 in the Nov. 8 election. Bishop Iffert was the key Catholic speaker at the event.

Nearly 150 couples celebrating milestone wedding anniversaries gathered for Vespers and Bishop John Iffert’s blessing at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. The celebration was organized by the diocesan Office of Catechesis and Evangelization and the Office of Worship and Liturgy.

Respect Life month kicks off in prayer with the celebration of the annual diocesan Pro-Life Mass at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington.

Youth in the Diocese of Covington, age 13-22, attend SUMMIT22, a youth retreat, at Covington Catholic High School.

Deacon Thomas (Tom) John Murrin is ordained the Order of Deacon for the Diocese of Covington. While expected to be ordained in April, an injury as result of a fall and subsequent months of recovery led to a delay of Mr. Murrin’s ordination.

Diocese celebrates a “White Mass” at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption in honor of healthcare professionals.

Supporters of seminarian education gather for the 2022 Seminary Ball. Since its resurgence 13 years ago by Bishop Emeritus Roger Foys, the Seminary Ball has become the Diocese of Covington’s biggest fundraising event for seminarian education. At the ball, Deacon and seminarian Michael Elmlinger said the people of diocese help seminarians to ‘per-severe.’

Official assignments

Rev. Michael T. Grady to Parochial Administrator, St. Therese Parish, Southgate

Obituary

Mary Ann Iffert, Oct. 15

November

Sts. Peter and Paul Parish adds a second access road on property adjacent to parish. Bishop Iffert blesses the new road and cuts the ribbon.

The “With One Heart” campaign holds its second Deanery Strategy Session at St. Agnes Parish in Ft. Wright. Over 150 parishioners from across the diocese attend the session.

Bishop Iffert celebrates Mass for religious sisters celebrating jubilees. Celebrating 50 years is Sister Cynthia Fehrenback, CDP. Celebrating 60 years are Sister Dorothy Schuette, OSB,



October – During the Election by the Bishop, Deacon Murrin kneels in front of Bishop Iffert at his ordination to the Order of Deacons at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Oct. 15.

Sister Florette Marie Adams, SND, Sister Mary Rita Geoppinger, SND, Sister Mary Judeann Luekan, SND, Sister Margaret Mary Jacobs, CDP and Sister Mary Joyce Moeller, CDP.

Following the failure of Amendment 2 in the Kentucky elections, Kentucky Bishops responded to the rejection with a letter, saying “The defeat of Amendment 2 is cause for sadness, but also a call to redouble our efforts at ensuring that every Kentuckian has the support they need to thrive. We renew our commitment to work with legislators to pass laws that protect the unborn, support women and families and respect human life and dignity in all stages of life.”

Official assignments

Rev. Stephen M. Bankemper to Diocesan Finance Council, five years
Sister Margaret Stallmeyer, C.D.P. to Diocesan Finance Council, five years

December

Newport Central Catholic High School launches “Looking Up” capital campaign. In a letter to Kenny Collopy, principal, Bishop John Iffert approves a \$13 million capital campaign that will bring updates and improvements to the school’s campus and programs.

A Christmas tree erected in St. Mary’s Park, Cathedral Square, Covington, is blessed and lit. During the event, Bishop Iffert held the first Bambinelli blessing within the diocese, praying that the baby Jesus’s would be a sign of God’s “abiding presence and love” to all who attended.

Thomas More University celebrates the 10-year anniversary of its Mary, Seat of Wisdom Chapel on the feast of St. Juan Diego, Dec. 9, with a Mass celebrated by Bishop Iffert.

Obituaries

Sister Mary Elaine Krebs, SND, Dec. 6
Sister Maria Grace Reis, CP, Dec.19
Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, Dec. 31

Annual Report of the Finances for the Diocese of Covington – June 30, 2022

The annual report of the Diocese of Covington shows the financial position and results of operation of the Diocese for the years ended June 30, 2022, and 2021. The financial statements of the Diocese of Covington are audited by the certified public accounting firm of VonLehman & Company, Inc. The auditors' report on the financial statements includes an unmodified opinion that the statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Diocese of Covington and the related affiliates. An unmodified opinion is the highest level of assurance given by a public accounting firm.

The financial information presented herein includes the Diocese of Covington Curia offices which are fiscally responsible to, and under the direct control of, the Bishop of the Diocese. This includes the central administrative offices, program offices and departments of the Diocese, its cemeteries and retreat centers, the Diocesan/Parish Annual Appeal, seminarian recruitment and education, the care for elderly and infirmed priests, the Diocesan-wide secondary school support program, the Alliance for

Urban Catholic Education (ACUE) school operations, and the Diocesan-wide self-funded health insurance program.

Various religious orders, lay societies, religious organizations which operate within the Diocese, parishes, parish elementary schools, secondary schools and other related institutions are not included in the accompanying financial information.

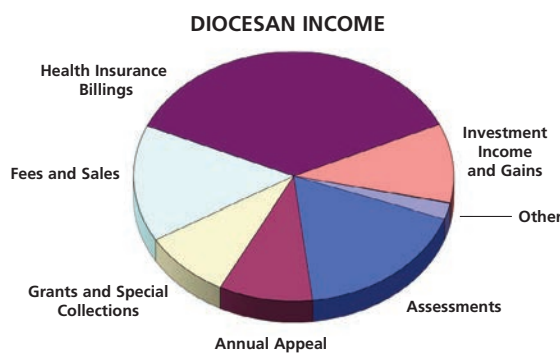
Results of Operations

During this past fiscal year, total revenues decreased from the prior year by 24.2%. This is almost entirely due to decreased investment returns. Total expenses remained relatively flat; with offsetting increases in Curia programmatic expenses and decreases in grants.

Operating Revenue

During the fiscal year ended June 30, 2022, the Diocese received operating revenue from the following sources which it used to fund its various ministries and services.

Health insurance billings	\$ 10,286,895
Assessments	4,936,669
Fees and sales	4,234,855
Diocesan/Parish Annual Appeal	2,664,801
Grants and special collections	2,513,012
Investment income/(losses)	(2,887,418)
Other	594,519
Total Operating Revenue	<u>\$ 22,343,333</u>



- Assessments are comprised of two differing taxes on the parishes of the Diocese. A 6.75 % tax on the income of parishes provided \$2,825,572 of income to fund the administrative offices of the Diocese. A 5% tax on the parishes of Kenton, Campbell, Boone, and Mason counties provided \$2,111,097 of support for the secondary and urban schools of the Diocese.

- The Diocesan/Parish Annual Appeal for 2021 (ended on March 31, 2022; adjusted to fiscal year ended June 30, 2022) raised an amount totaling \$3,948,787. Of this amount \$1,283,986 was returned to parishes as rebates for use in local ministries.

- Grants, special collections, and contributions represent: 1) grant monies received which are distributed to Diocesan parishes and missions, 2) the seminary collection used for seminarian education and 3) bequests received by the Diocese.

- Fees and sales represent the following for the 2022 fiscal year:

ACUE tuition and fees	\$ 1,957,177
Cemetery fees and sales	1,178,141
Retreat Center fees and sales	319,155
Newspaper ads and subscriptions	284,743
Education office fees	233,747
Departmental fees and fundraising	261,892
Total Fees and Sales	<u>\$ 4,234,855</u>

- Health insurance billings are premiums the Diocese and its entities charge themselves to fund the self-insured medical fund. This fund pays for the health insurance claims from doctors, hospitals and prescription drugs for Diocesan employees and covered dependents.

- Investment income/(loss) is the accumulation of interest, dividends, realized and unrealized gains/(losses) on investments held by the Diocese.

Operating Expense

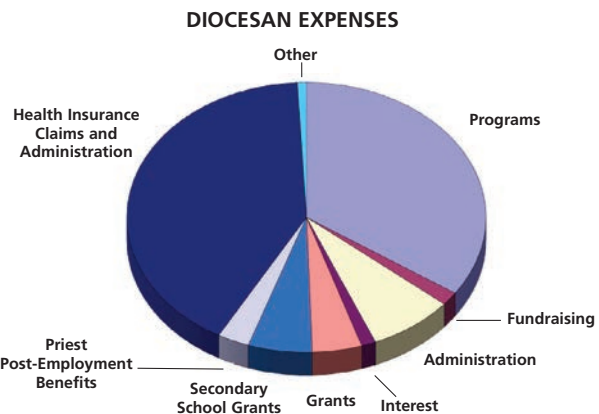
During the fiscal year ended June 30, 2021 the Diocese incurred programmatic costs, grant-making and departmental expenses as follows:

Health insurance claims/administration	\$ 10,717,567
Program expenses	8,998,882
Episcopal administration	1,988,874
Secondary school grants	1,500,000
Diocesan Grants	1,171,459
Priest post-employment benefits	751,677
Fundraising expenses	422,534
Interest expense	335,436
Other expenses	212,518
Total Operating Expense	<u>\$ 26,098,947</u>

- Health insurance claims and administration are the hospital and doctor bills and the prescription drugs costs for employees and their dependants who receive coverage under the Diocesan self-insured health insurance plan.

- Program expenses represent expenditures for carrying out the various ministries for the Diocese. These expenses include personnel salaries and benefits as well as direct expenses of the ministry. Program expenses are categorized as follows:

ACUE expenses	\$ 3,416,335
Diocesan properties	947,604
Cemeteries	934,163
St. Anne's Retreat Center	876,294
Community and pastoral services	706,412
Education and formation	698,382
Messenger	675,779
Seminary studies, vocations and deacon formation	469,459
Messenger	602,906
Clergy	274,454
Total Program Expenses	<u>\$ 8,998,882</u>



- Secondary school grants are made to the Diocesan urban and secondary schools for operating, scholarship and capital purposes from the secondary school assessment of parishes.

- Grants are made to various parishes, schools and other Diocesan institutions from the Annual Appeal and from other Diocesan revenues as follows:

Cathedral operations	\$ 299,750
Priest Retirement Fund	275,000
Catholic Charities	250,000
Inner city grants	199,800
Educational assistance	87,000
Holy See	22,000
Parishes and schools	16,295
Mission outreach	4,996
Other grants	16,618
Total Grants	<u>\$ 1,171,459</u>

- Priest post-employment benefits are the actuarially calculated cost of insurance for all retired priests as well as the costs of nursing care and assistance to infirmed priests.

Donor Restricted Assets

At June 30, 2022 the Diocese holds net assets which are donor restricted or endowed. Donor restricted assets are subject to a specific purpose or the passage of time. For endowed assets, only the income may be used for the intended purpose of the endowment, the principal may not be expended. These funds are classified as follows:

Restricted for a Specific Purpose/Time Period

Diocesan Annual Appeal	\$ 2,513,595
ACUE	1,626,728
Other Restrictions	708,087

\$ 4,848,410

Endowed Assets

Educational	2,485,218
Accumulated Net Appreciation	1,566,058
Property maintenance	942,386
Diocesan Annual Appeal	52,504
Social concerns	16,376
ACUE	3,200

\$ 5,065,742

Total Donor Restricted Assets \$ 9,914,152


Special Collections

The people of the Diocese of Covington have been extremely generous with their support of various agencies and relief efforts in our country and around the world. The following table is a listing of these Special Collections.

Kentucky Tornado Relief	\$ 423,186
International and domestic needs	195,953
Religious Retirement Collection	150,325
Mission Cooperative (ACUE)	131,959
Holy Father collection for worldwide charities (Peter's Pence)	63,755
Opportunities for Life	20,803
Other special collections	8,200

Total Special Collections \$ 994,181

Respectfully Submitted,


Chief Financial Officer
Diocese of Covington



January 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I give thanks to God for you! I can't help but be struck by the generosity and faith of the Catholic people of the Diocese of Covington. I have met so many wonderful people who, for love of Christ and His Church, do amazing things to carry out the work of evangelization, catechesis and charity. You provide for the needs of the Church, even building and making investments for the future. You pray with devotion for me, your priests, and members of the community. You exercise care for your family and neighbors. Thank you for that faithful example!

As your pastor, I hope to match your generosity and stewardship with careful management of what you entrust to the Diocese. I want to affirm that professionalism and good judgment are the rule of the day in using the financial and temporal gifts that you offer sacrificially. Therefore, I am happy to present a financial report in our Diocesan newspaper, the *Messenger*.

You will see that an independent public accounting firm has again issued an unmodified opinion on the Diocesan financial statements for the past fiscal year (ending June 30, 2022). This is the highest level of assurance attainable. The Diocesan Finance Council reviewed these statements and audit reports and accepted them in October 2022. Now it is your turn to review these statements for yourself.

These financial statements are more than just ledgers and balance sheets. They are a testament to the love and faith that each of you has for the kingdom of God here on Earth. It is that faith and love that sustains the Church. We invest more than our temporal goods in what we love most. For love, we lay down our lives. Thank you for your love for the mission of Jesus that is the essence of the Church. God will certainly reward you for your love, faith, and generosity.

I take this opportunity to express my gratitude also to our Diocesan Finance Council and to the staff of our Diocesan Finance Office. Their diligence ensures that we use the gifts entrusted to us to continue the mission that Christ entrusted to His Apostles and which we endeavor to carry out each day.

As we begin this new year, I thank God for each of you and entrust you to His loving care. Be assured of my prayers. Please, pray for me and for our beloved Diocese of Covington.

Yours devotedly and gratefully in the Lord,



Most Rev. John C. Iffert
Bishop of Covington

Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington, Diocesan Curia CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION

June 30	2022	2021
Assets		
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$ 7,996,699	\$ 7,370,219
Restricted Cash for Perpetual Care Fund	23,409	24,250
Accounts Receivable, Net	655,838	646,961
Loans Receivable, Net	3,491,849	3,198,386
Notes Receivable, Net	8,939,883	11,761,658
Unconditional Promises to Give, Net	1,572,247	1,677,597
Cemetery Property Held for Sale	385,658	409,556
Investments	24,786,021	28,493,758
Restricted Investments for Perpetual Care Fund	3,109,313	3,025,798
Property and Equipment, Net	13,080,535	13,196,956
Other Assets	548,008	766,899
Total Assets	<u>64,589,660</u>	<u>70,572,038</u>
Liabilities		
Accounts Payable and Accrued Expenses	1,935,903	2,048,591
Claims and Reserve for Incurred but not Reported Benefit Claims	537,778	673,300
Special Collections Payable	733,894	730,305
Pledges Payable, Net	642,302	751,919
Deposits Payable	11,417,733	10,940,043
Notes Payable, Net	8,933,263	11,767,451
Advances and Deferred Receipts	3,108,319	2,895,972
Priest Postretirement Liability	4,354,406	4,082,781
Total liabilities	<u>31,663,598</u>	<u>33,890,362</u>
Net Assets		
Without Donor Restrictions	23,011,910	26,657,396
With Donor Restrictions	9,914,152	10,024,280
Total Net Assets	<u>32,926,062</u>	<u>36,681,676</u>
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	<u>\$ 64,589,660</u>	<u>\$ 70,572,038</u>

See accountants' report and accompanying notes.

Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington, Diocesan Curia CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF ACTIVITIES

Year Ended June 30	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	Total	Total
Revenues, Gains and Other Support				
Parish Assessments	\$ 4,936,669	\$ -	\$ 4,936,669	\$ 4,838,918
Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal	2,664,801	2,664,801	2,664,801	2,596,590
Dividends and Interest	38,509	684,318	722,827	655,068
Grants and Special Collections	27,795	384,202	411,997	344,013
Realized Gains on Investments	575,854	176,167	752,021	1,361,392
Unrealized Gains / (Losses) on Investments	(3,249,352)	(1,074,405)	(4,323,757)	4,308,490
Contributions and Bequests	777,941	1,323,074	2,101,015	1,611,273
Self-Insurance Premium Retention	502,666	-	502,666	501,776
Fees and Sales	4,234,855	-	4,234,855	3,927,083
Health Insurance Billings	10,286,895	-	10,286,895	9,272,151
Gain on Sale of Property and Equipment	22,480	-	22,480	28,926
Other Income	69,373	-	69,373	32,872
Total revenue, Gains and Other Support	<u>18,830,985</u>	<u>3,512,348</u>	<u>22,343,333</u>	<u>29,478,572</u>
Net Assets Released From Restrictions	<u>3,622,476</u>	<u>(3,622,476)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
Total Revenue, Support, Gains, and Reclassifications	<u>22,453,461</u>	<u>(110,128)</u>	<u>22,343,333</u>	<u>29,478,572</u>
Expenses				
Programs	8,998,882	-	8,998,882	8,418,279
Fundraising	422,534	-	422,534	395,065
Management and General:				
Episcopal Administration	1,988,874	-	1,988,874	2,260,226
Settlements, Legal Fees and Counseling	111,651	-	111,651	20,031
Related to Sexual Abuse	1,171,459	-	1,171,459	2,371,264
Grants Made by Diocese	335,436	-	335,436	356,682
Priest Post Employment Benefits	751,677	-	751,677	347,887
Secondary School Grants	1,500,000	-	1,500,000	1,402,636
Health Insurance Claims and Administration	10,717,567	-	10,717,567	10,546,595
Contributions and Assessments	100,867	-	100,867	128,464
Total Expenses	<u>26,098,947</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>26,098,947</u>	<u>26,247,129</u>
Change in Net Assets	<u>(3,645,486)</u>	<u>(110,128)</u>	<u>(3,755,614)</u>	<u>3,231,443</u>
Net Assets at Beginning of Year	<u>26,657,396</u>	<u>10,024,280</u>	<u>36,681,676</u>	<u>33,450,233</u>
Net Assets at End of Year	<u>\$ 23,011,910</u>	<u>\$ 9,914,152</u>	<u>\$ 32,926,062</u>	<u>\$ 36,681,676</u>

See accountants' report and accompanying notes.

Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington, Diocesan Curia CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF CASH FLOWS

Year Ended June 30	2022	2021
Cash Flows From Operating Activities		
Change in Net Assets	\$ (3,755,614)	\$ 3,231,443
Reconciliation of Change in Net Assets with Cash Flows From Operating Activities		
Depreciation	691,122	645,727
Amortization of Debt Issuance Cost Included in Interest	15,163	46,219
Realized Gains on Investments	(752,021)	(1,361,392)
Unrealized Losses / (Gains) on Investments	4,323,757	(4,308,490)
Gain on Sale of Property and Equipment	(22,480)	(28,926)
Interest credited directly to deposits	128,281	127,209
Changes in		
Accounts and Contributions Receivable	(8,877)	147,952
Unconditional Promises to Give, Net	105,350	1,266,006
Cemetery Property Held for Sale	23,698	47,748
Other Assets	218,891	137,362
Accounts Payable, Accrued Expenses and Other Liabilities	285,256	406,470
Claims and Reserve for Incurred but not Reported Benefit Claims	(135,522)	(162,182)
Cash Provided by Operating Activities	<u>1,097,004</u>	<u>195,164</u>
Cash Flows from Investing Activities		
Purchases of Property and Equipment	(576,886)	(517,736)
Proceeds From Sale of Property and Equipment	24,665	40,379
Purchases of Investments	(6,389,324)	(8,408,141)
Proceeds from Sales and Maturities of Investments	6,441,810	9,822,536
Issuance of New Loans	(517,882)	(175,247)
Payments Received on Loans	224,219	128,453
Cash (Used) / Provided by Investing Activities	<u>(793,198)</u>	<u>890,244</u>
Cash Flows from Financing Activities		
New Deposits Received	3,146,484	2,165,223
Withdrawals of Deposits	(2,797,075)	(2,366,043)
Payments on Notes Payable	(27,576)	(24,596)
Payments on Loan Costs	-	(75,817)
Cash Provided / (Used) by Financing Activities	<u>321,833</u>	<u>(331,233)</u>
Net change in Cash and Cash Equivalents	<u>625,639</u>	<u>754,175</u>
Cash, Beginning of Year	<u>7,394,469</u>	<u>6,840,294</u>
Cash, End of Year	<u>\$ 8,020,108</u>	<u>\$ 7,394,469</u>

See accountants' report and accompanying notes.

History and science can tell us much about the Epiphany’s magi

Stephen Enzweiler
Cathedral Historian

This weekend we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany, which commemorates the visit of the Magi to the Christ Child in Bethlehem and their recognition that Jesus is both a royal king and the Son of God. This story of these mysterious visitors from the east has been known since at least the middle of the first century A.D., when the Apostle Matthew first included them as part of his gospel account of Jesus’ birth.

It is a familiar story, one we have become conditioned to know and accept as part of the canon of Christmas tradition, rich in its details and as much a part of the season as tinsel on the tree. But who were these magi, and what was the star they followed? Were they real people, and is their story based in history or, as some have hypothesized, are they merely a literary invention?

As it turns out, magi are historical figures and were plentiful throughout the ancient world. Accounts of their activities can be found in numerous ancient texts, including the Old Testament Book of Esther (Est 1:13), Daniel (2:48) and Jeremiah (Jer 39:3), and in the New Testament Acts of the Apostles (Acts 8:9). Descriptions of their activities and travels are also recorded by Roman historians like Pliny the Younger, Suetonius and Tacitus, and by Jewish historians Philo of Alexandria and Flavius Josephus. Historians tell us that no Persian was ever able to become a king without first being approved and crowned by their magi.

The word “magi” originally comes from the Greek *mágos* and refers to members of an ancient, learned class of Persian priests specializing in cultic practices associated with Zoroastrianism. They first appear in history in the seventh century B.C. as a Medeo-Persian tribe in eastern Mesopotamia (present day Iraq and Iran). Their main role at the time was as interpreters of dreams, but they may have also served as royal advisors.

In the Old Testament, we find the story of Daniel amid such a priestly caste in King Nebuchadnezzar’s court known simply as “wise men.” They are described as “...magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and Chaldeans...” (Dn 2:2). When the wise men could not interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams, he sentenced them to death. But when the Hebrew Daniel correctly interprets the dream, the king “fell down and worshipped Daniel, confessing, ‘Truly your God is the God of gods and Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries...’” (Dn 2:46). In appreciation, Nebuchadnezzar promotes Daniel’s Hebrew friends Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego to replace the “wise men” and appoints Daniel himself as “chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon” (Dn 2:48).

This act of Nebuchadnezzar is historically significant, because it gave Daniel the power and the opportunity to make significant changes in the way the magi operated throughout the Babylonian empire. He likely held this position as *chief magus* for the rest of his life, and the rabbinical schools he founded in Susa and elsewhere (notably Nisibis and Nehardea) would ensure that his magian influences would endure down through the centuries. It is

important to remember that only a small number of Jews returned from exile to Jerusalem (Ezra 2:64) and that by the time of Christ’s birth, roughly 1.2 million Jews still lived in the eastern provinces that had become the Parthian empire. The only historical description of these magi comes from the historian Philo of Alexandria (20 BC-40 AD). Writing to his friend Theodotus around the time of Jesus’ birth, he notes that the Persian magi “investigate the works of nature for the purpose of becoming acquainted with the truth ... and initiate others in the divine virtues by very clear explanations.” (*Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit*, XI)

At the time of Jesus’ birth, magi came “from the east.” In the ancient world, the term “from the east” was understood to refer to the region of the Near East occupied by

for men coming from Judea to rule the world.” In his *Histories*, Roman historian Tacitus, penned a prediction of “how at this very time the East was to grow powerful, and rulers, coming from Judaea, were to acquire universal empire.” Flavius Josephus recorded in his *Jewish Wars* that at about the time of Christ’s birth the Jews believed that one from their country “would soon become ruler of the habitable earth.”

One telling detail that reveals the magi of Matthew’s gospel were Jewish rather than pagan lies in the fact that when they arrived in Jerusalem, they sought to worship the “newborn King of the Jews” first rather than pay respects to King Herod. Had they been pagan magi, the protocols demanded would have been to first pay tribute to Herod before asking any favors. Instead, they virtually



The traditional magi by James Tissot.

the Seleucid and Parthian Empires, today’s Iraq and western Iran. Other kingdoms of the region — namely the Nabateans to the south and Armenians to the north — also used magi. But in the ancient world there was always a distinction between the magi of these countries and Parthian magi who were regarded as having the highest and most extraordinary level of astrological and religious knowledge.

Jewish chronicles state that Jewish communities enjoyed a long period of peace, maintaining close and positive relations with the reigning dynasty. It is most probable, then, that the magi who visited the Christ child in Bethlehem would come under this category of God-fearing, high-ranking magi. More significantly, it is known that *only* the area of ancient Media, Parthia, Assyria, and Babylonia had a Magian priesthood at the time of the birth of Christ (Catholic Encyclopedia, 1915). Thus, the magi in Matthew’s gospel had to have come from this region to the east.

They also would have been familiar with the many prophecies emerging across the ancient world which predicted the coming of a great ruler who would be a deliverer to the world. In his *Life of Vespasian*, Roman historian Suetonius reported: “There had spread over all the Orient an old and established belief that it was fated at that time

ignore Herod’s royal status and shift their focus toward finding the child first “to do him homage.” This would explain in part why Herod “was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him” (Mt 2:3).

Another telling detail is that according to Matthew’s account, only the Magi see the star, indicating it was not a physically bright star in the night sky but some other phenomenon, perhaps an observation of an unusual series of conjunctions between stars and planets in the night sky. Astronomers have recently discovered just such a series of triple conjunctions beginning in 3 BC between Jupiter (the king planet), Regulus (the king star), and Venus in the constellations of Leo (the symbol of the tribe of Judah) and Virgo (the Virgin). Between September 3 BC and June 1 BC, these celestial bodies went into conjunction on three different occasions, with Jupiter and Venus both stopping in the sky, a maneuver called “retrograde motion.” A search of the ancient skies reveals this particular series of conjunctions with their associated movements had never happened before in the astronomical record.

Whether it was a rare conjunction or some other means of discovery, *how* the magi knew just when to travel to Jerusalem is still a subject of debate among scientists, scholars and historians. However, based on the above astronomical evidence, their visit to Judea was likely in

December of 2 BC. An almost unknown lunar calendar system called the “Sabbatical Year” may also have been the key for their understanding of Daniel’s prophecy of the “Seventy Weeks of Years” which also dates their arrival to 2 BC.

But the *why* they came is crystal clear: the Messiah who would redeem the world had been born in Bethlehem! They would have set out from their capital and followed

the trade routes of the day — probably by caravan with an ample number of members and an armed escort to avoid any trouble.

They would have traveled northwest along the Euphrates River and crossed the vast Syrian Desert until they reached Tadmor (Palmyra). From there the road turned south to Damascus and ran through upper Galilee through small towns like Capernaum and Magdala on the

Sea of Galilee, then down a high mountain road through the grasslands of Shechem.

Arriving in Jerusalem, they undoubtedly would have entered the city from the north through the Gate of Benjamin, which was within sight of a deep limestone quarry to their right. Thirty-three years later, that same quarry would become notorious as the Roman site of execution called Golgotha.



(above left) Statuettes of Magi carrying barsoms; from the Oxus Treasure of the Achaemenid Empire, 4th century BC. (Photo by Nickmard Khoey.)

(center top) This cuneiform tablet dating from 350 BC used an advanced form of calculus to predict the movements of Jupiter. (Trustees of the British Museum/Mathieu Ossendrijver.)

(center bottom) Ancient Babylonian planisphere for tracking the planets, ca. 1000 BC.

(above right) Bronze of a Magus from the time of Daniel, ca. 559 BC. (British Museum)

Pope Benedict XVI remembered in the diocese — a glimpse of holiness

Staff report

The *Messenger* reached out to several local priests and others who knew or were inspired by Pope Benedict XVI. Here are their reactions to his life, teachings and death.



Msgr. William Cleves, pastor, Holy Spirit Parish, Newport:

I spent seven years in Rome, from 1974 to 1981. I knew Benedict as Joseph Ratzinger. He was loved by the children of the neighborhood. He never ever dressed as a cardinal, he always dressed in a simple black cassock. And when he came out of his apartment, he always had coins with him that he would give to the children so they could go buy ice cream. When he was elected Pope, I was watching Televizio Italiana to see what the Italians were saying about him. There was a restaurant in the neighborhood named Roberto and Roberto was on the screen being interviewed, bawling. He said, “there goes my best customer.” Everybody in the neighborhood knew him. He was



Father Michael Hennigen top right, serving for Pope Benedict XVI, on Jan.1, 2012.

just Father Ratzinger. He was a very, very humble man.



Father Michael Hennigen, pastor, Holy Cross Parish, Latonia:

I got to serve for him — I was with the class of 2013 seminarians of the Pontifical College Josephinum, Columbus — it was on January 1, 2012, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. It was amazing because our flight was supposed to leave out of Newark on December 30th so we could arrive for the practice. We had taken off, but we had to turn around because the autopilot went out. We thought, oh, man, we’re not going to make it to the practice to serve the Holy Father. If we missed the practice, then we couldn’t serve for the Holy Father. Sure enough, when we got back to Newark, they had another plane for us, so we made it to the practice.

I was chosen to do the lavabo, which is the washing of the hands. I didn’t realize that I was going to be able to

(Continued on page 14)

(Continued from page 13)

wash his hands right when he first came into the sacristy. I was one of the first seminaries as he walked into the sacristy. I washed his hands, and he just had a smile on his face, he did it silently, and then said, ‘thank you’ in English. There was just a calm, a serenity, a peacefulness about him. Then I washed his hands again at the Preparation of the Gifts, and I washed his hands a third time after Communion. I got to kneel right at his feet. He was at peace — peace from knowing the Lord Jesus. Those were his last words really, ‘Lord, I love you.’ What I really took from him, as beautiful a theologian as he is, but I just took this great peace from him and that he knew Jesus.

His teachings have a great depth to them, but there is also a great simplicity, especially in his first encyclical “God is love.” Really, you know love is what it all comes down to — the whole mission and even the Catechism — everything’s oriented towards love. That is the one thing I really took from the Holy Father.

Father Bill Appel, Father Eric Boelscher, Father Ryan Stenger and Claire Thérèse Heyne were studying in Rome when Pope Benedict resigned and witnessed him flying out of Vatican City the day of his departure, Feb. 28, 2013.



Father Eric Boelscher, pastor, St. Joseph Parish, Crescent Springs:

Pope Benedict XVI is one of the great silent heroes of our faith over the last century. His influence over the Church extends well beyond his papacy since he served the universal Church first as

an influential theologian at Vatican II and then for decades as the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In that role he helped guide the teaching of the Church and provided a consistent and clear presentation of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council.

Pope Benedict XVI was Pope Saint John Paul II’s most trusted collaborator and carried on his legacy. As much as I love Pope John Paul II and as much as a gift any Holy Father is to the universal Church, I will always feel like Pope Benedict XVI is, in a sense, my Pope. The way that I read Scripture, celebrate the Mass, engage with parishioners, and so much more in my spiritual life is taken from his good example. He was the first Pope I met, and his kindness and humility were like a noticeable halo around him.

I know there is so much to say about Pope Benedict XVI’s impressive contribution to the Church, but the one thing I like to point to is that his papacy was the modern “highwater mark” for seminaries. It doesn’t really make sense to some of why in the years following the worst scandal in the Church’s history, when religious life had been dismissed from most minds, why in those years seminaries would grow in number. For those of us who joined seminary at that time it was obvious. No one wants to give their life over to a question, and Pope Benedict XVI was crystal clear on what he was asking of priests. He expected us to be faithful to our studies, faithful to prayer, energetically evangelical, and for Christ alone to be the answer to the searchings of our heart. He did not present an easy image of the priesthood, he presented a holy one. I love him for that.

The first time I shook his hand was at an audience during World Youth Day in 2005 right after he was elected. I snuck into the newlywed section as teenager and was blessed by him along with the unsuspecting bride and groom! The second time was at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome a couple years later with Father Greg Bach while I was still in high school. Beforehand Father Bach and I were talking about the priesthood and I was sharing some concerns I had and some fears that were holding me back — worries

of what I might be giving up. Father Bach was great, he shared what some of his concerns had been, too, and how God had blessed him through that and often in unexpected ways. He also said, “But make no mistake, it can be hard. It’s the cross. We rely on Christ for all of it and it will take some real faith.”

When Pope Benedict XVI came in he was carrying his papal ferula — it’s the staff the pope carries with a cross at the top — and I just watched how he leaned on that as he walked but how it also seemed to be this triumphant image of Christ’s victory. There was just something really beautiful in that moment of God asking something of me in my life that was bound up with His cross and then giving me an image of a man who carried it so well.

I pray that Pope Benedict XVI will continue to be a guide for the Church from heaven and that he will help me take up my cross as the Lord asks, but also carry it triumphantly in the sure knowledge of God’s love. Pope Benedict is truly a great man and a great gift from God. Eternal rest grant unto him o Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him!



Father Ryan Stenger, pastor, St. Joseph Parish, Camp Springs:

Pope Benedict XVI is a major part of the reason that I’m a priest today. His papacy, more or less, coincided with my discernment of the priesthood. He was elected in 2005, when I was a high school student, and he resigned in 2013, when I was a deacon completing my final year of seminary formation in Rome. I’ll never for-

(Continued on page 18)

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.

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‘A great athlete and a great Christian gentleman’: Catholic high school prays for critically injured Bills safety and alumnus

Gina Christian
OSV News

The Central Catholic High School community in Pittsburgh is joining in prayer for NFL player Damar Hamlin, a 2016 school graduate, who was critically injured during a Jan. 2 game between the Buffalo Bills and the Cincinnati Bengals.

Hamlin, a safety for the Bills, collapsed after tackling Bengals receiver Tee Higgins during a routine play. According to a statement by the Buffalo Bills, the 24-year-old safety suffered a cardiac arrest following the hit.

Medics worked for nearly 10 minutes to restore his heartbeat as Bills team and staff members knelt in a tight prayer circle around Hamlin. Hamlin was then transferred to the University of Cincinnati Medical Center, where he remains in critical condition. Players, staff and commentators were visibly shaken by the incident, and the game – the last Monday Night Football match of the regular season – was suspended.

The NFL has posted an image of Hamlin’s team number with the words “Pray for Damar” across its social media accounts.

The Hamlin family released a statement online Jan. 3 asking supporters to “please keep Damar in your prayers,” noting they were “deeply moved by the prayers, kind words and donations from fans around the country.”

In a Jan. 3 statement sent to OSV News, Central Catholic called Hamlin a “highly respected young man” who “has been an integral part of our Catholic Lasallian Community and regularly returns to Central to speak with participants of our football campus.”

A photograph provided by the school to OSV News showed Hamlin in his high school football uniform holding a poster that read, “Recruited by Jesus.”

Central Catholic president Christian Brother Mike Andrejko asked in the statement that “the Lord be with (Hamlin) and hold him in the palm of his hand.”

The school’s recently retired head football coach Terry Totten described Hamlin in the statement as “a great ath-



OSV News photo/Cara Owsley

Football fans pray outside the University of Cincinnati Medical Center in Cincinnati for Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin, who was hospitalized after he collapsed on the field during the Monday Night Football game with the Cincinnati Bengals Jan. 2, 2023. Hamlin, an alum of Central Catholic High School in Pittsburgh, was in critical condition after suffering cardiac arrest following a hit by a Bengals player.

lete and a great Christian gentleman who is a man for others,” one who is “an essential part of the community at Central Catholic.”

Totten also pointed to Hamlin’s “unparalleled” work in the Pittsburgh community through the athlete’s charitable foundation, The Chasing M’s Foundation Community Toy Drive, which he started just before his selection in the sixth round of the 2021 NFL draft.

On its Facebook page, Central Catholic posted a mes-

sage stating its community “is praying for the well-being and swift recovery” of Hamlin, adding: “May the Lord be with him and his family during this most difficult time.”

As of Jan. 3, the post had garnered some 2,500 shares and almost 400 responses, which included a number of heartfelt prayers.

“We humbly pray to Thee, Dear God, in Jesus’ Name, to heal Damar Hamlin,” wrote Miran Liza Mientus. “And please, Dear God, provide comfort for his dear Parents and Family, the Bills, the Bengals, and All who love him. How beautiful to see countless people come together in prayer for him.”

Amy Smyth Miller posted the text of the Memorare prayer to Mary, while others invoked the intercession of St. John the Baptist, St. Jude, St. Sebastian, Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos and the late Pope Benedict XVI.

One poster added a link to an undated video of Hamlin recorded during his high school years for the Pittsburgh Steelers Youth Football Show. As part of the interview, Hamlin shared that he had chosen the player number three because it was a “family number,” one his own father had worn.

He also said that Central Catholic was “big on tradition,” and that “the name and the school ... means a lot not just to the coaches, but the alumni. ... You know you’re not playing for just yourself and your family; you’re also playing for the name and the tradition.”

Hamlin’s Twitter timeline over the past two years includes multiple expressions of faith and gratitude, along with support for friends and fellow athletes.

“I see myself through God’s eyes, not anyone else’s,” he wrote Dec. 8, 2020.

A post from the previous month read “from losses to lessons to blessings. Thank you, God!”

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Pope Benedict

(Continued from page 1)

His body was to lie in St. Peter’s Basilica beginning Jan. 2 so that people could pay their respects and offer their prayers, he said.

Immediately after the pope died at 9:34 a.m., Bruni said, his personal secretary, Archbishop Georg Ganswein, phoned Pope Francis, who went immediately to the late pope’s bedside to pray and to offer condolences to those who had cared for him in the last years of his life.

Archbishop Ganswein told Vatican News Jan. 1 that Pope Benedict’s last words were, “Lord, I love you.”

It was about 3 a.m. the day he died, the archbishop said. “In a faint voice, but in a clearly discernable way, he said in Italian, ‘Lord, I love you!’ I was not there at the time, but the nurse told me shortly afterward. These were his last comprehensible words, because afterward he was no longer able to express himself.”

A close collaborator of St. John Paul II and the theological expert behind many of his major teachings and gestures, Pope Benedict came to the papacy after 24 years heading the doctrinal congregation’s work of safeguarding Catholic teaching on faith and morals, correcting the work of some Catholic theologians and ensuring the theological solidity of the documents issued by other Vatican offices.

As pope, he continued writing as a theologian, but also

made historically important gestures to Catholics who had difficulty accepting all of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, particularly about the liturgy. In 2007, he widened permission to use the “extraordinary” or pre-Vatican II form of the Mass and, a short time later, extended a hand to the traditionalist Society of St. Pius X. Besides lifting the excommunications of four of the society’s bishops who were ordained illicitly in 1988, he launched a long and intense dialogue with the group. In the end, though, the talks broke down.

His papacy, which began when he was 78, was extremely busy for a man who already had a pacemaker and who had wanted to retire to study, write and pray when he turned 75. He used virtually every medium at his disposal — books and Twitter, sermons and encyclicals — to catechize the faithful

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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.

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on the foundational beliefs and practices of Christianity, ranging from the sermons of St. Augustine to the sign of the cross.

Pope Benedict was the first pope to meet with victims of clerical sexual abuse. He clarified church laws to expedite cases and mandated that bishops’ conferences put in place stringent norms against abuse.

Although he did not expect to travel much, he ended up making 24 trips to six continents and three times presided over World Youth Day mega-gatherings: in Germany in 2005, Australia in 2008, and Spain in 2011.

On a historic visit to the United States in 2008, the pope brought his own identity into clearer focus for Americans. He set forth a moral challenge on issues ranging from economic justice to abortion. He also took church recognition of the priestly sex-abuse scandal to a new level, expressing his personal shame at what happened and personally praying with victims.

While still in his 30s, he served as an influential adviser during the Second Vatican Council, 1962-65, and as pope, he made it a priority to correct what he saw as overly expansive interpretations of Vatican II in favor of readings that stressed the council’s continuity with the church’s millennial traditions.

Under his oversight, the Vatican continued to highlight the church’s moral boundaries on issues such as end-of-life medical care, marriage and homosexuality. But the pope’s message to society at large focused less on single issues and more on the risk of losing the basic relationship between the human being and the Creator.

Surprising those who had expected a by-the-book pontificate from a man who had spent so many years as the Vatican’s chief doctrinal official, Pope Benedict emphasized that Christianity was a religion of love and not a religion of rules.

The German-born pontiff did not try to match the popularity of St. John Paul II, but the millions of people who came to see him in Rome and abroad came to appreciate his smile, his frequent ad-libs and his ability to speak from the heart.

Some of Pope Benedict’s most memorable statements came when he applied simple Gospel values to social issues such as the protection of human life, the environment and economics. When the global financial crisis worsened in 2008, for example, the pope insisted that financial institutions must put people before profits. He also reminded people that money and worldly success are passing realities, saying: “Whoever builds his life on these things — on material things, on success, on appearances — is building on sand.”

He consistently warned the West that unless its secularized society rediscovered religious values, it could not hope to engage in real dialogue with Muslims and members of other religious traditions.

In his encyclicals and in his books on “Jesus of Nazareth,” the pope honed that message, asking readers to discover the essential connections between sacrificial love, works of charity, a dedication to the truth and the Gospel of Christ.

The retired pope looked in-depth at his papacy and resignation, his relationships with St. John Paul and Pope Francis and a host of other issues in “Last Testament,” a book-length interview with journalist Peter Seewald published in 2016.

In the book, Pope Benedict insisted once again that he was not pressured by anyone or any event to resign and he did not feel he was running away from any problem. However, he acknowledged “practical governance was not my forte, and this certainly was a weakness.”

Insisting “my hour had passed, and I had given all I could,” Pope Benedict said he never regretted resigning, but he did regret hurting friends and faithful who were “really distressed and felt forsaken” by his stepping down.

Less than a month after resigning, he already looked frail and walked with noticeably more difficulty than he did when he left office. The video images released by the Vatican March 23, 2013, when his successor, Pope Francis, visited him at Castel Gandolfo underscored the “diminishing energy” Pope Benedict had said led to his resignation.

Pope Benedict moved to the papal summer villa at Castel Gandolfo Feb. 28, 2013, the day his resignation took effect. He remained at the villa south of Rome for two months — a period that included the conclave that elected Pope Francis as his successor and the first month of the new pope’s pontificate. The retired pope moved back to the Vatican May 2, 2013, living in a monastery remodeled as a residence for him, his secretary and the consecrated women who cared for his household before and after his resignation.

On his only post-retirement trip outside of Italy, he flew to

Germany in June 2020 for a five-day visit with his ailing 96-year-old brother.

Answering questions from reporters on a flight back from Brazil in July 2013, Pope Francis spoke with admiration of the retired pope’s humility, intelligence and prayerfulness. The unusual situation of having a pope and a retired pope both living at the Vatican was working out very well, Pope Francis said. Having the retired pope nearby to consult with, or ask questions of, Pope Francis said, was “like having a grandfather at home — a very wise grandfather.”

By the time Pope Benedict had been retired for a year, his daily routine was set. Archbishop Georg Ganswein, his personal secretary, said his days began with Mass, morning prayer and breakfast. Although mostly hidden from public view, he was not cloistered, but continued welcoming old friends and colleagues, engaging in dialogue or offering spiritual counsel. He spent hours reading and dealing with correspondence before a 4 p.m. stroll in the garden and recitation of the rosary.

In the early days of his retirement, to the delight and surprise of pilgrims and cardinals, Pope Benedict appeared at major events with Pope Francis, including the opening of the Holy Door of St. Peter’s Basilica Dec. 8, 2015.

At a June 2016 celebration in the Apostolic Palace, where Pope Benedict once lived and worked, Pope Francis, top officials of the Roman Curia and a few friends gathered with him to mark the 65th anniversary of the retired pontiff’s priestly ordination.

Pope Francis told Pope Benedict that with him in residence, the monastery in the Vatican Gardens “emanates tranquility, peace, strength, faithfulness, maturity, faith, dedication and loyalty, which does so much good for me and gives strength to me and to the whole church.”

Pope Benedict replied to Pope Francis, “More than the beauty found in the Vatican Gardens, your goodness is the place where I live; I feel protected.”

He prayed that Pope Francis would continue to “lead us all on this path of divine mercy that shows the path of Jesus, to Jesus and to God.”

Mercy was a prominent topic in an interview Pope Benedict gave in 2015. The Catholic focus on mercy really began with St. John Paul, the retired pope told Belgian Jesuit Father Jacques Servais in the written interview, which was not released until March 2016.

From his experience as a youth during World War II and his ministry under communism in Poland, St. John Paul “affirmed that mercy is the only true and ultimately effective reaction against the power of evil. Only where there is mercy does cruelty end, only there do evil and violence stop,” said Pope Benedict, who worked closely with the Polish pope for decades.

“Pope Francis,” he said, “is in complete agreement with this line. His pastoral practice is expressed precisely in the fact that he speaks continuously of God’s mercy.”

Pope Benedict had said he planned to live a “hidden life” in retirement — and to a large extent he did. But when he did make contributions to public discussions, they became headline news. In April 2019, for instance, what he described as “notes” on the clerical sexual abuse crisis were published; and, in January 2020, an essay he wrote on priestly celibacy was published in a book by Cardinal Robert Sarah, prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments.

In the text on abuse, which the retired pope said was motivated by the February 2019 Vatican summit on the crisis, Pope Benedict traced the abuse crisis to a loss of certainty about faith and morals, especially beginning in the late 1960s. To address the crisis, he wrote, “what is required first and foremost is the renewal of the faith in the reality of Jesus Christ given to us in the Blessed Sacrament.”

The 2020 text on celibacy became the center of a media storm, not only because of its content, but also because Catholics were awaiting Pope Francis’ official response to the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon and suggestions made there that in remote areas the church could consider ordaining some married men to take the sacraments to Catholics who usually go months without.

Since marriage and priesthood both demand the total devotion and self-giving of a man to his vocation, “it does not seem possible to realize both vocations simultaneously,” Pope Benedict wrote in his essay.

The retired pope’s contribution to the discussion became even more controversial when Archbishop Ganswein informed media and the original publisher that while Pope Benedict contributed an essay to Cardinal Sarah’s book, he

did not want to be listed as co-author of the volume.

As inevitable as his election seemed after St. John Paul died in 2005, Pope Benedict’s path to the papacy was long and indirect.

Joseph Ratzinger was born April 16, 1927, in the Bavarian town of Marktl am Inn, the third and youngest child of a police officer, Joseph Sr., and his wife, Maria. Young Joseph joined his brother, Georg, at a minor seminary in 1939.

Like other young students in Germany at the time, he was automatically enrolled in the Hitler Youth program, but soon stopped going to meetings. During World War II, he was conscripted into the army, and in the spring of 1945, he deserted his unit and returned home, spending a few months in an Allied prisoner-of-war camp. He returned to the seminary late in 1945 and was ordained six years later, along with his brother.

In a meeting with young people in 2006, the pope said witnessing the brutality of the Nazi regime helped persuade him to become a priest. But he also had to overcome some doubts, he said. For one thing, he asked himself whether he “could faithfully live celibacy” his entire life. He also recognized that his real leanings were toward theology and wondered whether he had the qualities of a good pastor and the ability “to be simple with the simple people.”

After a short stint as a parish priest, the future pope began a teaching career and built a reputation as one of the church’s foremost theologians. At Vatican II, he made important contributions as a theological expert and embraced the council’s early work. But he began to have misgivings about an emerging anti-Roman bias, the idea of a “church from below” run on a parliamentary model, and the direction of theological research in the church — criticism that would become even sharper in later years.

In a 2005 speech that served as a kind of manifesto for his young papacy, Pope Benedict rejected what he called a “hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture” in interpreting Vatican II as a radical break with the past. The pope called instead for reading the council through a “hermeneutic of reform” in continuity with Catholic tradition.

In 1977, St. Paul VI named him archbishop of Munich and Freising and, four years later, Pope John Paul called him to head the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, where he wielded great influence on issues such as liberation theology, dissent from church teachings and pressure for women’s ordination. Serving in this role for nearly a quarter century, then-Cardinal Ratzinger earned a reputation in some quarters as a sort of grand inquisitor, seeking to stamp out independent thinking, an image belied by his passion for debate with thinkers inside and outside the church.

As the newly elected pope in 2005, he explained that he took the name Benedict to evoke the memory of Pope Benedict XV, a “courageous prophet of peace” during World War I, and said he wanted to place his ministry at the service of reconciliation and harmony among peoples.

Like his namesake and his predecessors, he was untiring in his appeals for an end to violence in world trouble spots and for dialogue as the only true and lasting solution to conflict. Another key to building a better world, he said repeatedly, is to respect the right of each person to seek and to worship God.

A direct appeal to China’s communist government to respect the religious freedom of its people was a central part of Pope Benedict’s 2007 Letter to Chinese Catholics. The letter also pleaded with the faithful on the mainland to work toward reconciliation between communities that had accepted some government control in order to minister openly and those that continued to practice their faith more clandestinely.

In the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States and amid reports of rising religious-inspired violence in various parts of the world, Pope Benedict also repeatedly and clearly condemned all violence committed in the name of God.

One of the biggest tests of his papacy came after a lecture at Germany’s University of Regensburg, in 2006, when he quoted a Christian medieval emperor who said the prophet Muhammad had brought “things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.”

Protests in the Muslim world followed, and Pope Benedict apologized that his words had offended Muslims, distancing himself from the text he had quoted. Soon after, he accepted the invitation of an international group of Muslim scholars and leaders to launch a new dialogue initiative, “The Common Word,” looking at teachings that Christians and Muslims share.

Pope Benedict remembered

(Continued from page 14)

get the teacher wheeling the TV cart into our classroom at Covington Latin to watch the announcement of Pope Benedict’s election and I’ll never forget standing in St. Peter’s Square for his final papal audience. Even as a teenager, I was inspired by the clarity and courage of his teaching and by the witness of his reverence and love for the sacred liturgy. He seemed to me to be heroic in his stand for the enduring truth and transcendent beauty of our faith against the tide of superficiality and relativism that still sweeps over our culture today. And the manner in which he took that stand touched me as well. He was never harsh or polemical in his words, but rather he spoke always with gentleness, humility and love.

I’ve always been struck by the centrality of friendship with Christ of Pope Benedict’s thought and by the tenderness and love with which he spoke about that friendship. In his homily at the Mass before the conclave that elected him to the papacy, Cardinal Ratzinger said, “An ‘adult’ faith is not a faith that follows the trends of fashion and the latest novelty; a mature adult faith is deeply rooted in friendship with Christ.” He concluded his first homily as pope by proclaiming, “Only in this friendship are the doors

of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation.” He knew that what the human heart needs above all is a love that endures and never runs out, which we receive only in our friendship with Jesus Christ. It was evident that he spoke about that friendship from great personal experience and I have no doubt that he is already experiencing the fullness of that friendship in heaven. While Pope Benedict’s passing is a great loss for the Church, I also firmly believe that we have gained a powerful friend and intercessor who will continue to serve the Church through his prayers in the heavenly liturgy.



Father Bill Appel, chaplain, Archdiocese for the Military Services:

I have been comforted by a lot of good articles on Pope Benedict XVI recently. I think, when someone passes, we take a long look at the good and the bad, and too often we hear about the bad. I’m grateful that so many people have sent me such uplifting things. That, in itself, has been a lesson to me — have

the class to build someone up in their absence. Perhaps it’s the antithesis of the cancel culture.

One of the things that struck me was that he had spent more time as “Pope Emeritus” than in his active papacy. It could seem that he had more to give, but on the contrary, I believe he healed, and perhaps none too soon. We cannot deny a difficulty — in some cases a difficulty near death — just because someone has healed. I’ve long thought of not only the papacy but also the move to step down as a “death unto self,” humbly doing what one feels is morally right over one’s own will. I hadn’t considered what effect active ministry physically took on the minister. Even in my relatively short time as a priest, I feel like I have a front row seat watching selfless priests give their all in ministry. Many of those priests have told me that I can be as busy as I want to be. By that, they were clear — I can find relaxation as a priest if I seek it. Conversely, and more to the point, I can find a nearly endless amount of work as a priest if I seek it. Pope Benedict XVI was a gifted intellectual and a conscientious worker. He showed a humble knowledge of himself and ministry. I believe he and many others have taken themselves to the breaking point — a true example of Jesus Christ.



Claire Thérèse Heyne is a consecrated virgin in the Covington diocese and operates a

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nonprofit retreat house, Clearbright Cottage Inc., Perry Park, and is adjunct Theology professor at the Athenaeum:

I was a graduate student in Rome for six years, from 2009 to 2015. While I certainly recall Pope Benedict's sudden resignation in 2013, that is not what I will remember most about him, not by a longshot. I did not read everything he wrote nor make it to every papal audience while I lived in Rome, but I loved reading and studying, among other works, his "Called to Communion" (wherein he gives a merciful image for the Church as a fresco in need of continual renewal), his "Jesus of Nazareth" books (wherein he gives historical and spiritual insights that are worth rereading every Lent), and his "Deus caritas est" (the best encyclical on Love, in my estimation). While he was alive and active as our pope, I appreciated his unprecedented efforts to "cleanse the temple" by removing abusers. I appreciated his reverence for objective beauty in the liturgy, including beautiful music. (It was a real treat to attend a private concert for him by a children's choir; his beloved brother as the conductor. I remember the pope's quiet, childlike joy as he listened.) I appreciated his orthodox and clear teaching, especially in the "Catechism of the Catholic Church." After his resignation — and God alone knows fully why he resigned — I appreciated his humble, hidden prayers and silent suffering for all of us, day after day, year after year. His teachings and prayers have formed and reformed me, I am sure. But, it was his words to Jesus as a seven year old and his last words before death that have struck me to the core. "Please give me the heart of Jesus," he asked Baby Jesus for Christmas as a child. Then, at the end of a life full of brilliant accomplishments despite much suffering, he simply said, "I love you, Jesus" and died. He lived for Christ with the Heart of Christ. He died focused on Christ. Dear Pope Benedict XVI, please pray that we do the same, by the grace of God. Santo subito!



Brad Torline, director, Angelico Project, Cincinnati:

I lost my faith by middle school. Catholicism failed to engage me either intellectually or emotionally. In fact, it was often downright grating on my mind and nerves. There was just no way something so lifeless could be true. This loss of faith led to struggles with meaninglessness and depression. If

there is no God, no life after death, if everything comes to nothingness in the end — then what is the point? My experience is not unique. Over 90 percent of children baptized Catholic lose their faith before age 30. Talk to them and you will likewise find that anxiety and depression are not rare. It makes sense; despair is a reasonable response to the meaninglessness of life without faith.

What is unique to my story, however, is that I miraculously found my way back. Pope Benedict XVI was one of the most instrumental players in that return. In high school he became my hero and remains so to this day. Contrary to the image painted of him by the media, Pope Benedict had a way with young people. He understood us. I think he went to his grave genuinely unaware of the affect he had on us. He understood that what we are really crying out for is stability. Overwhelmed with constant information, doubt and uncertainty, we need to know that there are some truths we can count on and build our lives around. In a world where everything changes so rapidly, we need to know that some things remain the same.

Any good father knows that a mark of adolescence is to test limits and that the proper response is to show firmness and dependability — to provide firm ground to stand on. Benedict did this for me. He showed me that Catholicism is a sure foundation upon which I can build my life. For me this has made all the difference.

I devoured his books, homilies, and writings. With his radical intellectual robustness he showed how intellectually engaging and defensible Catholicism is. Read any of his works and you will discover this for yourself. But he also showed me how beautiful and emotionally engaging the faith can be. So many people nowadays seem to think we need to be embarrassed of so much of what makes us who

we are as Catholics. Benedict did not have this sickness. He wore the "funny outfits," donned the "funny hats" and embraced the "smells and bells" with zero apology. In doing so he exuded authenticity and confidence and showed us: "You have nothing to be ashamed of. This is our heritage. Our culture. Our tradition. Be Brave. Be Different. Be Catholic." He told us, "See, you are part of something big and beautiful that survives the tides of time. Move the world, do not be moved by the world." In this way Benedict is instrumental not only to my past but also to my future. He has not only helped lay the foundation on which I have built my life, he has also outlined for me the path I believe we should take forward.

Truth, humility, reverence, tradition, hope, love, gentleness, meekness, beauty, authenticity, unity, continuity. These are the chief lessons Benedict manifested for us and, and if there is a path forward for the Church in the West, I think it will be through these principles: If I aspire to them or attain any of them in my life, it will be because Benedict first inspired me to.

The world is struggling with meaningless, confusion, and despair and the Church needs to go out confidently into the world and proclaim, as Benedict did, "The happiness you are seeking, the happiness you have a right to enjoy, has a name and a face: it is Jesus of Nazareth."



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Christmas 2022 was merrier and brighter as Curia staff resumed the in-person celebration of the Regency Manor Christmas, Dec. 15. Faye Roch and Peggy Piccola of the diocesan Pro-Life Office organize the annual gift giving and dinner party. The Curia staff pick tags from the giving tree bearing the Christmas wishes of the residents of Regency Manor. The gifts are delivered to the residential care facility where students from Bishop Brossart and Covington Catholic high schools deliver them to the residents. Adding to the cheer, the students lead the singing of Christmas carols. (left) Bishop John Iffert joined the Curia staff for a photo as gifts were being loaded into cars for delivery.



Baker and Keener photos

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