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Lent is a season of love

Most Rev. John Iffert
Bishop of Covington

I was recently reminded that we can do something for years and not understand why we are doing it. I received a letter from someone whose non-Catholic friends questioned him about abstaining from meat on the Fridays of Lent. They asked him how it could be a sin for a Catholic to eat meat on



Bishop John Iffert

Friday during Lent and not a sin for protestant Christians to do the same. They believed this inconsistency proved that the Catholic faith is fatally flawed. It was enough to plant a seed of doubt in the letter writer.

It reminds me of a conversation I heard recently between a mother and daughter. The daughter wanted to know why she didn't have a smartphone yet, when everyone in her class was allowed one. Without breaking stride her mother said, "Because I do not get to decide what is best for your classmates. I do get to decide what is best for you."

For Catholics, if we completely ignore the Church's laws of fast and abstinence during Lent, we sin. It is not because eating meat is immoral. (It is the same meat after all that many will happily eat on Saturday.) We sin because we disobey the reasonable request that a legitimate religious authority makes of us; an authority that our protestant friends do not recognize as legitimate. That is why an action can be a sin for one who recognizes that the Holy Spirit guides us through the leadership of our Catholic pastors and well-established spiritual traditions, and hardly the point for a separated brother or sister who does not accept this truth.

If Catholics ignore the Church's regulations of fast and abstinence, we refuse to do something that saints have found to contribute to their spiritual maturity. We miss an opportunity to do penance, to unite that sacrifice to the cross of Christ, and to join in solidarity with Catholic Christians sharing a common penance around the world. Like an immature person, we display negligence, selfishness, and disrespect. This is the source of the culpability that attaches to our actions. We sin because we refuse to submit ourselves. We refuse to surrender.

Surrender is hard. For several Sundays leading up to Lent, we have heard from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has been teaching us to surrender ourselves, to purify our motives, and to let him make our hearts poor, meek, and merciful. Lent is a school to help us learn to surrender. We pray (surrender our time and attention), fast (surrender our pleasures), and give alms (surrender our stuff) so that we can learn to be more and more like Jesus.

In the second reading for Ash Wednesday we read, "We are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appeal-

ing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20-21).

An ambassador is an official representative, one who speaks for another, a vicar. When I was first appointed a "vicar" of my local bishop, I took an hour or two to study what that meant. What stood out to me most in that brief study was a commentator who said that a vicar's chief responsibility was to come to know the mind of the bishop and never to do anything that the vicar knows is contrary to the other's will. It is a difficult and humbling thing to do. It requires discipline.

There are tasks that help us to practice surrender so that we might come to know the mind of Christ and choose his will over our own fallen wills. Chief among them: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The Church preserves these patterns and calls us to them in a special way during Lent. Our pastors even remind us that we are obliged to engage in some pattern of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. To know this wisdom and refuse it is a blameworthy act. To embrace it and strive to live after the pattern of Christ is to love like he loves.

Last year at this time I reminded you that Lent is a joyful season. This year I am remembering that Lent is a season of love. Love leads us to surrender ourselves as gift to God and one another.

God bless your Lenten journey. God bless you in love.



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Lent at the Cathedral

Ash Wednesday — Feb. 22, Mass 10 a.m. with Bishop John Iffert and 5:30 p.m.

Stations of the Cross — Fridays, Feb. 24–March 31, 6:30 p.m. No Stations March 10

Rite of Election — Sunday, Feb. 26, 2 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. No 5:30 p.m. Mass

24 Hours with the Lord — Twelve consecutive hours of Eucharistic Adoration and confessions

March 10, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, noon-midnight

March 17, Holy Cross Church, Latonia, noon-midnight



PREPARE THE WAY

On the many forms of penance in Christian life, the Catechism of the Catholic Church observes, "The interior penance of the Christian can be expressed in many and various ways. Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms, fasting, prayer, and almsgiving." (CCC, n. 1434) As a

reminder, the rules of fasting and abstinence are as follows:

Fasting — Catholics in the United States, ages 18 to the day after their 59th birthday, are obliged to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Only one full meal is allowed on these days, with no eating between meals.

Abstinence — Catholics in the U.S., from the age of 14, are obliged to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday, the Fridays of Lent and Good Friday. Illness or other circumstances might make it necessary for an individual to practice ways of doing penance other than fasting and abstinence.

Cathedral exhibit celebrates ‘Benedictines in Covington’

Father Jordan Hainsey
Contributor

In honor of Covington’s rich Benedictine history and the establishment of the new St. Cosmas Benedictine Oblate Deanery, St. Mary’s Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption is currently hosting an exhibit of Benedictine artifacts from the days of Covington’s pioneer monks. Displayed in the Bishop Maes Crypt Chapel through March 31, 2023, the exhibit focuses on two early pioneer monks active in Covington: Father Eberhard Gahr, O.S.B., and Brother Cosmas Wolf, O.S.B.

The Cathedral’s exhibit brings together important artifacts from the history of Immaculate Conception Church

at Stepstone in California, Ky. (*See related on story page 10.*) On view is a 19th century five-piece vestment set that would have been used by Father Gahr (chasuble, stole, maniple, veil, and burse). Made in cloth-of-gold fabric, the chasuble features a Eucharistic Pelican of exquisite gold bullion with impeccable stump work. This chasuble would have been worn only on the most solemn feasts.

Visible beneath the chasuble is an alb that would have also been worn by Father Gahr. Lovingly made from net and Mechlin lace, the alb’s floral motifs communicate Eucharistic imagery of thanksgiving.

Also on view is a period cassock and surplice that would have been worn by a young altar server. The cassock is made of broadcloth — a popular cloth of woven wool in

— a workshop of craftsmen specializing in ecclesiastical decoration — also known as the Institute for Catholic Art. Located at St. Joseph Church, in Covington, Ky, the workshop adorned churches largely in service of the growing number of German immigrants throughout the geographic area between Cincinnati, Milwaukee and St. Louis, commonly referred to as the “German Triangle.”

Equipped with workspaces for painting, woodworking and stained-glass, under Brother Cosmas’ direction, the Company created altars, baptismal fonts, statues, candlesticks, reredoses, pulpits, communion rails, Stations of the Cross, frames for easel paintings, crucifixes, croziers and other architectural ornaments and liturgical appointments.

The studio worked primarily in a German Gothic Revival style, resulting in designs that featured pointed archways, highly composed vignettes of figures, steep gables and delicate ornament. For many, a revival of these late-medieval conventions symbolized abiding tradition, permanence, spiritual lineage and a reverence for craftsmanship over the advancements of industry. As a result, communities commissioning work from the Catholic Altar Building Stock Company were importing an aesthetic that expressed a collective spiritual identity linked to a foreign home.

Brother Cosmas assembled an impressive team of artists and designers whose collective creative output included work in 10 states and dozens of churches. The young Frank Duveneck, who served as an altar boy at St. Joseph Church, discovered Brother Cosmas and his Altar Stock Building Co. in its infancy, and it would be here that Duveneck apprenticed and discovered his vocation as a painter.

Over the course of his prolific career, Brother Cosmas created works for numerous Covington churches including: St. Augustine Church, Augusta; Old St. Elizabeth’s Hospital, Covington; St. John’s Church, Covington; St. John’s Church, Wilder; St. Joseph Church, Covington; and St. Paul Church, Florence. Today, Brother Cosmas Wolf is regarded as one of the most significant 19th century church artists working in the United States.

On view in the exhibit is an original pen and ink drawing by Brother Cosmas for an upper pulpit. Showing his expertise in draughtsmanship, the drawing not only renders the upper pulpit in full detail but includes a measurement scale and cross-section detailing how the pulpit would be constructed. Also shown is a small statue of St. Anthony with the Christ Child. It was likely made by a lay brother training in the studio of Brother Cosmas either in Covington or at St. Vincent. Though unfinished, the statue offers valuable insight into the carving process.

In addition to items directly related to Father Eberhard and Brother Cosmas, the exhibit features two other important items: a reliquary of St. Benedict and a Benedictine monk’s habit.

Numerous extant documents in the St. Vincent Archives reveal that Abbot Wimmer authenticated numerous relics in the 1870s. The reliquary on view houses a 1st class relic of St. Benedict and bears Wimmer’s wax seal, thus authenticating the relic for veneration and devotion.

A Benedictine Monk Habit from the 1980s forms the centerpiece of the exhibit. Cut from the same pattern since 1846, St. Vincent’s habits and those of her daughter-houses (the American-Cassinese Congregation) feature a unique button which connects the hood to the scapular. Tradition holds that during the Napoleonic Suppression which swept Europe in the 1800s, the button allowed monks to quickly detach their hoods so they could easily blend into society and avoid persecution.

Each of the four parts of the habit is highly symbolic: the tunic (robe) reminds the monk he is wrapped in humility; the belt symbolizes a continual conversion of life; the shoulder scapular reminds the monk that he bears the yoke of Christ; and the cowl (hood) reminds the monk he is called to turn away from worldly distractions. Each piece is black, evoking humility as it is the dark color of earth.

Father Jordan Hainsey is administrative assistant to the Bishop and custos of the Holy Relics, Diocese of Covington, Ky. He is also a Benedictine



Benedictine Oblates — St. Cosmas Deanery

Come and See inaugural gathering

Saturday, Feb. 25, 10 a.m.

Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington

Benedictines in Covington

An exhibit honoring the Benedictine legacy, on view

Feb. 11 to March 31, 2023 in the Maes Crypt Chapel, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption.

The Cathedral’s open hours are Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–3 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Mass, and Sunday, 11:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Mass.

For information on the Benedictine Oblates or the exhibit visit CovOblates.org.

the 19th century — while the surplice is made of net lace featuring crocheted lace at the hem, sleeves, and neckline. All the vestments have been impeccably preserved and cared for.

The exhibit also shows artifacts related to Brother Cosmas Wolf, O.S.B. Bavarian-born Johann Cosmas came to America to pursue monastic life at St. Vincent as a lay brother in 1853, taking the name Cosmas after the early 3rd century martyr. Recognizing his artistic aptitude, Abbot Boniface Wimmer sent him to study at the Royal Academy of Art in Munich under the sculptor Johann Nepomuk Petz (1818–1880).

Heavily influenced by the Neo-Gothic and Nazarene stylings for which his teacher Petz was widely noted, Brother Cosmas’ rigorous apprenticeship prepared him for analogous work upon his return to America. In 1862, Brother Cosmas established the Catholic Altar Building Stock Company

(left top) The Benedictines in Covington exhibit features, a reliquary housing a first class relic of St. Benedict and statue of St. Anthony with the Christ Child made at Brother Cosmas studio.

(left center) Chasuble featuring a Eucharistic Pelican of exquisite gold bullion with impeccable stump work that would have been used by Father Gahr.

(left bottom) A period cassock and surplice that would have been worn by a young altar server.

(left) A Benedictine Monk Habit from the 1980s with a detachable hood.

Father Gerald B. Witzemann remembered for his love of community, family and friends

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Father Gerald B. Witzemann was born July 19, 1934, to Clifford and Viola (Henke) Witzmann of St. Bernard, Ohio. He was the youngest of three children; his older sisters are Verna and Janet.

He attended St. Clement School, St. Bernard, Ohio, before leaving to pursue his secondary education and a vocation to the priesthood at St. Francis Seminary in Mt. Healthy, Ohio. Following such, he would attend college at St. Anthony Friary in Mt. Airy, Ohio, before being ordained into the Franciscan Order by Most Rev. Rembert Kowalski, O.F.M., at St. Leonary College in Dayton, Ohio, June 13, 1961.

Father Witzemann would also study philosophy at Duns Scotus College in Southfield, Michigan and Holy Name College in Oldenburg, Indiana; as well as theology at St. Leonard College, Dayton, Ohio.

On July 7, 1978, Father Gerald Witzemann would be incardinated as a priest in the Diocese of Covington.

Father Witzemann cared deeply for his family and parish communities, serving as pastor for multiple parish-



Father Gerald B. Witzemann

es across the Diocese of Covington throughout his tenure. His first assignment following his incardination would be as pastor at Corpus Christi Church in Newport, Ky., though he also had served as associate pastor at Good Shepherd Church in Frankfort and St. Pius X Church in Edgewood prior.

During his time with the diocese, Father Witzemann would also serve as associate pastor for St. Paul Church, Florence; pastor for St. Joseph Church in Warsaw and St. Edward Mission in Owenton, as contact for Rural Life Ministry, and finally pastor for St. Patrick Church, Taylor Mill, before his initial retirement in 2000.

In 2003, Father Witzemann would partially resume duties as Parochial Administrator for St. Joseph, Warsaw and St. Edward Mission, Owenton, before retiring fully in 2019.

As a diocesan priest, Father Witzemann would spend holidays with his family: his sisters, nieces and nephews. According to nephew Randy Lakes, Father Witzemann took an interest in ceramics, and would often make handmade gifts for family members.

In his later years, Father Witzemann would also enjoy

gardening via vegetable gardens, planting tomatoes, peppers and potatoes. “Last year, I remember he had like over 80 or so pots filled with various vegetables that he used in cooking: he loved to cook, he was a good cook,” said Mr. Lakes. “It was simple, but his mother was a good cook. He learned from there.”

Father Witzemann would also frequently visit former parishioners and friends. “He did love being priest, and he loved going out in the community,” said Mr. Lakes. Janet Lee Roth, Father Witzemann’s sister, mentions that families would visit him frequently near the end of his life, as well, in hospice.

“People came in to see him, and would say how he married and baptized all of their kids — and now had baptized their grandkids. It was funny to hear because so many of the families had 10 or 12 children, and he married and baptized them all,” said Mrs. Roth.

Wherever he went as a priest, Father Witzemann would identify problems in his community and work to correct them. “He would work with them for social action to alleviate that problem or that issue,” Mr. Lakes said. “He was pretty gentle. I don’t know if I’ve ever seen him mad at anybody.”

After a period in hospice, Father Witzemann died Feb. 5, 2023. He is preceeded in death by his parents and sister, Verna Lakes, and survived by his sister Janet Lee Roth, nieces and nephews.

A memorial Mass in his memory will be held at 11 a.m. on Feb. 24 at St. Clement Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. His family will accept mourners beginning at 10 a.m. Per Father Witzemann’s request, his body will be donated to the University of Cincinnati Medical Center for medical research.

Memorials suggested to FriarWorks, 1615 Vine Street, Cincinnati, Ohio, or to St. Joseph Church, P.O. Box 492, Warsaw, Kentucky — Fr. Gerry Fund.



Diocese welcomes two Rosarian priests

Bishop John Iffert welcomed two Rosarian priests — Father George Mathew and Father Susairaj Jesurajan — who have come to join the Rosarian Monastery, Melbourne. Pictured (from left) are: Rosarian Father Anil Baa; Father Mathew; Bishop Iffert; Rosarian Father Berdinand Nicholas, superior; and Father Jesurajan.

Girl’s comment saved ‘I Am the Bread of Life’ song from trash bin

Mark Pattison
OSV News

An unsolicited comment from a high school girl kept one of the most popular hymns of the Second Vatican Council era, “I Am the Bread of Life,” from meeting an untimely fate.

Mercy Sister Suzanne Toolan, who composed the song, said she had been asked to write a song for an event in the Archdiocese of San Francisco — possibly a eucharistic event, she recalled —and was writing on deadline.

At the Catholic girls’ high school in California where she was teaching in 1966, Sister Suzanne used an unoccupied room next to the school infirmary to finish what became “I Am the Bread of Life.”

“I worked on it, and I tore it up. I thought, ‘This will not do,’” she told



Mercy Sister Suzanne Toolan

Catholic News Service in a 2007 telephone interview from her order’s convent in Burlingame, Calif. “And this little girl came out of the infirmary and said, ‘What was that? That was beautiful!’ I went right back and Scotch-taped it up.”

The rest, as they say, is history.

“I Am the Bread of Life” is not only in all manner of Catholic hymnals, but also is in the official hymnbooks of the Episcopal, Lutheran and Methodist churches.

“It always gives me joy when someone tells me that ‘I Am the Bread of Life’ gave them comfort in times of loss,” said Sister Suzanne.

Today, Sister Suzanne is 95 years old, living at Marian Oaks Mercy Assisted Living facility in Burlingame. “It is such a beautiful place and I am so blest to be here,” Sister Suzanne said.

The Messenger contributed to this story



Bishop’s Schedule

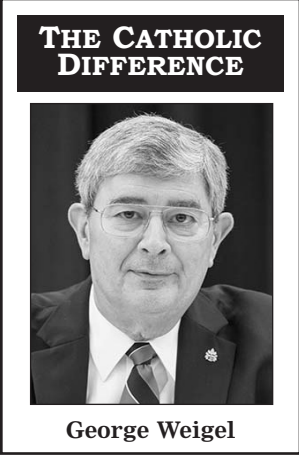
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| Feb. 18
Vigil Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 4:30 p.m. | Feb. 22
Ash Wednesday Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 10 a.m. |
| Feb. 19
Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 10 a.m. | Feb. 24
Mass, St. Timothy School, Union, 8 a.m. |
| Feb. 20
President Day holiday — Curia offices closed | Feb. 25-26
DPAA pre-announcement weekend |
| Confirmation, St. Joseph Parish, Warsaw and St. Edward Mission, Owenton, held at St. Joseph Parish, 7 p.m. | Vigil Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 4:30 p.m. |
| Feb. 21
Advisory Council meeting, 9:30 a.m. | Feb. 26
Rite of Election, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 2 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. |
| Priest Formation Day, St. Joseph Heights, Park Hills, 10 a.m. | |
| Confirmation, St. Edward Parish, Cynthia, 7 p.m. | |

Correction

In the Feb. 3 edition of the *Messenger*, the article “World Youth Day 2023 — millions of Catholics gather in Lisbon, Portugal,” a pilgrim was misrepresented. Amy Fathman is a nurse practitioner at St. Elizabeth Physicians (not UC Medical Center) in the newly established department of Natural Restorative Reproductive Health, a FEMM certified medical provider and associate professor — clinical at the University of Cincinnati College of Nursing. The *Messenger* apologizes for the error.

Memo to Gen Z Catholics: Why Vatican II is still important

Adam Lucas, who is “newly married with a baby on the way” (mazel tov!) and “has a Master’s in Theology,” speaks for a depressing number of Gen Z Catholics when he writes on the Crisis website that “the world of the 1960s is gone, and with it any real relevance of Vatican II.” The Council, he concludes, should just be ignored: “After all, *aggiornamento* demands it.”



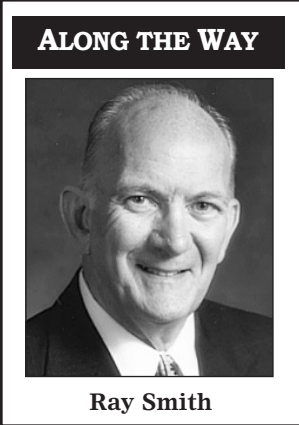
This is so mind-numbingly wrongheaded that one hardly knows where to start in responding to it. Mr. Lucas’s lament seems to be the result of a number of blogosphere contentions about the Council, ignited by two Ross Douthat op-eds in the *New York Times*. I hope I won’t be thought excessively self-referential, however; if I note that Mr. Lucas fails to mention my recent book, “To Sanctify the World: The Vital Legacy of Vatican II,” which is being read by large numbers of Gen Z seminarians and students. These men and women seem to find the book helpful in understanding why Vatican II was necessary, what the Council actually taught (wholly unremarked in Mr. Lucas’s article), and how Vatican II was given its authoritative interpretation by two men of the Council — Karol Wojtyła and Joseph Ratzinger — in their Petrine ministries as Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. Perhaps Mr. Lucas should also have a go — and before

that baby arrives, after which he will get very little sleep for a while. But in case he doesn’t get around to the book, let me briefly outline why Vatican II, far from lacking “any real relevance” today, is utterly relevant to the chief contentions of the moment. What is the bottom-line issue in the Catholic conflict over “synodality”? The bottom line, whether in Germany or in preparations for the World Synod of Bishops in October 2023, is whether divine revelation is real and has binding authority over time. The most vociferous proponents of “synodality,” like Cardinals Hollerich and McElroy, seem to think not; they imagine that our contemporary experience judges, and corrects, what we have been taught by Scripture and the Great Tradition of the Church. Vatican II’s “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,” “*Dei Verbum*,” robustly affirms that God has spoken into history, first to the People of Israel and then definitively in the person of the Incarnate Word. Do we know better than God about what makes for human flourishing and beatitude? The Council says “No.” Score one for Vatican II. What is the bottom-line issue in the culture war afflicting western culture across the globe? The bottom of that bottom line is whether human beings are really just bundles of desires, all of which are morally equal and should be acknowledged as legitimate in the name of human rights. By contrast, Vatican II’s “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” (“*Gaudium et Spes*”) taught that the truth about our humanity is revealed in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. In Christ, we learn that we are creatures of a

much nobler nature and destiny, and that self-giving, not self-assertion, is freedom lived in a truly human way. Score another one for Vatican II. Where do we find answers to post-modernity’s quest for authentic human community? Wokery is a world of silos in which race-mania, “gender identity,” and “isms” of all sorts are somehow supposed to foster living in solidarity. Vatican II’s “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church” (“*Lumen Gentium*”) teaches that the Church, in which “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28) is the template (the “sacrament,” as the Council put it) of authentic human community, the experience of which can lead to building solidarity in society. Score yet another one for Vatican II. How does the West rebuild the shattered foundations of its culture? Vatican II, as authentically interpreted by John Paul II and Benedict XVI, teaches that a great awakening to the truths on which our civilization was built will come through a New Evangelization, in which every Catholic (as affirmed by “*Lumen Gentium*” and by the Council’s Decree on the “Apostolate of the Laity”, “*Apostolicam Actuositatem*”) understands himself or herself to have been baptized into a missionary vocation, bringing others to friendship with Jesus Christ. Game, set, and match to Vatican II. Dear Gen Z brethren: Please stop confusing the blogosphere with reality, and please read what Vatican II actually taught. You’ll find more “relevance” than you imagine — or that any of us can deploy in a lifetime. *George Weigel is a senior fellow of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C. His column “The Catholic Difference” is syndicated by the Denver Catholic, the official publication of the Archdiocese of Denver.*

What’s your definition of Lent?

Somewhere along the way, about two minutes ago, I looked up the word, “Lent,” in a World Book dictionary. I found the definition to be less than impressive or inspiring, that is, “the 40 weekdays between Ash Wednesday and Easter, observed in many Christian churches as a time for fasting and repenting of sins; Quadragesima ... the first Sunday of Lent.” Please trust me, and don’t yawn, there’s far more to it than that! Not now, but sometime during the next few days — you pick the right time — try to expand that definition of Lent in your own words. Draw from past experiences and from what you are experiencing as a Christian right now. Define it in a prayer or in series of words that come to mind, one after another. For example, acceptance of the here and now, sacrifice, silence, sorry, giving, grace, appreciation, loving, caring, seeking, fear, indecision, pain, sin, patience, stubbornness and by all means, forgiveness. Don’t let me put words in your mind or in your personal notes. It’s a love task for you and the Holy Spirit. What needs work in your life right now? What nagging habit or doubt or destructive attitude has crept in that you would love to see dash out? That might well be answered in the spontaneous words that travel from your mind to pen or keyboard. Don’t be discouraged if nothing gets on your page at the first sitting or during that first



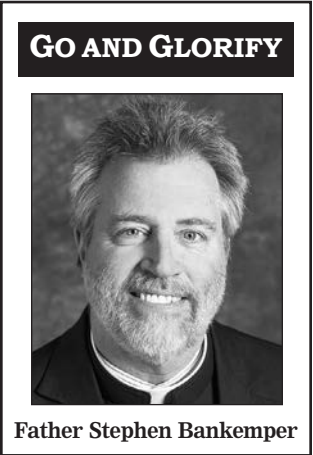
walk you take with a handy notepad. If something comes to mind while driving, please pull over to a safe spot before trying to write it down or to record it. Heaven can wait. Is there someone you know, stranger or loved one, who needs your prayers or a smile or a helping hand right now? Is there a bitter grudge or a seemingly unforgettable disagreement with someone that never has been resolved or settled peacefully that weighs heavier and heavier each day? Is it time for a special reconciliation that is long overdue? Some years ago, a dear friend’s father had endured three heart attacks in short order. His life was in danger. Daughter and father had been estranged and out of touch for six long years. Eventually, during Lent, that daughter regretted that it took a serious health threat for her to take the first step toward their reunion and to what turned out to be a fruitful reconciliation for both who reunited and gave thanks for their renewed love and relief. This year, our celebrant’s homily the week before Ash Wednesday challenged us to be fortified by the Mass’s readings, while also urging each of us to become and remain a “light of the world.” The daily disappointing, disturbing and devastating news of wanton murders anywhere and everywhere, violent destruction of property, theft, street beatings, violent attacks in classrooms, on playgrounds and in school buses. The constant display of cruelty and brutality could not be more discouraging, he expounded. Yesterday on the news, I saw two young boys, cheered on by classmates, viciously attack a nine-year-old girl, using her for a punching bag, loudly encouraged by both sexes, believe it or not.

The beauty of Lent is that it can work wonders, but it needs our attention and cooperation, the sooner the better, because as you probably have noticed, it arrives quickly and flies away just when we are about to get “into it.” Are you, no doubt, too busy with life and responsibilities to make the effort this time around? Of course! Is that a legitimate excuse to pass up this simple exercise this Lent? No. Need a little help, a nudge? Life happens. All struggle. Thomas Merton once prompted my Lentercize with this unconditional surrender in his beautiful and unique self-examination, “Thoughts In Solitude”: “My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust in you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and will never leave me to face my perils alone.” The time is now, dear reader and friend — for you are the light of the world. *Ray Smith is a commissioned Lay Pastoral Minister for the Diocese of Covington.*

What makes you holy?

The readings for the seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle A — are: **Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18; 1 Corinthians 3:16-23 and Matthew 5:38-48.**

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Speak to the whole Israelite community and tell them: Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy.’”



What does it mean to be holy? Since God commands it, we must be able to become holy, but how does one become holy? What does it mean that God is holy? What does it mean that God uses as a reason for our being holy that He is holy? There is, obviously, not enough space in a short article to treat these questions exhaustively, but we can lay the groundwork for a better understanding of holiness, what it means

for us to be holy, and how we can become holy.

Let us begin with the holiness of God. The Catechism gives us this profound sentence: “The holiness of God is the inaccessible center of his eternal mystery.” In other words, the holiness of God is who God is. That may seem as helpful as God telling Moses that his name is “I am that I am,” but it does, actually, tell us something fundamentally important: holiness comes from the center of who God is, and being “inaccessible,” holiness is not something that we can achieve on our own. We could call this the First Principle of Holiness: All holiness comes from God, who alone is holy. As we pray in Eucharistic Prayer II, “You are indeed Holy, O Lord, the fount of all holiness.”

This is the holiness of God. What about our holiness? To understand something about this, let us first understand what the word “holy” means. The Hebrew word for “holy” is “kodesh,” one of whose root meanings is “set apart” or “separate.” One of the meanings of the creation stories in Genesis is that God, being the one who created the world, is not part of the world, and even though is intimately involved in the world, yet stands apart from it, “separate.” For us to be holy, therefore, means to belong, not to the world, but to God.

This belonging to God comes about first by God’s choice and action. This is illustrated in other verses from Leviticus: “Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy; and I have set you apart from the people to be Mine.” (Lev 20:26) “For I am the Lord who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy.” (Lev 11:45) Thus, our Second Principle of Holiness follows closely on the first: Since all holiness comes from God, only God makes someone/something holy.


We do participate, however, in the process of becoming holy. God brought Israel up from the land of Egypt to be a people of “his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth” (Deut 14:2), but then had to teach them how to be His people. While to us the laws given in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, for example, seem to be one prohibition after another, they are God’s direction of how to remain dedicated to him. What seem to us to be arbitrary prohibitions are God’s way of saying, these things take you away from me, they make you unclean, unfit for the purpose I called you to fulfill. This could be our Third Principle of Holiness: We cannot make ourselves holy, but our actions open us to grow in holiness, or cause us to lose holiness.

We have been looking at Old Testament passages; what of us? Our being chosen came at our baptism. Baptism consecrates us to God through Jesus; that is why (and when) we are called Christian. From that moment on, we are called to belong to God and not to the world. The words Jesus spoke to his apostles come to us as well: “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before

Received in the Image of God

Reflecting over the past few months on the many ministries offered at Catholic Charities and the increase in services being provided, I am amazed by all the ways that we have assisted others in need. Even more, I am pleased and amazed by how many volunteers share their gifts of time, talent and treasure to accompany us in serving others in these beautiful exchanges of love of neighbor. I am humbled and grateful for these many “angels among us.”

These reflections have caused me to ponder: Why do we do what we do?



Alan Pickett

Where did the call to serve come from? What is our inspiration to serve others in our Catholic Charities ministry? And why are so many others attracted to join us in serving our neighbor? We know from the Catechism that our hearts are stamped with the call to evangelize from our baptism.

Going further, we may be inspired to follow the two greatest commandments: “You shall love the Lord your

God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” (Luke 10:27) Or, we may be following these commandments and do this work out of obedience. However, I believe that we may be most motivated to share this love with others when we recognize how much God loves us.

So, how do we experience God’s love for us? How do you know God’s love? I believe that one way we know the love of the Father is by becoming more aware of the way he created us. He created us in his image, out of love. Male and female he created us. And our dignity and identity are received as a free gift from God.

Recognizing that our image is received as a free gift from God, we may start to realize that our neighbor is also created in the same image of God. And as we see others more like ourselves — in the image of God — we are more likely to treat our neighbor with the dignity and respect that we have already received. I could even love the person whom I do not like or do not know.

Let us hold close to our heart this image of ourselves as in the image of God so that we don’t let the world try to inscribe our own imperfect image into what God has created. What an awesome gift!

Alan Pickett is executive director for Catholic Charities, Diocese of Covington, Ky

Wide views and new encounters

My company recently moved from the suburbs to the fifth floor of a building in downtown Cincinnati. The windows are tall and provide expansive views that include



Sister Kimberly Porter

downtown buildings, green hillsides leading up to Mt. Adams and the traffic on I-71. On foggy days it can feel a bit surreal as buildings peak through the dense fog.

In addition to the new views I am encountering different people and things on my drive to the office. I journey through the streets of downtown taking in the variety of buildings and all the people going about their morning routine — their

pace as diverse as each of them. One of the more interesting commutes home involved a detour around a movie set.

The wide views and new encounters invite me into a different way of interacting with the world. I’m taking time for a wider perspective — both, literally and in my way of processing — amidst the details of the daily. The

texture, sounds, color and movement of my new surroundings awaken my senses. Gratitude fills me for the little things such as the wave of thanks when pausing for a pedestrian, a laugh with a co-worker, or getting all green lights through downtown. It also invites me to reflect on the bittersweet nature of change which holds both blessing and challenge.

We will soon be entering into the season of Lent, which invites us to interact in a different way with the world. It is a time when we are invited to choose practices that make more space for God and for others. We are invited open our hearts to wider perspectives and new encounters.

Our senses can be alert in the midst of barrenness and absence. Perhaps it is also a time for gratitude for the shared journey and steps toward transformation. In my experience, it can also be a challenging time where I have to practice self-compassion to stay with the journey of transformation through Lent.

May we each journey forward with openness and grace, allowing our hearts and perspectives to be transformed.

Sister Kimberly Porter is a professed member of the Benedictine Sisters of St. Walburg Monastery, Villa Hills, Ky. Her reflection is from the community’s blogspot “School for the Lord’s Service.

it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” (John 15:18-19)

An image we might use to illustrate how we become holy is how the sun darkens our skin. We are not the source of the ultraviolet rays, but we “cooperate” with the sun by exposing ourselves to it, or not, by blocking the sun’s rays. We cooperate with the process of God making us holy by our acts of charity and the practice of our religion; we resist or block the process by living for ourselves and by our sin.

We should not leave this discussion without at least a mention of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. How merciful is God, who gives us a way to return to our baptismal holiness when we have compromised it with our venial

sins, or even ruined it with mortal sin.

The word we can use for the process of becoming holy is conversion. As we come to think like God thinks, so to speak, value what God values, love what God loves, act as God acts, we open ourselves more and more to receive the holiness God wants to give us.

What is beautiful is that we do not have to guess about these things. Not only do we have Scripture and Church teaching, we have the life and words of Jesus, and the sacraments of the Church. We can surely say with Baruch, “Happy are we ... for we know what is pleasing to God.” (Bar 4:4) In other words, we know what will bring us to holiness.

Father Stephen Bankemper is pastor, St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Ft. Thomas, Ky

We Choose Life



Pro-Life Office

of the Diocese of Covington

Mission Statement

The Pro-Life Office of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington, guided by our bishop, promotes the sanctity and legal protection of human life from conception to natural death through prayer, pastoral care, public policy and education.

How to help mothers choose life

For years, networks of pro-life groups have been strengthening social safety nets by engaging more churches, voluntary organizations and private donors. Yet state government budgets lag, with only piecemeal protections for motherhood and families.

Texas stands alone. Since 2006 its A2A (Alternatives to Abortion) program has been a model of well-crafted, well-funded (\$100 million last year), effective pro-life, pro-family health and human services legislation. Its contracted partners arrange material assistance and access to daycare, Medicaid, home healthcare, housing, maternity homes and training in life skills and job readiness. As a funded subcontractor, Catholic Charities of Dallas provides, for example, food pantries, bilingual parenting classes and baby items.

Who is eligible? Parent services extend up to three years post-partum; 90 days after loss of a child; two years post-adoption; and to legal guardians of minors.

This is what wraparound care can look like when citizens demand adequate care for vulnerable women and families and their state leadership deliberately chooses life.

The We Choose Life Committee

Abortion or motherhood? Just ask Louise

Laura Strietmann
Contributor

One beautiful Sunday last fall, walking down Auburn Ave. in Cincinnati toward the closing ceremony of the 40 Days for Life prayer vigil, I thought I heard a far-off voice calling my name. I looked up, but no one caught my eye. It happened again, several times — then suddenly a car pulled over near me, right into the driveway of Planned Parenthood. The driver had spotted me and gone back and forth, shouting my name out her window. Now she hollered again, “Laura!” and jumped out to unbuckle her young son before rushing over with a big hug for me.

Wow! Louise and I had once been extremely close, connected through the pregnancy center where I helped as she struggled with a series of pregnancies and a mountain of challenges. I had seen her tears after she chose abortion, her strength as she gave a child in adoption, and her pride and joy at the birth of this very child — a precious son. We had not seen each other in years. Now, in front of Planned Parenthood, we hugged, laughed and shared happy tears.

Her boy was a little confused by all the emotion on the sidewalk, until Louise explained, “This is the lady that helped me when I was pregnant with you.” She told me that she could now care for her son independently, and that she was working full-time at a great job. What a gift it was to reunite. I felt so proud of Louise’s success.

As I introduced Louise to some of the people attending the prayer ceremony, she could not stop expressing her thanks. She was grateful for getting years of help from the pregnancy center. She was grateful she and I had become so close. And she was still amazed and delighted that so many of my personal friends had helped her out, too. Her cry of “Laura!” brought me truly good news, and I will never forget her son’s smiling face.

Louise’s life stands in stark contrast to the loud demands we all hear to “Shout your abortion.” In the months since Dobbs removed federal protection of abortion, dishonest rhetoric has monopolized news headlines, airwaves and social media, while the push to enshrine elective abortion in state constitutions — with few or no restrictions — is powerful and growing.

We have all heard the lies:

— Pro-lifers are only pro-birth and stop helping once the baby is born.”

False! Just ask Louise. How many of you help with baby bottle drives and baby showers, support a local pregnancy and family resource center or assist with programs for family counseling and housing? You know how fake this claim is.

— “There are not enough people to adopt more babies, and the foster care system is filled already.”



Laura Strietmann

False! Just ask Louise. Newborn adoption is entirely different from state custody in foster care, and all 50 states have waiting lists for adoption. The lists are long because even in difficult circumstances, like Louise faced, most women want to raise their babies.

— “Having a baby will keep a woman from living her dreams.”

False! Just ask Louise. Countless women find satisfaction in raising children full-time. Others work outside the home by choice or necessity without sacrificing motherhood. Babies and dreams go well together. Think of Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett, mother of seven — two of them adopted.

— “Our states don’t have the resources to handle more babies.”

False! Just ask Louise. Choosing life empowers women for success, and with proper support they can move on to provide for their families. Instead of relying on charity groups, state budgets can and should prioritize families and help women succeed. Then again, who says only poor women have unexpected pregnancies? Surprise pregnancies have no socioeconomic boundary, and not every single mom needs wel-

fare.

— “Abortion is healthcare.”

False! Just ask Louise. She knows that the sole purpose of abortion is to end a life. She also knows how much abortion harms the mother. Healing is the purpose of true healthcare, but no disease is treated, nothing is cured and nothing is solved by abortion.

The list goes on. All these excuses for abortion are fundamentally anti-woman. They demean motherhood. They deny the inherent nature and dignity of women. And they have taught generations of girls to scorn fertility and accept the destruction of babies as the price of success in life.

How can we counter all the pro-abortion lies? By focusing first on the truth: Jesus. He is our path to victory in protecting life and upholding human dignity. He is our path to changing the culture. Jesus left us his Church to be the voice of truth and distributor of the sacraments, and it is only through his truth and grace that we will find the strength and conviction to do his will by defending life.

Kentucky, like many states, has life-and-death battles coming up in the courts and legislatures. As we press forward toward legal protection of all lives, we must also work locally to help others see through the lies. One way is to tell stories like Louise’s. Her joy can reassure a desperate woman or sow the seeds of a post-abortion healing. May we persevere prayerfully on the path to victory — through Jesus and through one heart and mind at a time.

Laura Strietmann is executive director of Cincinnati Right to Life and has served women in untimely pregnancies for 15 years.

Alternatives to Abortion in Texas

A2A is designed to:

- Reduce abortions and improve pregnancy outcomes by helping women practice sound health-related behaviors and improve prenatal nutrition;
 - Improve child health and development by helping parents provide responsible and competent care for their children; and
 - Improve families’ economic self-sufficiency by helping parents continue their education and secure employment.
- From the 2022 A2A Report

For more information about the Pro-Life Office or to be added to our e-mail newsgroups, visit us online at www.covdio.org/prolife/ or call (859) 392-1500.

Bishop Iffert blesses three new bells for Our Lady of Lourdes Parish

Laura Keener
Editor

On the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, Feb. 11, Bishop John Iffert joined Missionary of St. John the Baptist Fathers Shannon Collins, pastor, and Sean Kopczynski, at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Ft. Wright, for the blessing and dedication of new bells. The three bells were cast by the Verdin Bell Company, Cincinnati, in Belgium at the same foundry and in the same style that the parish’s three original bells cast in 1964.

The bells are of three different sizes. The largest bell is dedicated to St. John the Baptist, patron of the missionary Fathers who serve the parish. Our Lady of Lourdes is the Diocese’s only Personal Parish and is home to the Traditional Latin Mass. The Missionaries of St. John the Baptist, likewise, serve in particular those attached to the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite.

The second largest bell is dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene and the smallest bell is dedicated to St. Bernadette. As a teenager, the would-be saint Bernadette Soubirous had a series of visions of the Virgin Mary in the Massabielle Grotto in Lourdes, France, which became the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes.

Father Collins led the congregation in the praying of several Psalms before the blessing of the bells. During the blessing and dedication, Bishop Iffert prayed, “...that these bells, destined for your holy Church, may be hallowed by the Holy Spirit ... so that when they are tolled and rung the faithful may be invited to the house of God and to the everlasting recompense. Let the people’s faith and piety wax stronger whenever they hear their melodious peals.”

These three new bells join the three existing bells in the recently restored bell tower at Our Lady of Lourdes Church. Father Collins said that with the additional three bells the parish will now be able to play the Lourdes Hymn, “Ave, Ave, Ave, Maria,” every hour, on the hour.

Currently, Verdin Bell Company is engraving the names on each of the bells. The work is expected to be complete in about three weeks, at which time arrangements will be made to install the bells in their home — the bell tower at Our Lady of Lourdes Church.



(above) Bishop John Iffert lifts his arms as he blesses the newly cast bells at Our Lady of Lourdes Personal Parish, Park Hills, Feb. 11.
(right) After the blessing and sprinkling, Bishop Iffert anoints each bell with oil.



Keener photos



(far left) Father Shannon Collins, pastor, (right) leads the praying of several Psalms before the blessing, while Father Sean Kopczynski looks on.

(left) The three new bells will join three existing bells in the parish’s bell tower. The bells are dedicated to (from left) St. Bernadette, St. Mary Magdalene and St. John the Baptist.

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Fourth Prize

Drawing to be held March 18 at 6:30 p.m. (EST) at our Centennial Celebration Event at Blessed Sacrament Undercroft, 2407 Dixie Highway, Fort Mitchell, KY 41017.
Live on our Facebook page @SVDPNorthernKentucky.

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The Office of Catechesis and Evangelization invites teens to join the 2023 NCYC: “Fully Alive” conference, Nov. 16-18, at the Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis.

What is NCYC?

National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) is the largest Catholic Youth gathering in the United States with over 25,000 young people, clergy, religious, and adult chaperones attending from all over the country. It is a unique three-day experience of prayer, community, evangelization, catechesis, service and empowerment for Catholic teens and their adult chaperones.

What to expect at NCYC

Hear inspiring Catholic speakers, attend Mass with thousands of teens, and participate in reconciliation and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Enjoy praise and worship music led by award-winning artists and experience interactive exhibits with games, crafts, obstacle courses and more.

Where will we stay?

We will stay at the Country Inn & Suites by Radisson, 5630 Flight School Dr., Indianapolis. It is a 15-minute drive from the hotel to the Indianapolis Convention Center and Lucas Oil Stadium. NCYC small group discussion sessions will be held in the Convention Center, whereas the major general sessions will be held in Lucas Oil Stadium.

How do we get there and back?

The Diocese will arrange for coach bus transportation to and from Indianapolis. Buses will pick up groups at St. Joseph Church, Crescent Springs, departing very early on Thursday morning and travel approximately 2 hours directly to the hotel. Return home departure will be Saturday evening, arriving at St. Joseph Church by Sunday morning around 2 a.m. A detailed travel itinerary will be provided later.

How much does it cost?

The overall trip cost, which includes Conference registration (set by NCYC), transportation, lodging and gratuity will range (based on when you submit your initial payment) between \$545-\$590. There are four NCYC registration options based on when participants submit their deposits:

Early Bird Registration — ended Feb. 15.

Regular Registration

Group deposit \$280 per person is due to the Diocese by Tuesday, March 28.

Installment payment schedule due to Diocese:

Friday, April 29, \$100 per person.

Tuesday, May 30, \$100 per person.

Wednesday, June 28, \$80 per person.

Total Regular event package is \$560.

Late Registration

Group deposit \$295 per person due to the diocese by Tuesday, May 30.

Installment payment schedule due to Diocese:

Wednesday, June 28, \$100 per person.

Wednesday, July 26, \$180 per person.

Total Late event package is \$575.

Late, Late Registration

Event package is \$590 per person due to the Diocese by Friday, Sept. 1.

Note: payments to the diocese are made by parishes or groups taking participants. Participants will individually pay their parish, school or group. If parishes want to charge a deposit less than \$265 per person by Feb. 15, they are welcome to do so but the group will still be responsible for submitting full deposit amounts to the Diocese. Conference tickets are non-refundable

For additional information, contact Isaak A. Isaak at (859) 392-1529 or iisaak@covdio.org.



(above) Students from Bishop Brossart High School on the bus to NCYC in 2021. The biennial event held in Indianapolis gathers thousands of teens from around the country for a unique experience of prayer, community, evangelization, catechesis and service.

(below) A man raises his arms in praise at a former NCYC event.



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PEOPLE AND EVENTS



Thank you, Father!

During Catholic Schools Week, students at St. Henry School, Elsmere, invited Father Joshua Lange and Father John Sterling over for lunch, to thank them for their service and to learn more about vocations.

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

Holy Cross High School 25th annual Mulch Sale, selling 3 kinds of mulch and pine straw, includes delivery to your home, business or rental property anywhere in Kenton, Boone and Campbell Counties and students will put it anywhere on your property, starting April 1. Order online at www.hcmulch.com or call (859) 392-8999.

Thomas More University art exhibit “Ibon is Bird” by local artist John Lanzador, Feb. 16–March 9, Eva G. Farris Art Gallery. Gallery talk, 3:30–4 p.m. and opening reception, 4–7 p.m., Feb. 16. Free to the public; gallery is located in the Benedictine Library. Visit thomasmore.edu/artgallery.

32nd annual Mardi Gras for Homeless Children, Feb. 21, 6–9 p.m., NKY Convention Center, Covington. All you can eat food and drinks from dozens of local restaurants and vendors, live music, parade, local celebrities, live and silent auction prizes, and more. Tickets: \$100; VIP tickets \$120.



Catholic Schools celebrate parishioners

To kick off Catholic Schools Week, Holy Cross Parish had a student-led Mass. Students from Holy Cross Elementary greeted parishioners, were readers, took up the collection and passed out “Thank You” notes after Mass.

Kentucky history

(right) In their Social Studies class, third and fourth grade students at St. Anthony School, Taylor Mill, learned about Dr. Thomas Walker. Dr. Walker was not only a doctor but also an explorer. His expedition explored thousands of acres of land in western Kentucky. Near the river, which he named Cumberland, Walker built a cabin. The students made their lessons come to life, by building a replica of his cabin under the guidance of their teacher Mrs. Simon.



Saints Night — Admitted Student Preview, Feb. 22, 6–8 p.m., Mary, Seat of Wisdom Chapel, Thomas More University, Crestview Hills. Have you been admitted to Thomas More University for Fall 2023?

Congratulations! You’re invited to Saints Night, where prospective students check out the Saints community as they get ready for their college decision. RSVP at thomasmore.edu/preview.

Diocese of Covington **Regional Dual-Credit Information Night** presented by James Catchen, Feb. 23, 6-7:30 p.m., Thomas More University, Steigerwald Hall, Saints Center, Crestview Hills, for high school students (and their guardians), who would benefit from dual credit courses. During the presentation, attendees will hear from KHEAA on scholarship opportunities to pay for dual-credit courses as well as how dual-credit courses can impact students after high school. Dual-credit representatives from Thomas More, Gateway, and NKU on available dual-credit opportunities. Visit thomasmore.edu/preview.

St. Henry Parish, Elsmere, Men’s “Brews and Wild Game Night,” Feb. 25, after 4 p.m. Mass, in school cafeteria. Cost \$15, includes wild game dishes and craft beers.

“Put Out Into the Deep,” Lenten Mission with Msgr. William Cleves, St. Agnes Church, Ft. Wright, March 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29, 7–8 p.m. Each evening Msgr. Cleves will focus on a Scripture passage, followed by Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction. Confessions will be offered during Adoration.

The next **Marriage Encounter Weekend for spouses** will be held March 3–5, Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center, Cincinnati. For information contact Andy and Melanie Reindersman, (859) 653-8464, application@esharing.org , or visit esharing.org.

The Thomas More University Women’s Conference, March 3, 8:30 a.m.–2 p.m., Steigerwald Hall, Saints Center, Crestview Hills. This one-day, interactive conference is designed to enlighten, engage and challenge women to seek more within their careers. The Conference explores the topic of “Women Who Innovate” within different industries. This conference is geared for alumni, college students, faculty/staff, parents, high school students, and community members. Cost \$50. Reserve your space at tmuky.us/tmwc.

The Bishop Brossart Softball and Volleyball teams will host its 2nd annual Euchre Tournament, March 10, Hegenaur Hall, Alexandria. Doors open at 5:30 p.m.; tournament begins 7 p.m. Top prize is \$500. Cost \$25 per player (includes food, water and pop). Beer and wine will be available for purchase. Contact ckremer11@icloud.com to register or for more information.

Memorial Mass for the Loss of a Child, March 15, Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Burlington. This Mass is being offered for parents and family members who have lost a child through miscarriage, stillbirth, early infant death, abortion, suicide or any other reason. All are welcome. For information, contact the Diocese of Covington Pro-Life

Fish Frys

St. Benedict Parish, Covington, March 3, 17 and 31, 5–7 p.m.

St. Mary Parish, Alexandria, Feb. 24, March 3, 10, 17, 4–7:30 p.m.

All Fridays of Lent — Feb 24-Mar 31

Holy Cross District High School, Covington, 5–8 p.m.

Mary, Queen of Heaven Parish, Erlanger, 4–8 p.m.

St. Barbara Parish, Erlanger, 4:30–8 p.m.

St. Bernard Parish, Dayton, 5–7 p.m.

St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Ft. Thomas, 4:30–7:30 p.m.

St. Edward Parish, Cynthiana, 11 a.m.–1 p.m.; 5–7 p.m., (859)-298-5932

St. Francis Xavier Parish, Falmouth, Knights of Columbus, 4–7:30 p.m., (859) 321-9733

St. Joseph Academy, Walton, 4:30–8 p.m.

St. Joseph Parish, Camp Springs, 4–7:30 p.m.

St. Patrick Parish, Taylor Mill, 4:30–7:30 p.m.

St. William Parish, Williamstown, drive-thru only, 4:30–7 p.m.

Office at (859) 392-1545.

“The Book of Wisdom” a workshop hosted by the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization and presented by Father Timothy Schehr, March 18 and April 22, 9–11:30 a.m., at the Curia, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Covington. Father Schehr is a retired biblical scholar and former professor at Mount St. Mary’s School of Theology at the Athenaeum of Ohio. This book encourages readers to seek wisdom. But where do we begin such a search? Cost \$35. Register online <https://covdio.org/oce/catholic-bible-study/> or call (859) 392-1529.

The St. Cecilia Altar Society annual Spring Craft Bazaar, March 19, 9 a.m.–3 p.m. Table rental, call (859) 356-8235. Tables are \$35 for a 9’x9’ space, which includes a table and electricity (first come, first served).

Bishop Brossart High School, Alexandria, Art Gallery will host the Elementary School Art Show, March 19, noon-4; March 24 and 25, before, during and after the Senior Play; and March 26, noon-4.

Benedictines in Covington — revisiting history at Immaculate Conception Church at Stepstone

Father Jordan Hainsey
Contributor

In 1846, Abbot Boniface Wimmer, O.S.B., arrived in the United States from Metten Abbey, Bavaria, to establish St. Vincent Archabbey, the first Benedictine foundation in North America. Soon after in 1858, Covington’s first Bishop, George Aloysius Carrell, S.J., invited Wimmer to send Benedictines to Covington for the growing missionary needs of the Diocese.

Abbot Wimmer spared no cost in his generosity to Covington by sending his finest monks for missionary service. They included: Father Oswald Moosmueller, monastery prior and seminary rector; Father Emmeran Blummel, the first chaplain killed in action in any American battle (Civil War); Father Celestine Engelbrecht, monastery prior; Leander Schnerr, who would later become the third Archabbot of St. Vincent; and Father Luke Wimmer, the Abbot’s nephew. Among their ranks was Father Eberhard Gahr, a prolific American-pioneer priest, and Brother Cosmas Wolf, a master draftsman, sculptor and artisan.

On May 17, 1857, the then Brother Eberhard Gahr, a native of Bavaria, arrived in Newark, New Jersey, to help the developing community of St. Mary’s Abbey, a new Benedictine foundation of St. Vincent. Needing priests for the growing German-Catholic faithful, Newark’s first Bishop, James Roosevelt Bayley, quickly ordained Gahr to the subdiaconate, diaconate, and priesthood all within the course of a week.

Soon Gahr was called by Wimmer for ministry in Northern Kentucky. In 1868, Gahr arrived in the Diocese of Covington. Here, he served as pastor of St. Augustine Church, Augusta, for three years during which time he built the first rectory. A prolific missionary career eventually took him across the United States to new Benedictine foundations as far as Missouri, Minnesota and Texas. However, in 1900 at the age of 68, weary from years of missionary service, Gahr returned to the Diocese of Covington and became the resident pastor of Immaculate Conception Church at Stepstone in Butler, Ky.

Immaculate Conception Church is the oldest wood-frame church still in active use in the Diocese of Covington. Steeped in rich tradition, the Catholic community of Stepstone dates to the late-1840s and 1850s, when a large presence of Catholic immigrants from Ireland, Germany and France filled the river valley and surrounding hills of present-day Pendleton, Campbell and Bracken counties.

In the 1850s a log structure was erected on the property close to Stepstone Creek donated by Michael Faulhaber. The congregation and the new modest church became known as Immaculate Conception after the Church’s recent Marian Dogma (1854). As the faith blossomed, so, too, did the community and their need for a larger house of worship.

In 1861, the present church was built from lumber taken

(Continued on page 11)

from the 3-acre plot. Some logs were used as sills on top of a rock foundation while uniform cuts were sawed at the mill 1-mile up Stepstone Creek (now Highway 10). The former log structure became a school for the eight families in the parish and neighbors. During these years, the community was entirely dependent on early pioneer-priests who traveled on horseback.

In 1900, Father Eberhard Gahr returned to the Diocese of Covington and became Stepstone’s first and only resident pastor. There, he lived with a German family about half-a-mile from the church. For the next 22 years, he would serve the region’s immigrants spiritual and pastoral needs.

Sadly, as roads and transportation



(above) Father Eberhard Gahr, O.S.B. and the Community of Immaculate Conception Church at Stepstone, ca. 1910. Photo Courtesy of Ann Record.

(above right) Brother Cosmas Wolf, O.S.B. Read about him on page 2.

(right) Father Eberhard Gahr, O.S.B.



Benedictines in Covington

An exhibit honoring the Benedictine legacy, brings together important artifacts from the history of Immaculate Conception Church at Stepstone in California, Ky. (See related story page 2)

The exhibit is on view Feb. 11 to March 31, 2023, in the Maes Crypt Chapel, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington.

The Cathedral’s open hours are Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–3 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Mass, and Sunday, 11:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Mass.

For information on the Benedictine Oblates or the exhibit visit CovOblates.org.

(above) Bishop John Iffert visited Immaculate Conception Church at Stepstone, Jan. 29. Church Caretaker Ann Record is pictured at Bishop Iffert’s right. Friends of Stepstone and Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, California, joined to welcome Bishop Iffert.

improved, the families at Immaculate Conception were subsumed into Sts. Peter and Paul Parish on California Crossroads and the only liturgical services to be held at Stepstone Church would be the annual cemetery visitation and feast Day Mass.

That would not be the end of Stepstone’s story though. For years up until present day, descendants of the Faulhaber family have continued to preserve the tiny Immaculate Conception Church at Stepstone. For one to enter the little Church is to step into a place time has for-

gotten. A crucifix lovingly carried from Bavaria still hangs on the wall. Stencil work and angel murals still decorate the sanctuary. The sacristy remains replete as if Father Gahr was still ready to vest for Mass.

For years, Marvin Record served as the guardian of the tiny mission church, preserving, gathering, and organizing photos and archival material for future generations. In 2018, he passed away, being buried by the little church he loved so much. Soon though, his wife, Ann Record, took up the reigns. For her, cemetery maintenance, coordination efforts to firm up the church’s foundation, and the preservation of the church’s contents is not work, but a vocation of labor and love. “I just want to tell this Church and her peoples’ story” Mrs. Record says to anyone who asks.

Tours of the historic Immaculate Conception Church at Stepstone are by appointment only. For more information, visit: <https://parish.stspp.com/immaculate-conception-church>

To learn more about Benedictine men and women in the Diocese of Covington, or to become an Oblate, visit: CovOblates.org.

Father Jordan Hainsey is administrative assistant to the Bishop and custos of the Holy Relics, Diocese of Covington, Ky. He is also a Benedictine Oblate of the St. Cosmas Deanery, Covington, Ky.

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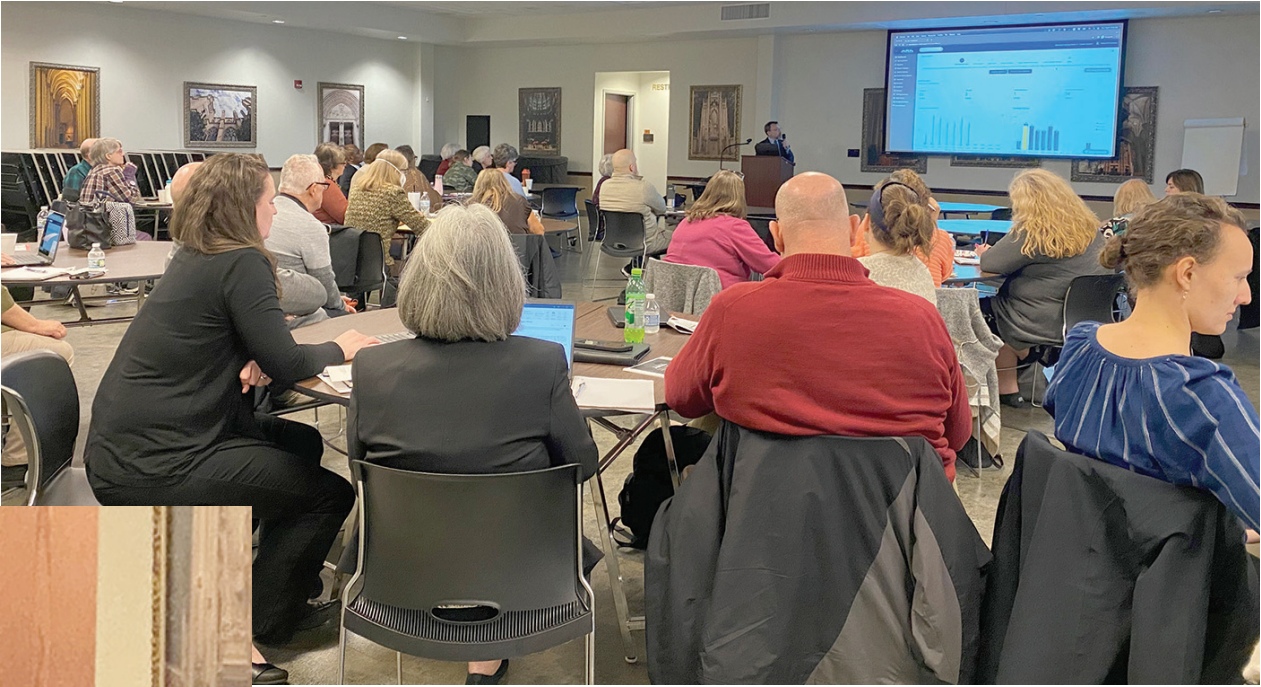
School administrators prepare for second round of ARK testing

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

The second year of ARK testing in the Diocese of Covington is right around the corner, with the testing window for 2023 spanning March 20—May 5. The ARK test, which came first to the diocese in 2022, tests students for their religious knowledge to evaluate Catholic education in diocesan schools.

School administrators, directors of religious education, and school tech employees, gathered for a meeting, Feb. 9, for an overview of the ARK standardized test in preparation for next month's testing.

Rob Kenney, ARK director, gave a presentation that informed those present how to register their teachers and students, how to administer the test and most importantly, how to navigate the exam's results. Test results can be examined and compared against classrooms, grade levels and other dioceses to identify both weaknesses and strengths in Catholic education programs.



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Newport Central Catholic ‘Looking Up’ and beyond to serve their community

Laura Keener
Editor

The Newport Central Catholic High School “Looking Up” capital campaign entered its public phase, Feb 2, with a kick-off dinner: Ken Collopy, principal and Charles Marks, advancement director, welcomed hundreds of alumni, family and friends to the school on the hill to learn more about the capital campaign’s goals.

Bishop John Iffert was unable to attend the event in person but sent a video message. “Thank you for your support of Newport Central Catholic High School,” Bishop Iffert said. “Our Catholic high schools are all about passing on the faith from one generation to another. That’s never been a more challenging proposition than it is in our world right now.”

Bishop Iffert encouraged everyone at the dinner to think of a teacher or person to whom they look up to, someone who has made a difference in their life.

“Our wonderful faculty, administration and staff at Newport Central Catholic are the people that students here today look up to.” The Looking Up Campaign will help fund initiatives for these educators “to have the facilities, to have the equipment, to have what they need to be able to teach this generation,” he said.

Initiatives to be funded by the \$13 million campaign include: a state-of-the-art Science Learning Center with STEM Labs; campus and existing facilities improvements including roof repair/replacement, campus entryway enhancements, driveway expansion and HVAC upgrades to the gymnasium and original school building; the elimination of \$1 million debt; and the building of an on-campus multi-purpose athletic complex providing a home field for soccer, track and football teams and a practice facility for baseball and softball teams. Additionally, a portion of the money saved by the elimination of debt will be used for the continued enhancement of the faith formation programs at NCCHS.

Charles Marks shared a personally emotional story on how a Newport Central Catholic High School alumnus — Bruce Carusi (’70) — had a life-changing impact on his life, even though he grew up in San Diego, California. When he was 14 years old, he had a “radical encounter with Jesus” that changed his life and eventually led him to the Franciscan University of Steubenville. There he met his



The Newport Central Catholic High School “Looking Up” capital campaign entered its public phase, Feb 2, with a kick-off dinner: Ken Collopy, principal and (above left) Charles Marks, advancement director, welcomed hundreds of alumni, family and friends to the school on the hill to learn more about the capital campaign’s goals. (center) Kendra McGuire, superintendent of Schools, shared a personal example of how Catholic school education impacts generations. (right) Matthew Kelly, founder of Dynamic Catholic, was the keynote speaker. NCCHS will be partnering with Dynamic Catholic for its faith formation program.

future wife, Caitlin, who was only able to attend Franciscan University with the help of a scholarship from the Big Guy Foundation — a foundation begun by Mr. Carusi.

“Bruce just wanted to help others,” Mr. Marks said about his founding the foundation. Last summer, Mr. Marks went to visit Mr. Carusi. During their meeting, he showed Mr. Carusi a picture of his six children. “I went to his house and just gave him a huge hug,” Mr. Marks said. “God has done amazing things with the generosity of the NCC alumni community and he’s not done yet.”

Kendra McGuire, superintendent of Catholic Schools, said that “Catholic education has provided many children with a strong foundation in faith and academics ... we do this in an environment where our children are growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. That’s the most important mission work that we are doing.”

Mrs. McGuire said that her father and uncles and her two brothers all attended Newport Catholic. “That experience helped shaped his (her father’s) life,” she said. “His Catholic faith has been the focus of his entire life. He has passed that on to me, my three siblings and now 17 grandchildren. This is what a Catholic education can do. The fruits of this ministry extend far beyond the young men and women who sit in the desks ... our graduates go on to shape their families, go on to shape their communities and go on to shape the world around them.”

In conclusion, Mrs. McGuire said, “this is such an exciting time here at Newport Central Catholic ... through our efforts Newport Central Catholic will continue to be a beacon on this hill. And I can guarantee you, when those lights are on at that field, it’s going to shine very bright at night here in this city, and we will all be looking up to see the

great things that NCC is doing.”

Newport Central Catholic will be partnering with Dynamic Catholic to enhance its faith formation program, not only for students but also for parents, faculty and staff. Matthew Kelly, founder of Dynamic Catholic, was the keynote speaker at the kick-off dinner. In his address, Mr. Kelly spoke about hunger — great hunger and little hungers.

“Little hungers are for food and for clothes and for shelter. The great hunger is for meaning,” said Mr. Kelly. “It is the great hunger that is escaping our culture at this moment in history.”

“The battle for our society is a battle of ideas,” Mr. Kelly said. “The ideas that are being thrust upon our young people (by secular culture) are absolutely lacking in meaning. They shout the superficial. It’s selfishness and absolutely will not bring happiness and fulfillment ... secular education focuses on imposing ideas upon people forcing them to think certain things rather than teaching them how to think ... What we have to decide is do we want to surrender education to secular people? And what would the world look like if we did? ... It’s a tragedy that we have closed a Catholic school in America every four days for the last 20 years ... This (NCCHS) is a treasure to your community ... Let’s keep it alive and, more than alive, let’s put it in a position to thrive.”

2023 St. Mary Parish Fish Fry

St. Mary in Alexandria, KY will host Fish Fries in the school cafeteria on the first four Fridays of Lent this year:

February 24, March 3, 10 and 17

Drive-through, eat in and carry-out

Fish and Shrimp dinners (2 sides and dessert) will be served from 4:00 – 7:30pm. Fish will be hand-breaded Cod and Catfish, and Baked Tilapia. We will also have Pizza, Grilled Cheese, home-made hushpuppies, mozzarella cheese sticks, and fried pickles

St. Mary is located at 8246 East Main Street in Alexandria. The Parish office phone number is 859-635-4188.



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Interested candidates may submit a resume, references, and writing samples to Stephen Koplyay by e-mail: skoplyay@covdio.org, (859) 392-1500. EOE

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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VOLUNTEER DRIVER

St. Benedict Church, Covington, is looking for a Volunteer Driver for their Festival Shuttle Bus. Dates are September 22nd & 23rd from 4 until 11 PM. Please call Greg for more information 859-743-0223.

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Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Covington is adding services and growing, and this is an exciting time to serve in our local Church. If you have a desire to work in an environment where you can truly make a difference by serving others, Catholic Charities seeks candidates to fill the following positions:



Accounting Associate

Catholic Charities is seeking to hire a part time Accounting Associate. This is a non-exempt, part-time, hourly position, 20 hours a week. Under the general direction of the Controller, assists with all activities in connection with financial and business matters, including budgeting, accounts payable, accounts receivable, payroll, financial reporting, external audit, policies, and procedures for transacting financial business.

Administrative Assistant to Marketing and Fund Development.

Catholic Charities is seeking to hire a part time Administrative Assistant to the Marketing and Fund Development staff. This is a non-exempt, part time, hourly position, 24 hours a week. Under the direction of the Institutional Advancement Manager assists with ensuring accuracy of donor database by entering and updating information, sending acknowledgements, providing reports, assist with event implementation and in the production of print and electronic marketing materials.

Parish Kitchen, Weekend Staff

Parish Kitchen is a special ministry that serves a free lunch daily in Covington to anyone hungry. We are looking for one or more individuals to work part-time on weekends who feel a call to serve within the context of this ministry, and who are capable of working with the population we do. This is a paid position, working selected Saturdays and Sundays from 8:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.to help prepare a meal, supervise volunteers who assist serving between 11:30 – 1:30 and clean up after closing. Ideally, two Weekend staff work together to oversee all aspects of this operation. Prior experience in one or more would be a strong plus: food service, ministry, and social work. You may be scheduled as few as once a month, or up to 4 or 5 times per month, depending on your availability and need.

To learn more details about any of these job opportunities, please visit our website at <https://www.covingtoncharities.org/news-events/job-opportunities>.

Vatican, environmental institute release action guide for sustainability

Carol Glatz
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — To help local parishes, schools, other groups and individuals reflect on the practical and concrete action they can take to help tackle today’s environmental challenges, the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and the Stockholm Environment Institute have released a guidebook.

Titled, “Our Common Home: A Guide to Caring for our Living Planet,” the 20-page, full-color guide connects scientific facts and figures on key environmental issues with reflections and teachings from Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical “Laudato Si’ on Care for Our Common Home.”

The guide “calls for urgent and immediate climate action” and provides clear information, “inspiration and tools essential for community-based responses,” he added.

It represents “an important and hopeful collaboration between two great sectors: that of science, and that of faith,” he said. “The call to protect, care and regenerate creation must be a priority for everyone, regardless of one’s belonging to this or that religion or none at all.”

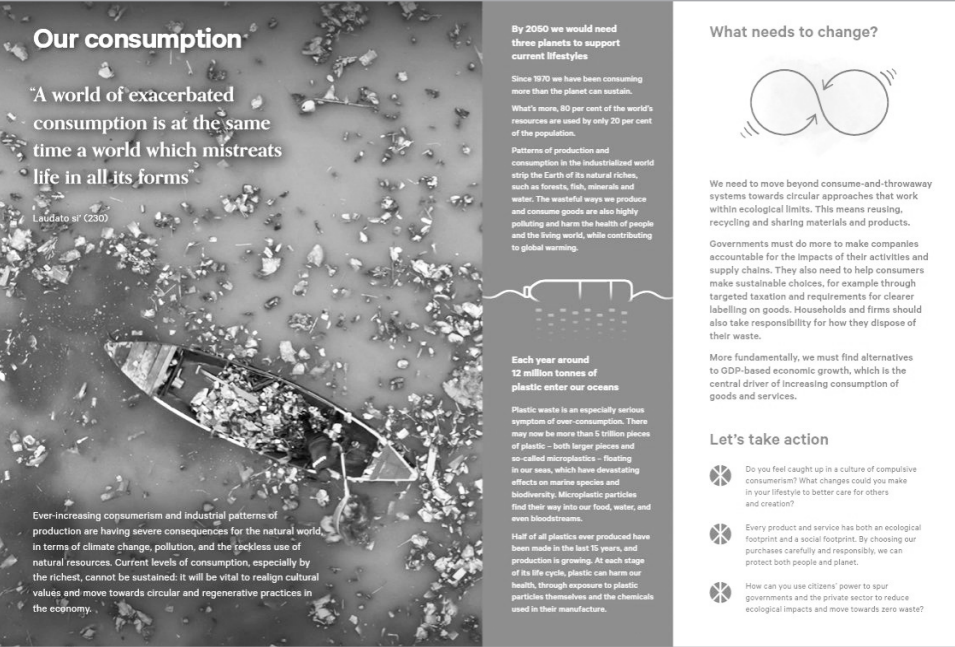
The booklet is available online or in print in five languages. It covers problems such as food waste, air pollution, water insecurity and biodiversity loss, offers spiritual reflection and suggests practical action to build a more sustainable future.

The joint initiative also encouraged people to join the Laudato Si’ Action Platform, which helps Catholic institutions, communities and families implement the encyclical’s teaching.

The platform’s director, John Mundell, is a Catholic and an earth scientist and environmental engineer. Launched in November 2021, the platform now has nearly 7,000 participants, he said during the Feb. 14 news conference.

Participants represent more than “3,000 families and individuals, 150 dioceses and 385 parishes, 540 religious congregations and 700 religious communities, 1,050 educational institutions and 800 hospitals, healthcare agencies, businesses and organizations,” he said.

The platform’s “ground-up approach inspired by Pope Francis’ encyclical” has one clear goal, he said: “to inspire and empower everyone to take practical and concrete decisive action, here and now as we journey toward a better future together.”



CNS photo/screen grab

An illustrated page is shown in this screen grab from a new publication by the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) and the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development released Feb. 14, 2023. The 20-page guide, is titled, “Our Common Home: A Guide to Caring for our Living Planet.”

cal “Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home.”

The guide “aims to empower” local churches and local community efforts “with inspiration, with introspection, with careful consideration of what has to change,” Cardinal Michael Czerny, the dicastery prefect, said during an online news conference Feb. 14.



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Catholic charities sending millions in aid to an ailing Syria and Turkey after deadly earthquake

Paulina Guzik
OSV News

“All ours survived,” Father Dariusz Dogondke, a parish priest in the Catholic Cathedral of Annunciation in Iskanderun, south Turkey, sighed with relief.

“I don’t have news about any parishioners that have died,” Father Dogondke told OSV News, including priests working at his parish and religious sisters living nearby.

In addition, “the statue of Virgin Mary and St. Anthony of Padua stayed untouched. Part of the altar survived.”

But, he said, “The rest is ruins.”

Father Dogondke learned about the devastating earthquake that killed more than 40,000 in Turkey and Syria as of Feb. 14 while he was on retreat in his native Poland.

“I left on Saturday and on Monday morning the earthquake hit,” he said with disbelief. “I will return to Turkey this Friday to see what I can save from my apartment that was literally attached to the cathedral.”

Rebuilding the cathedral will be a long process. “It’s really building anew that is ahead of us,” Father Dogondke said. But now, he underscored, “the most important thing is to help those in the community.”

“We have some people sheltering in church buildings that survived the earthquake,” he said. “From what I’m hearing, it’s about 100 people, but news that reaches me is still very limited. There is no water, electricity; the situation is very dire in Iskanderun.”

With the 19th-century cathedral lying in ruins, along with many of the homes of his parishioners, Father Dogondke is left with a community of people who are

accustomed to serving others who now have nothing left themselves.

“Some of my parishioners now went to live with their families in other cities or in hotels hundreds of miles away,” the priest said, adding that there are no prospects that the situation will improve anytime soon in Iskanderun.

“In less than two minutes, some were left with nothing,” Inés San Martín of Pontifical Mission Societies in the United States told OSV News.

Humanitarian needs in Turkey and Syria are desperate, especially in Syria that has suffered a bloody civil war for almost 12 years. Following the Feb. 6 disaster that left many cities and villages in northwestern Syria completely ruined, the United Nations announced Feb. 14 a \$397 million humanitarian appeal to aid its people.

“The Syria effort brings together the entire U.N. system and humanitarian partners and will help secure desperately needed, life-saving relief for nearly 5 million Syrians — including shelter, health care, food and protection,” U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres told reporters as the appeal was launched.

Meanwhile, Catholic organizations also are putting millions of dollars into aid efforts.

The U.S.-based Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) raised \$200,000 in an online fundraiser that aims to collect \$250,000.

“We hope to meet our goal by the end of this week. We have had an incredibly generous response thus far from our donors, and we trust the drive will continue,” San

Martin told OSV News.

“The magnitude of what happened is hard to fully comprehend,” said San Martín, vice president of communications for the mission societies. “Hundreds of thousands were left homeless and will need our help while they rebuild,” she said, adding that “when people are back on their feet, we will have to work on rebuilding the many churches, monasteries and pastoral homes destroyed by the earthquake.”

German-based Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) will be providing at least \$530,000 in immediate assistance to Christians in Syria in the wake of the tragedy.

Given the many years of war and the economic collapse of Syria, the organization already had projects in place and partners on the ground in cities such as Aleppo and Latakia, which have considerable Christian communities, and which were badly affected by the quake, the organization said.

Several of the relief projects already approved are small in scale and aimed at addressing immediate and short-term needs.

Xavier Stephen Bisits, head of ACN’s Lebanon and Syria section, traveled to Aleppo, the second-largest city in Syria, immediately after the quake.

“We are working with the Franciscans in Latakia, who are providing blankets and food for displaced families; the Armenian Orthodox in Aleppo have prepared a project to supply medicine to displaced families; the Institute of the Incarnate Word wants to work with us on a project for the affected families,” he said in a report released by ACN.

The organization also has a project with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul to provide personal hygiene care for the elderly, “many of whom have chosen not to leave their homes and are living alone,” Bisits said.

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OSV News photo/Benoit Tessier, Reuters

Rubble surrounds the altar in the destroyed Cathedral of the Annunciation Feb. 11, 2023, in the aftermath of a deadly earthquake in Iskenderun, Turkey.

The most important project, however, has to do with helping people get back to their homes as quickly as possible. For this, however, it is necessary for the houses to be surveyed by engineers to make sure there is no risk of collapse.

Fortunately, according to Bisits, the nine different Christian churches that are present in Aleppo have an excellent working relationship and have already taken the lead.

“On Wednesday night, the Synod of Catholic bishops met in Aleppo and assembled a team of engineers who are going to start assessing the damage to the houses of the Christian families, and the approximate cost to repair each one, and this is something I hope ACN can help with, and we fully expect to be able to do it in a very professional way,” Bisits said.

ACN in Syria also is planning to help families rent houses if they’re unable to live in their own homes because it’s simply too dangerous.

The Caritas network has already started distributing supplies in cities and villages devastated by the earth-

quake. Mattresses, blankets, hygiene kits and food baskets are among the items most needed by the people whose houses were turned into ruins.

“We’re going to be facing a really difficult situation and a really long-term response,” said John Coughlin, emergency response team leader for Caritas Internationalis.

In Aleppo, Syrian Patriarch Archbishop Absi Melkite

Catholic Patriarch Joseph Absi, together with Caritas staff from Damascus, will assist with the distribution of 1,300 food baskets, mattresses and blankets to six shelters in the city. Caritas Syria teams will also move to Lattakia to support additional distributions of aid.

The earthquake in Syria hit areas that were already devastated by years of conflict. Described as a tragedy within a tragedy, it has left the population in despair. But not without hope.

“In general, people are afraid, but they are showing a solidarity we had not seen in 12 years in Syria. People gather, share, and pray,” said Marie Rose Diab, a Syrian who works for ACN in Damascus.

Those whose houses survived the quake are sharing what they have with others. Even though they themselves don’t have a lot.

Father Fadi Azar, a Catholic priest from Lattakia, where eight Christians were killed, was preparing to depart from the town after the earthquake.

“We had initially thought of leaving Lattakia as well, but we found many people who had come to our parish, including many who did not have cars, they had come to shelter in our church, so we decided to stay with them. A lot of young men and women from our parish have been helping us,” he said.

The priest also has seen signs of solidarity among the people.

“We were deeply moved when one of the parishioners we usually help came today with some loaves of bread to offer others. We all must help each other at this time,” he said.

“We are hoping the generosity we see today will continue,” San Martin told OSV News. “We cannot let this story disappear.”

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To evangelize, Christians are not called to argue but be meek like sheep

Justin McLellan
Catholic News Service

Christians are not called to “argue, counterattack and defend themselves” when evangelizing but to be meek and humble, Pope Francis said.

At his general audience Feb. 15, the pope continued his series of catechesis on evangelization and apostolic zeal.

The pope said Christians often think “we will become relevant, numerous, prestigious and that the world will listen to and respect us” if they evangelize forcefully. Instead, he said, Christ asks his followers to be “sheep among wolves,” protected by God and marked by “meekness, innocence and dedication.”

Each Christian’s call to evangelize stems from a personal encounter with Christ just as the disciples had, Pope Francis explained.

“To evangelize does not mean going ‘blah, blah, blah’ and nothing more,” the pope said while waving his hand to convey a rambling speech. It requires “a passion that involves all of you: the mind, the heart, the hands, everything. The whole person.”

Addressing the disciples’ seemingly contradictory obligations to be close to Jesus and go out to share his message, the pope said the two elements of discipleship go together, since “without mission the relationship with (Jesus) does not grow.”

Proclaiming the Gospel to others begins with having encountered Jesus, he said. One cannot share the light of Christ without first experiencing it.

But, the pope continued, “following Christ is not an inward-looking fact: without proclamation, without service, without mission, the relationship with him does not grow.”

“That is how you proclaim (the Gospel),” the pope said, “by showing Jesus more than talking about Jesus.”

Pope Francis also noted that in preaching the Gospel, “we often invite people to do something” rather than focus on communicating the Gospel’s “principal message” of God’s closeness to his people. He urged Christians to communicate “the reality of God,” as “the close, the tender, the merciful one” through their lives and actions.

And just as Jesus sent his disciples out in pairs or groups, Christians are not meant to

be alone in their missions, he said; they should go forth together, relying on support from one another rather than on worldly attention or rewards.



Pope Francis waves to a group of Italian children after his weekly general audience in the Vatican audience hall Feb. 15, 2023.



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NEWS BRIEFS

National/World

Polish family murdered by Nazis and Jews they helped hide to be beatified

KRAKOW, Poland — Urszula Niemczak keeps a regular schedule. At least twice a week she carefully checks whether winter decorations or fresh flowers growing in the summer on a historical gravesite of Józef and Wiktoria Ulma and their children look good and are well watered. She and her granddaughters take care of the grave in Markowa, in southeastern Poland. Niemczak’s husband is Wiktoria Ulma’s nephew. “How could I not come here and take care of that grave?” Niemczak told OSV News. “This is my obligation to this family that I entered, to the sacrifice the Ulmas made for all of us.” Józef and Wiktoria Ulma secretly gave shelter to eight Jews for almost two years in German-occupied Poland, hiding them from the Nazi regime during the Second World War. The Ulmas had seven children, including the unborn child in Wiktoria’s womb. The Nazis, informed by a local policeman that Jews were being hidden in the household, came early in the morning March 24, 1944, right before Easter. First, they killed all eight of the Jewish fugitives. Then they shot Wiktoria and Józef. The Vatican confirmed the martyrdom of the Ulma family, including their unborn child, on Dec. 17, 2022, clearing the way for all nine members of the Ulma family to be beatified. For the first time in history, an unborn child is on the path to sainthood. Pope Francis decided the beatification of the Ulmas will take place Sept. 10 in Markowa where they lived and died. The Archdioceses of Przemyśl in Poland announced the decision Feb. 14.

Bishop Báez: ‘What has happened in Nicaragua has been a miracle’

MIAMI — At a Feb. 12 Mass, exiled Nicaraguan Bishop Silvio Báez, auxiliary bishop of Managua, gave thanks for the surprise release of more than 200 Nicaraguan political prisoners who arrived in Washington on Feb. 9. Two of the priests, who were among the released prisoners, concelebrated the Mass at St. Agatha Parish, west of Miami, where one of the largest communities of Nicaraguans in the United States congregates. “What has happened in Nicaragua, and all those released agree, has been a miracle. It has been the work of God, the power of the Church’s prayer. It is like the dawn of a new day and of a new historical stage of freedom and justice that is opening,” said Bishop Báez, who went into exile in 2019, after massive demonstrations against the Ortega-Murillo regime began in 2018 and were met with extreme violence, causing more than 300 deaths, around 800 arrests and more than 100,000 exiles, according to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The bishop explained that the entire world has turned its eyes to Nicaragua and asked “not to feel discouraged or weak. Let us boldly denounce the crimes of the tyrants, let us not remain silent, because there are silences that kill.”

National Black Catholic Congress XIII to be held in Washington area

WASHINGTON — During Black History Month in February, Catholics are being invited to register to attend this summer’s National Black Catholic Congress, which over the years has made history of its own. The National Black Catholic Congress XIII will be held July 20-23 at the Gaylord National Resort in National Harbor, Maryland, just outside the District of Columbia. It marks the third time the Washington area has

hosted the gathering, and each of those times, key participants included noted figures in U.S. Catholic history. Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory — the archbishop of Washington who was elevated to the College of Cardinals by Pope Francis in 2020, becoming the first African American cardinal in history — will give the opening keynote speech and celebrate the opening Mass. Early registration for the National Black Catholic Congress XIII ends Feb. 28 and regular registration ends July 15,. For more information, including a schedule of events, and to register, go online to nbccgathering2023.org.



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