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World Youth Day pilgrims gather before the main stage at Eduardo VII Park in Lisbon, Portugal. the 2023 World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal.

‘Everyone, everyone, everyone!’ cheer attendees at 2023 World Youth Day

Justin McLellan
Catholic News Service

Pope Francis asked the 1.5 million young people who attended World Youth Day to take “what God has sown into your hearts” back to their home countries and build a joyful church that is open to all. Among these pilgrims were 24 youth and parents from the Diocese of Covington, along with Bishop John Iffert, Deacon Jim Fortner, COO and Isaak Isaak, co-director of the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization.

Young pilgrims interviewed by Catholic News Service during World Youth Day constantly returned to the pope’s main point during the official welcome ceremony for World Youth Day Aug. 3: in the church there is room for “everyone, everyone, everyone.”

He asked the jubilant crowd of flag-waving young people to repeat the refrain with him in Lisbon’s Eduardo VII Park and shouts of “todos, todos, todos” — “everyone” in Spanish and Portuguese — spread throughout the crowd.

As he did often during the trip, the pope solicited engagement from the crowd, asking them to repeat after him or consider in silence a question he posed.

Yet it was during his meeting Aug. 2 with Portuguese bishops, priests, religious and pastoral workers that the pope first issued his

“todos” message.

“Please, let us not convert the church into a customs office” where only the “just,” “good,” and “properly married” can enter while leaving everyone else outside, he said. “No. The church is not that,” he said, rather it is a place for “righteous and sinners, good and bad, everyone, everyone, everyone.”

Asked during his inflight news conference Aug. 6 how the church can be for everyone when women and gay people are excluded from some sacraments, Pope Francis said that “the church is open to all, but then there is legislation that regulates life inside the church.”

“This does not mean that (the church) is closed. Each person encounters God by their own way, inside the church, and the church is mother and guides each one by their own path,” he responded.

At 86 years old, Pope Francis showed no sign of slowing down for the 42nd international trip of his pontificate, which he jokingly told journalists on the flight to Lisbon will “make me young again.”

The pope’s packed agenda had three to four official events per day, and he added private meetings with several groups and individuals at the Vatican nunciature in Lisbon where he was staying. Among them was a group of abuse survivors who met with the pope

(Continued on page 7)

Monthly ‘candlelight Masses’ encourage young adults to celebrate the beauty of the Mass

Maura Baker
Staff Writer

In collaboration with the Angelico project, a nonprofit dedicated to evangelization through the beauty of Catholic arts and culture, the diocesan Office of Catechesis and Evangelization sets forth to bring candlelit Masses to parishes across the diocese.

The intent of these Masses is to bring young adults — a demographic most at risk of falling from the faith — into the Mass to celebrate its beauty and form a newfound appreciation.

Brad Torline, director of the Angelico Project, formed the idea of the candlelit Masses while he was serving as the Diocese of Covington’s youth minister. Inspired by dioceses across the nation who found the practice effective, Mr. Torline decided to bring it to the Diocese of Covington, as well. The candlelight Masses are in the evenings — a generally more advantageous time for young adults and professionals to attend weekday Mass.

(Continued on page 14)



Father Eric Boelscher, pastor, St. Joseph, Crescent Springs, preaches at a Friday candlelight Mass held in conjunction with the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization and the Angelico Project.

Teacher shortage prompts Bishop Iffert to suspend operations at Holy Family School

Laura Keener
Editor

With only three weeks until the first day of school and with no applicants for two critically needed vacant teaching positions, Bishop John Iffert directed that operations at Holy Family School be suspended for the 2023-24 school year.

“This decision, made necessary by a shortage of teachers, deeply affects students, families, neighborhoods and parishes,” said Bishop Iffert in a message posted on the diocesan website, www.covdio.org. “The Diocese of Covington is working to place every student whose family seeks Catholic education in a strong and effective Catholic school to assist families in forming young scholars, citizens and saints.”

Holy Family School is in the East side of Covington. As the new school year approached, 42 students were enrolled at the school and contracted staff consisted of one principal/teacher and two full-time teachers. Holy Family School is one of the diocese’s six urban schools that make up the Alliance for Catholic Urban Education (ACUE). The other five ACUE schools are: Holy Cross Elementary, Prince of Peace School and St. Augustine School, Covington; Holy Trinity School, Bellevue and St. Anthony School, Taylor Mill.

Recognizing that this news would likely concern other ACUE schools, Bishop Iffert assured, “We remain committed to assuring Catholic education in our urban core.”

The decision to suspend operations at Holy Family School came after Kendra McGuire, superintendent, and her staff consulted with the Board of Catholic Education; Beth Vieth, principal, Holy Family School, and Father Ryan Maher, rector, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington; Divine Providence Sister Janet Bucher, pastoral administrator, Our Savior Parish, Covington; and Father Lawrence Schaeper, pastor, St. Benedict Parish, Covington. These parishes are feeder parishes of Holy Family School, and Father Maher and Sister Janet are frequent visitors at the school.

Once the decision was made, Mrs. McGuire met with the parents of Holy Family School, July 29, at the school to

share the news and detail the support that is available to enroll their children in neighboring ACUE schools. Following the meeting, Mrs. McGuire e-mailed a letter to all families of Holy Family School reiterating the information shared at the meeting, including the options that were available that ultimately led to the decision to close for this year.

“As we approached the end of July, we had zero applicants and our efforts to reach out to prospective teachers had not been successful,” said Mrs. McGuire. Those efforts included contacting retired teachers including retired women religious.

“In our discussions on how to move forward, we were left with limited options. One solution was to continue searching for qualified candidates. Another was to delay the start of school by a few weeks to provide additional search time. And the last option was to suspend school operations for the 2023-24 school year,” Mrs. McGuire said.

The inability to find qualified teachers to continue providing a quality Catholic education that parents have grown to expect and that students deserve is not limited to Catholic schools.

“Unfortunately, we are experiencing a teacher shortage across our region in both public and private education and our ability to staff these teaching positions will only become more challenging as the start of school nears,” said Mrs. McGuire. “With this in mind, and the possibility that we will still be without teachers to begin the school year, we had growing concerns about how this would impact our students and staff”

Mrs. McGuire hopes that the situation is temporary. “It is our hope as we go through the next year that we can work to improve the staffing situation and reopen the doors of Holy Family School in the future,” she said.

The principal and teachers of Holy Family School have



Keener photo

all accepted principal and teaching positions at neighboring Holy Cross Elementary School. There is also availability for all Holy Family students at Holy Cross Elementary.

Parents were assured that the tuition agreement that was negotiated at Holy Family School would be accepted at any of the five ACUE schools. Additionally, the ACUE schools share a common, if not identical, school calendar and curriculum, utilizing the same teaching resources. The Department of Catholic Schools is also assisting Holy Family parents obtain school uniforms for their children. Transportation is the remaining obstacle, and solutions like carpooling are being explored.

“Our other Catholic schools are ready to welcome you,” said Mrs. McGuire. “It is our hope that you will continue to choose a Catholic education for your child(ren) ... We want to continue helping your children grow and thrive.”



Bishop’s Schedule

Aug. 13
Mass, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, 10 a.m.

Vocations BBQ, K of C Hall, Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Burlington, 5 p.m.

Aug. 14
Catholic Charities Corporate Board meeting, 1:30 p.m.
Vigil Mass, Solemnity of the Assumption, Cathedral Basilica, 5:30 p.m.

Aug. 15
Solemnity of the Assumption — Diocesan Curia Closed

Aug. 16
Building Commission meeting, 2 p.m.

Aug. 17
Directors meeting, 9:30 a.m.

Serra Club seminarian cookout, Senior Center, Freedom Park, Edgewood, 11:30 a.m.

Priest Holy Hour, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, 3 p.m.

20th annual clergy dinner, Fr. DeJaco Council #5220, Alexandria, 4:30 p.m.

Aug. 18
DPAA priest committee meeting, 10 a.m.

Aug. 19
Deanery Pastoral Council orientation, Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, 10 a.m.



Baker photos

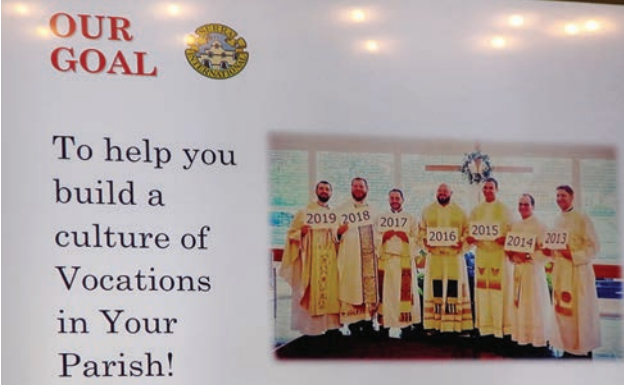
Advisory board discusses DPAA grant allocations

The Stewardship Advisory Board gathered in Bishop Howard Memorial Hall, July 27, to discuss grant allocations for this year’s Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal. The meeting opened with a greeting and address by Jim Hess, director, Stewardship and Mission Services, and was led by board member James “Jay” Whittle. Bishop John Iffert will hand deliver checks to grant recipients at the 2023 DPAA celebration Aug. 24.

SerraSpark.org is the source to ‘Ignite’ parish vocation committees

Laura Keener
Editor

About 100 Serra Club members and parish vocation coordinators looked in awe at a presentation slide of seven priests each holding a sign with the year of their ordination — 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019. These seven priests, explained presenters Judy Cozzens and Michael Downey, are all members of the same parish when they entered seminary.



A presentation slide showing a single parish with seven consecutive years of priestly vocations.

The success of this one parish to encourage and realize vocations to the priesthood stands in stark contrast to statistics on vocations in the United States. Since 1965 the total number of diocesan priests is down 30 percent, while the population of U.S. Catholics is up 58 percent, buoyed by the increase in Hispanic Catholics in the U.S. And while since 2000 priestly ordinations have been increasing, bishops nationwide are struggling to provide priests for the parishes, schools and ministries of their diocese.

To put it bluntly, “The shortage of priests remains a crisis,” said Mrs. Cozzens

But the slide also offers a picture of possibilities and hope and the importance of parishes and parishioners in promoting vocations.

“It’s not a lot of effort but it’s a lot of effort if you’re trying to do 18 parishes at a time, but it’s perfect for a parish vocations committee” said Mr. Downey about “Called By Name,” one of the 28 vocation tools Serra Club International offers to its diocesan and parish Serra Club councils.

Mr. Downey and Mrs. Cozzens were invited by the Serra Club Councils of Northern Kentucky and Cincinnati to lead the “Ignite” vocation ministry workshop, Aug. 5, at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Peter in Chains, Cincinnati. The mission of the Serra Club is threefold — to foster and promote vocations to the priesthood and religious life, to support priests in their sacred ministry, and to assist its members to grow in holiness. Ms. Cozzens is president of U.S. Council of Serra, Minneapolis, Minn., and Mr.

Downey is president of the U.S. Council for Serra and chair of the Leadership Development Committee for the Council.

The day began with Mass, concelebrated by Father Conor Kunath, vocations director for the Diocese of Covington, who also attended the morning presentation. Other members of the Serra Club Northern Kentucky attending the workshop included: Nick Winnike, president; Mike Murray, membership chair, and Donna Heim, former campus minister, Northern Kentucky University.

During the presentation Mr. Downey introduced the Serra Spark website, www.serraspark.org, while he and Mrs. Cozzens detailed some of the most popular plug-n-play tools that vocation promoters can use to form, maintain and sustain vocation ministries at their parish. These vocation tools concentrate on four distinct areas: affirmation tools, awareness tools, invitation and encouragement tools and prayer tools.

The plethora of tools available on the Serra Spark website can be overwhelming, Mr. Downey admitted. His advice — pick one or two, “pluck it up and use it.”

The Called by Name tool — an invitation tool — seems especially intriguing because it is simple and secretive. With this tool parishes invite parishioners to anonymously place on a card the name and contact information of a man or woman they believe might make a good priest or religious brother and then place the card in a basket or box. The names would then be sent on to the diocesan vocation director or promoter.

Mr. Downey likes this tool because it engages everyone in the parish, giving them the opportunity to “really chime in.” He also shared the story of two young ladies who anonymously submitted a card with their own name and contact information. “They didn’t have the courage to go talk to the vocations director; they didn’t think they were worthy, but they thought they would try this and see what happens.” The vocations director did contact them and they did enter discernment.

The School Traveling Crucifix tool — an awareness tool — brings vocation awareness into Catholic schools. The Serra Club provides one crucifix to each school along with a prayer. During the school year the crucifix travels from classroom to classroom and at least on one day of the week the students pray the special prayer. There are also lesson plans on the website for teachers to use — all at no cost.

“They’re praying for vocations and its fun,” said Mrs. Cozzens. She also shared a story of a family who participated in a similar awareness tool for parishes, the Traveling Chalice tool. With the Traveling Chalice tool, each week a parish family takes the chalice home to pray for vocations. One family, who needed a little coaxing, took the chalice home to pray for vocations. When they returned the chalice, the mother confirmed to Mrs. Cozzens that the family did pray together every night. She didn’t know if any of the children were going to have a

vocation or not, but, she said, now it is okay with her if they did.

“We changed her heart and that’s the beginning,” said Mrs. Cozzens. “If we can change the hearts of mothers and fathers and bring that culture of vocations into the home, we’re going to succeed. Vocations start in our homes and in our parishes. We gotta get it going.”

The presentation ended with grateful and encouraging words to the Serrans and parish vocation promoters attending.

“The Holy Spirit brought you here today, each one of us are called,” said Mrs. Cozzens. Our Church needs us. Know in your heart that this is where the Lord has put you, embrace this ministry and help bring more religious vocations to our Church.”



(top left) Judy Cozzen, president, U.S. council of Serra, Minneapolis, Minn. And (top right) Mike Downey, president, U.S. council for Serra, were the presenters and led the workshops. (above) Nearly 100 Serra Club members and parish vocation coordinators attended.



Father Conor Kunath (right) concelebrates Mass, Aug. 5, at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Peter in Chains, Cincinnati, opening the “Ignite” vocation workshop sponsored by Cincinnati and NKY Serra Clubs.



Call for testimonials

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul Northern Kentucky is celebrating 100 years of service to the people of the Diocese of Covington.

To share your story on how the Society has impacted you and/or your family, e-mail messenger@covdio.org with the subject line: Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Your story may be featured in the upcoming *Messenger* supplement highlighting the Society’s centennial. The deadline for submissions is Sept. 14.

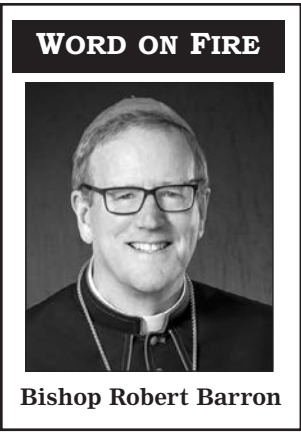
Correction

In the article entitled “St. Henry parishioner plans to enter novitiate, inspired by the ‘Lord in the Eucharist’” in the July 28 edition of the *Messenger*, Olivia Staverman was misquoted on why she is discerning a vocation with the Mercedarian Sisters. The correct quote is: “They’re youth and university (not “diversity” as originally reported) oriented, and they have Jesus in the Eucharist at the forefront of their mission — which is what spoke to my heart.” The *Messenger* apologizes for the error.

COMMENTARY

Oppenheimer’s frown

Cillian Murphy, who beautifully evokes the physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer in Christopher Nolan’s new film, wears, through about 85 percent of the movie, a worried frown. Nolan does not lionize Oppenheimer but presents him consistently as an ambiguous character, a man tormented by inner demons, external enemies and moral dilemmas. And Oppenheimer’s frown is, it seems to me, evocative of deep conflicts that endure in the consciousness of the West.



The first of these has to do with science and scientists. In the ancient world, the philosopher was probably the most admired figure; in the medieval context, the saint; in the modern milieu, the warrior or wealthy landowner. But in our contemporary setting, there seems little doubt that the scientist holds pride of place. By a rather deep instinct, we tend to look for wisdom, not from sages, politicians, or religious leaders, but from the practitioners of the hard sciences.

It is no accident that George Lucas chose to model the face of Yoda, the Jedi wise man in “Star Wars,” after the visage of Albert Einstein. And Einstein does indeed figure in “Oppenheimer,” along with Werner Heisenberg, Niels Bohr, Edward Teller, Enrico Fermi, as well as the eponymous main character.

I liked very much the fact that Nolan presents all of these players in their brilliance and celebrates their achievements, but that he does not canonize them or present them as moral exemplars. Heisenberg, we learn, worked for the Nazis; Teller was a turncoat; Oppenheimer was self-absorbed and unfaithful; etc. There is a sharp distinction to be made between intellectual

acumen and moral excellence, and in our culture, we too often mistake the former for the latter.

This gives rise to the second conflict — and it is the central theme of the film — namely, the tension between what can be done and what ought to be done. I especially enjoyed the first act of “Oppenheimer,” which explores the education of the keenly intelligent young American scientist under the direction of some of the leading lights of European science.

The newly-minted Dr. Oppenheimer brought the still-novel discipline of quantum mechanics to our shores and commenced to show its theoretical and practical implications, including in the military domain.

Animated by his left-wing political views and by his Jewish identity, Oppenheimer was eager to dedicate his science to the development of a mighty weapon that could bring down the Nazis, who were enemies of both his nation and his people. Hence, when invited, he accepted the invitation from the US Army to head up the Manhattan Project, dedicated to the development of an atomic bomb.

With the help of his hyper-competent colleagues, Oppenheimer demonstrated that a bomb of epically destructive power could be created, and in the initial aftermath of the Hiroshima attack, he was elated.

Catholic teaching would never countenance doing something intrinsically evil in order that good might come of it.

But what began to bother him more was whether this awful weapon should have been used. When he visits President Truman, he comments, with real pain, that he feels he has blood on his hands.

Catholic moral teaching would support Oppenheimer’s reservations, for the atomic bombings, which resulted in the deaths of over one hundred thousand innocents, clearly violated the principle of discrimination, which dictates that in any act of war, one must distinguish between combatants and noncombatants.

Though a number of characters in the film, including

an admittedly cartoonish version of Harry Truman, trot out the familiar consequentialist justification that the attacks saved lives in the long run, Catholic teaching would never countenance doing something intrinsically evil in order that good might come of it.

A third prompt for the worried frown of Robert Oppenheimer was the strain between his loyalty to America and his association with Communism. The third act of the film, which I frankly found more than a little tiresome, explores this struggle in some detail.

What made the final section of the movie hard to take was not simply its slow pace but also its odd sympathy with the Communism of so many of Oppenheimer’s friends and colleagues. It still appears to be the case in Hollywood that being Communist is rather cool and avant-garde, amounting to a romantic devotion to the poor and the disadvantaged — and this attitude is shared by an alarming number of young people in our country today.

In point of fact, Marxist-Leninist ideology has produced economic misery and mountains of corpses wherever it has been implemented, and therefore no responsible person in the twenty-first century should have the slightest regard for it. Moreover, it is simply a matter of historical record that there were indeed Soviet spies associated with the Manhattan Project and that they posed a real threat to national security.

Though there were indeed McCarthyite extremists in the 1950s, those who had suspicions of certain of Oppenheimer’s associations were more than justified in their skepticism and should not have been portrayed as semi-fascist boors.

Oppenheimer is a good film, and Oppenheimer himself, in his intelligence, his passion, his deep flaws, a compelling character. But what I take away most from the film is his nervous frown.

Bishop Robert Barron is bishop of the Diocese of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota. Article originally published at WordOnFire.org.

Give thanks in all circumstances

“Because a thankful heart is a happy heart! I’m glad for what I have that’s an easy way to start!” —“The Thankfulness Song,” Veggie Tales



Have you watched Veggie Tales? Madame Blueberry was one that my siblings and I watched constantly growing up and the “Thankfulness Song” was one we had memorized.

For those who have not seen it, this Veggie Tales episode focuses on Madame Blueberry, a wealthy lady who is constantly crying over all the things she does not have. When a “Stuff Mart” suddenly appears, Madame Blueberry quickly goes and buys everything she ever thought she needed or wanted, but after her spree she discovers she is still unhappy.

She also discovers all the things she has bought are now weighing down her tree house and eventually it crashes causing her to lose everything. Madame Blueberry finds herself being comforted by a small, poor family who share all they have with her. The family’s gratefulness with the few items they have teaches Madame Blueberry to be thankful for what she has, thereby making her happier in life.

We have been taught the importance of being grateful our entire lives. Greed is one of the Seven Deadly Sins, and we know that gratitude is one of the best ways to combat

this temptation. If we are thankful for what we have, we are less driven to desire more. As Catholics, we have also been taught the importance of gratitude in suffering.

That can often be an intimidating concept. Stephen Colbert, a Catholic comedian known for the Late Show and The Colbert Report, has given many interviews discussing the impact of grief on his life. In one interview, he said something that has stuck with me, “If God is everywhere, and God is in everything, then the world as it is is all just an expression of God and his love, and you have to accept it with gratitude.”

The driving question remains though, how are we to be grateful for our misery? But I think, it’s not about being grateful for our suffering, God doesn’t want us to suffer. It’s more about being grateful for what our suffering teaches us.

With suffering comes empathy; a deeper understanding of the suffering of those around us. This understanding helps us to be gentler people, more in touch with the needs of those around us. Though I would never wish suffering on any person, and if given the chance I would happily prevent my own suffering, the reality is that it happened, and it can’t be undone. Learning to accept what cannot be changed and to be grateful for what we have learned through our pain, that is what I believe it means to be grateful in our suffering.

On the flip side of that, however, gratitude is not complacency. It is not a contradiction to be grateful yet wish for things to be different. A person struggling with homelessness may be grateful to be alive, but we would never expect that this person would not wish to have a place to call home. It is not selfish to wish for our basic needs to be satisfied. To wish to be loved, protected, fed, housed ... none of

these are selfish desires, nor are the want for these things an example of ungratefulness for what you do have.

God gifted us with free will, not just so we could survive but so we could thrive. It is not an act of ingratitude to change the things in your life that you wish were different. We are expected to take the steps necessary in our life to create happiness for ourselves and those around us.

And in those moments were suffering feels too great and the steps to change feel too large, we return it to God. One of the most loving and grateful options we have in this life is to offer it up to the Lord.

In the moments when gratitude feels unattainable, especially in those moments when you look around and see all the things you should be grateful for, yet the weight of suffering pushes everything else away, the most grateful and loving act we can offer is to align our suffering with that of Christ.

Think how heavy that burden is right now? You can physically feel it on your shoulders, on your chest. Close your eyes and push it all off. Offer it up to the Lord, offer it up to the souls in purgatory, offer it up for the homeless, the dying, the lonely. I know it is so much easier said than done, and I know it does not feel like gratitude, but it is. The most grateful thing you can possibly do is give it to the Father, who wants nothing more than for you to simply ask his help.

“For the love that He shares, ‘cause He listens to my prayers, that’s why I say thanks every day!” – “The Thankfulness Song,” Veggie Tales

Sarah Torres is the archivist for the Diocese of Covington, Ky

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COMMENTARY

A mighty whisper

The readings for the nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time — Cycle A — are: 1 Kings 19:9a, 11-13a; Romans 9:1-5 and Matthew 14:22-33,

It has been several years ago that the movie, “The Temptation of Christ” came out. A group of parishioners decided to go together. Before we left for the movie, we prayed the Way of the Cross together.

As I was nearing the end my phone rang. I forgot to turn it off. It rang for 5 rings. I tried to reach into my pocket to turn it off but could not reach it. A few minutes later my phone went off. Once again, the phone rang, and I couldn’t get to my phone.

After the Way of the Cross, I checked my phone to see who called. It was one of the teenagers in the group that called my phone. He was a good kid so I couldn’t be mad at him, but I think his parents may have been. I think the young lad was getting bored as we entered the last few stations.

Sometimes prayer is like that for us. Maybe we get bored as we pray and need some of the noise from outside of our prayer life to fill the void. In the seminary we had several silent retreats. I was good for 3 out of 5 days and then I had to talk to someone to fill that void, someone to talk to or some noise to fill my ears. Walking around campus it wasn’t hard to find someone who wanted to break the silence for a few minutes.

Silence is hard for us these days. There is so much noise in our daily lives. The absence of constant phones ringing or the sound of a TV or computer games or videos we constantly watch, or whatever it may be in our life, causes us to not be able hear the Word of God.

Ah, his voice is like a whisper. Can you hear a whisper? That is where God’s voice can be found. In order to hear what God is calling us to do, we need to be quiet and listen.

Find the time during your daily life when you can turn everything off and listen to the voice of God.

Father Gregory Bach is assistant to the Bishop and vice-chancellor, Diocese of Covington, Ky

The priest I didn’t want delivered the Lord of Love I needed near

Like many people, I had struggled for years to create a regular habit of receiving the sacrament of reconciliation.

I had heard the recommendation about making time for a monthly confession, but I could always find excuses to put it off — a typical “wait ’till next week” mentality.

However, that all changed about 15 years ago when I was on a retreat. I knew that this was my opportunity to make a good confession. The “wait ’till next retreat” temptation did not seem very convincing.

There were two priests available that day, and as my fellow retreatants and I inched forward. While waiting, I found myself really hoping that I would have the opportunity to go to the wise older priest whose homilies I had been enjoying, rather than the young priest who I had decided was not particularly impressive.

Needless to say, this was not the most appropriate thing to be pondering in preparation for my confession, and I felt a little bad about it even as I really hoped to get the wise older priest.

As Providence would have it, I wound up with the young priest.

GO AND GLORIFY



Father Gregory Bach

A perfect gift, a perfect love

The end of Roe v. Wade has over the last year brought attention to many sensationalized scenarios in favor of abortion rights.

Expectant parents faced with a poor prenatal diagnosis are often told by health-care professionals that their best option is to terminate the pregnancy; their normal pregnancy has been turned upside down. As these parents grieve the loss of a dream pregnancy, they are thrust into deciding not only the medical care but also the fate of the precious life entrusted to them. These babies are more than a poor prognosis. No matter what, these parents will grieve the loss of the child they expected. But in bringing that life to term, parents can see true love through the eyes of God.

I’ve known and met those families who have been touched by a poor prenatal diagnosis. Some of the babies have died prior to birth, or shortly after birth. These parents are grateful for the time they were able to hold their infant and say goodbye.

In other cases, a baby may be born with Down’s Syndrome or birth anomalies. Their parents, who chose life, have gone on to see that all lives are created in the image and likeness of God.

I know the parents of these children go through much heartbreak and many struggles, more than I can begin to imagine, but many parents have told me of the joy that their child with special needs has brought to their family.

Many years ago, I discovered a flyer at Children’s Hospital sitting on a table in a waiting area. On the flyer was a quote from a fictional novel, “The Clowns of God,” by Morris West.

Doing a little research, I discovered that the clowns of God are children who are mentally or physically handicapped. In the book, the French have given them that name and feel that these children are especially close to God’s heart.

A Jesus-like figure comes back to earth and, at one point, he is holding a little girl with Down’s syndrome and says: “I know what you are thinking. You need a sign. What better one could I give but to make this little one whole and new? I could do it, but I will not. I am the Lord

After I made my confession, what followed was a complete shock. From the mouth of this priest came words that only the divine Word could have spoken. Straight to my heart, there was tender mercy, delivered without limit; there was other-worldly advice about root causes of my specific sins, and above all there was absolute reassurance about my deepest identity: I was a beloved son of the Father:

I had long understood that the priest’s power to forgive sins comes directly from the Risen Lord’s gift to the apostles: “Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained” (John 20: 23). I knew that only God could forgive sins, and it made sense that, if the Son of God had bestowed such authority on mere mortals, this was a gift that I should receive with gratitude.

But I had never stopped to consider that the words of the priest in the confessional could be Jesus’ words, meant directly for me.

Since that uniquely graced moment, each month when I return to confession for a spiritual “fresh start,” I ask the Holy Spirit to help me hear what I need to hear. Sometimes it is a key phrase or word from the Scriptures that the priest references. Often it is simply the beautiful message of absolution from the sacramental rite:

God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and poured out the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the church

VIEWPOINT



Faye Roch

and not a conjurer. I gave this mite a gift I denied to all of you — eternal innocence. To you she looks imperfect — but to me she is flawless, like the bud that dies unopened or the fledgling that falls from the nest to be devoured by ants. She will never offend me, as all of you have done. She will never pervert or destroy the work of my Father’s hands. She is necessary to you. She will evoke the kindness that will keep you human. Her infirmity will prompt you to gratitude for your own good fortune ... More! She will remind you every day that I am who I am, that my ways are not yours, and that the smallest dust mite whirled in the darkest spaces does not fall out of my hand ... I have chosen you. You have not chosen me. This little one is my sign to you. Treasure her!”

As I reflected on this, I was overwhelmed with the love God has for us. We are all created in his image and likeness, and we are all perfect in his eyes. We are all a gift, even those who may appear disabled or ill. Some come as a different sort of gift and through these gifts we receive something very special.

In these times where everyone is striving for perfection in everything from homes, jobs, bodies and even children’s birthday parties, we need to rethink the gift of the child — the gift of a human being. We need to open our hearts and create a culture that says “yes” to all children, that says “yes” to God made manifest through his creation.

In pursuit of perfection couples often remain childless until they have an acceptable amount of money in their bank account. We are told it’s okay to say “no” to the gift of life, “no” to the providential love and assistance that would have come to us and into the world through the gift of a child. Children are no longer seen as gifts but as possessions. If the child is not perfect according to society’s standards, we are told we can say “no” and reject it through abortion. And, if we really want the “model” child, we have reproductive technology to create perfection.

What treasures are we deprived of with the choices that are being made in our pursuit of perfection?

I know several families with children, both young and adult, who have mental and physical handicaps. These families witness every day to their community true love with the eternal innocence that these children have brought into their lives. I marvel at these parents and families on this journey they travel with such grace. They show us what perfect love is and I’ve seen the many gifts and blessings these children have brought to their family and to the world.

Faye Roch is director for the Pro-Life Office, Diocese of Covington, Ky

may God grant you pardon and peace.
And I absolve you from your sins,
in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.
I have come to think of these words of absolution as a “love letter” from the Lord, reminding me that I am never defined by my failures and that I am always, first and foremost, beloved.

They reaffirm that Jesus died for me as well as for the whole world. They compel me to be more open to his grace so that I might respond by living each day for the Lord. They restore me to friendship and intimacy with the Blessed Trinity — that Communion of Persons who is Love — and they strengthen my communion to all of God’s other beloved children.

They also make me more receptive to the full mystery of the Eucharist in the life of the church.

When my easily wounded pride might try to keep me away from regular reconciliation, I remind myself of Peter’s response to Jesus after people began to turn away from His Eucharistic teaching in the sixth chapter of John’s Gospel: “Master...You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). Even though Peter did not fully comprehend the mystery, he understood what was essential: When Jesus speaks, love happens.

David Spesia is the executive director of the secretariat of evangelization and catechesis for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

GUEST



David Spesia



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2023 World Youth Day reflections

“As a parent, it was beautiful to travel to World Youth Day and hear so many young voices singing together and praising God. Lisbon was full of youth from around the world who brought so much joy to every place they went. To visit the church where St. Anthony of Padua was born, and wait in line to place intentions in the prayer box, it was like a Star Wars fan waiting in line to meet Harrison Ford. Everyone was geeking out over their love of Jesus, and excitement to see Pope Francis. Everyone who attended from the diocese went with the same goals and got along so well.”

Susan Keller, St. Timothy

“For me, WYD in Lisbon was building up a theme of “Rise Up and Pursue the Joy” even when you feel tired. This theme was used from the Opening Mass by Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon, Manuel Clemente to the Papal Welcoming to the Way of the Cross to the Saturday Vigil and to the Final Mass at Park Tejo with Our Holy Father, Pope Francis.

The Rise Up message was the theme in WYD. It was even used during catechesis with young people by the different Bishops of the Universal Church. Catechesis was done in the form of questions and answers just like the Synod on Synodality between bishops and young people of the universal Church from Wednesday through Friday, culminating with the Sunday Mass. It was an amazing experience. I cried throughout the entire week. This event is where young people of the universal Church learn about their faith in a practical way. There was hands-on catechesis going on. During World Youth Day, I was able to build and grow my faith from our bishops, the Holy Father and the different communities of the Universal Church.”

Isaak Isaak, Co-director, Office of Catechesis and Evangelization

“It is amazing how many people unite for this event. Although the crowds cause headaches, you know the person next to you is united in the same faith. It is beautiful to see people from across the world giving the sign of peace together at Mass and trading trinkets from home. I have left both world youth day events certain of God’s presence despite challenges. Even though life causes suffering, at least we are suffering together. This is made evident as thousands of people sit baking in the sun or squished together to get on public transportation. I return home refreshed in my faith with great stories to share of God’s amazing church.”

Emily Scheper, St. Henry

Due to air travel delays and difficulties many of the Diocese of Covington pilgrims to World Youth Day had not returned home as of this publication of the Messenger. The Messenger will attempt to catch up with the pilgrims and share more of their photos and reflections in a future edition.

2023 World Youth Day

(Continued from page 1)

for over an hour Aug. 2, during which they “dialogued about this plague” of abuse, the pope said.

The pope celebrated Mass with 1.5 million young people sprawled across Lisbon’s river-side Tejo Park Aug. 6 and told them not to be afraid of pursuing their great dreams to change the world.

In addition to listening the testimonies of young people and fielding questions from some of them during public events, Pope Francis had a chance for more direct interactions with several young people during the trip. He heard the confessions of three pilgrims and ate lunch with a group of 10 young people Aug. 4.

The pope later shared that he spoke to one young man who had previously considered taking his own life and said youth suicide is a problem today, noting the challenge is especially prevalent in places where universities and the job market are very demanding.

After the closing Mass, the pope announced that Seoul, South Korea, would be the location for the next World Youth Day in 2027, drawing great applause from the South Korean delegations scattered throughout the crowd.

The previous morning, Pope Francis visited the Shrine of Our Lady of Fátima, where he again put aside his prepared remarks and spoke off the cuff, focusing on Mary and skipping over an expected prayer for peace in the world.

He later said that “I prayed to Our Lady, and I prayed for peace” before a statue of Our Lady of Fátima, but “I did not advertise.”

In the shrine’s Chapel of the Apparitions, marking the exact spot where the three Portuguese children claimed to see Mary in 1917, he said the open-air chapel “is like a beautiful image of the church, welcoming, without doors, so that all can enter.”

The Messenger contributed to this article. For reflections from Diocesan pilgrims, see page 6.




Day 2 of World Youth Day 2023 found the pilgrims up early to be among the first to arrive in Fatima. (below) The group visited the homes of the Fatima visionaries and met-up with (above) Bishop John Iffert for a private Mass in the Fatima chapel.



(left) On Saturday, Diocesan pilgrims camp out under a bridge waiting for the arrival of Pope Francis and the evenings events.



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New teacher orientation

Over 65 new teachers arrived at Bishop Howard Memorial Auditorium, Aug. 1, for new teacher orientation. (right) Kendra McGuire, superintendent of Schools, welcomed the new educators and led them through a series of inspirational talks and videos on the importance of creating positive and transformational relationships with students. Dale Henson, chief financial officer, went over the onboarding process and how to sign up for benefits. Julie Feinauer, director, Office of Safe Environment, discussed how to identify the signs of abuse and abuse reporting procedures, as well as best practices for protecting their own reputation online.



Parish Secretary meeting
(above) Jamie Schroeder, chancellor, welcomed parish secretaries, Aug. 3, for their quarterly meeting. This meeting focused on the With One Heart program. While the schedule and milestones of the program are not new secretaries, Mrs. Schroeder focused on the important work secretaries do in supporting pastors and parishioners. She also shared with the secretaries the three priorities that the With One Heart Planning Commission had identified and that Bishop John Iffert has included in the Diocesan Pastoral Plan. The next parish secretary meeting is scheduled for Oct. 18.

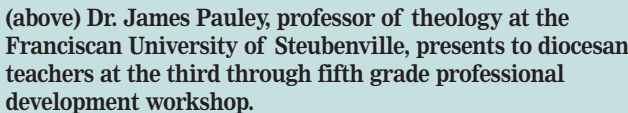


Maura Baker
Staff Writer

Teachers were asked to register for and attend sessions based on the grade level they taught — but every session had the same theme, “The Mission of Sharing the Catholic Faith.”

After a brief address and welcome from diocesan superintendent of Schools, Kendra McGuire, Ingrid Waldstein of the Sophia Institute for Teachers began the workshops with prayer, reflections and discussions based on scripture.

“So, why is this mission of discipleship so important?,” Dr. Pauley asked, “This is the mission of the Church that has been entrusted to us by Jesus himself ... discipleship has a sacramental dimension to it, and also a catechetical dimension to it — and both of these are at the very heart of what happens in a Catholic school.”



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National Eucharistic Pilgrimage connects Catholics across U.S. to 2024 Congress

Maria Wiering
OSV News

ST. PAUL, Minn. (OSV News) — Mike Wavra thinks of the 2024 National Eucharistic Pilgrimage as “an opportunity to walk with the Lord.”

He and his wife, Cindi, both 65-year-old retirees, plan to join the pilgrimage at its northern launch point in Minnesota in May 2024, and then walk for about a week, before rejoining the pilgrims seven weeks later in

gelization, as well as a way to engage Catholics unable to attend the Congress, said Tim Glemkowski, the National Eucharistic Congress’ executive director.

“What the pilgrimage does is it builds us in prayerful anticipation for what God is going to do at the Congress,” he told OSV News May 5. “It’s two months of us pilgrimag-ing, fasting, praying, interceding, asking the Lord to renew his church, his bride, in those five days. ... They’re not two different things. It’s one pilgrimage: five days of which

Christi and Houston, and continue through New Orleans; Mobile, Alabama; Atlanta; Nashville, Tennessee; and Louisville, Kentucky.

The “Seton Route” — named for St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, the first U.S.-born saint — begins in New Haven, Connecticut, and continues through New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Pittsburgh, and Steubenville, Columbus and Cincinnati, Ohio.

The “Junipero Serra Route” begins in San Francisco — with hope of walking over the Golden Gate Bridge — and continues through Reno, Nevada; Salt Lake City; Denver; North Platte and Omaha, Nebraska; Kansas City, Kansas and Missouri; and St. Louis.

At more than 2,200 miles long, the Junipero Serra Route is the longest and most rigorous route. Pilgrims will use transport to cross sections of their route, but the Rocky Mountains and Great Plains are expected to be crossed on foot.

Modern Catholic Pilgrim, a pilgrimage non-profit with offices in Minnesota and California, is organizing the national pilgrimage. Its founder and president, Will Peterson, connects the pilgrimage to the scriptural journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus, where two of his disciples met Jesus after the Resurrection. Luke 24 recounts how Jesus comforted them, and then revealed himself in the breaking of the bread.

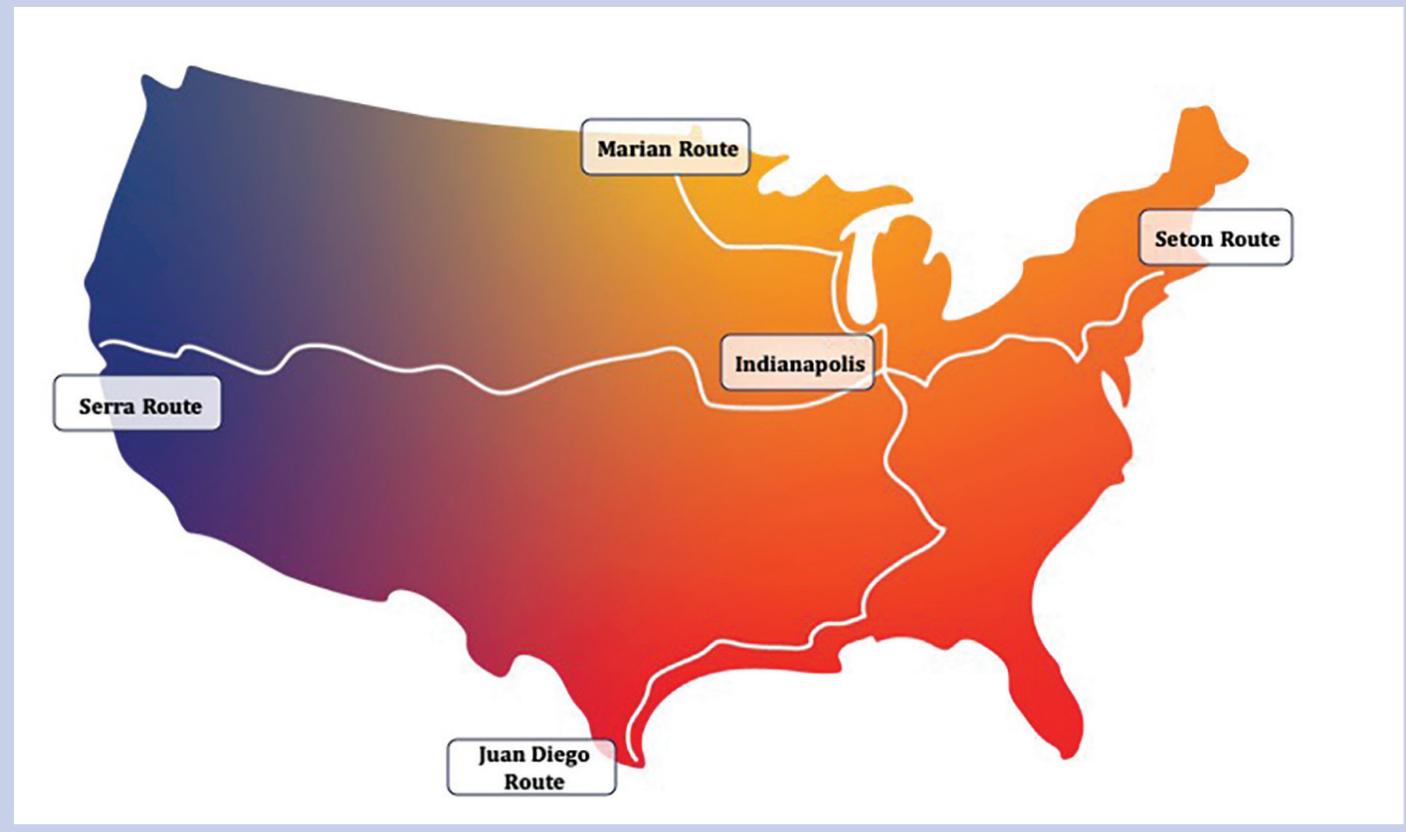
The routes include important Catholic sites in the United States, such the 18th-century ministry of St. Junipero Serra in what is now California, the Philadelphia tombs of St. John Neumann and St. Katharine Drexel, and in Wisconsin, the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, the only approved Marian apparition in the United States.

“People are going to reach an ‘Emmaus point’ at these spots along the way, and we want to support the local church,” Peterson said May 9. “That’s where it’s such a great gift to coordinate with like 65 dioceses to say, ‘How can we really highlight the great sacred sites of your diocese?’”

Each pilgrimage route is expected to have 12 “perpetual pilgrims,” young adults, including two seminarians, committed to traveling the entire route, from their launch points to Indianapolis. Each route also will include priest chaplains who will carry the Eucharist, usually in a monstrance specially designed for the pilgrimage. While some chaplains may join the entire pilgrimage route, others may join for segments of the journey, Glemkowski said.

The faithful are invited to join the pilgrimage for hours, days or weeks. Each day of the pilgrimage will begin with Mass and a Eucharistic procession with the local community before pilgrims continue the trek to their next stopping point. Pilgrims joining the Eucharistic caravans for short stretches will be responsible for arranging their own food and overnight accommodations, although some parishes along the routes may provide meals and lodging.

For information on the Eucharistic Revival including the pilgrimage routes visit www.EucharisticRevival.org. To order tickets to and join others from the Diocese of Covington at the Eucharistic Congress visit www.codio.org.



Indianapolis for the 10th National Eucharistic Congress.

The Wavras are among thousands of Catholics from across the United States anticipated to participate in next year’s pilgrimage to the Congress, part of the U.S. bishops’ three-year National Eucharistic Revival that began in 2021. The pilgrimage has four routes, with one beginning in the north, south, east and west of the country.

Pilgrims traveling in the “Eucharistic caravans” on all four routes will begin their journeys with Pentecost weekend celebrations May 17-18, 2024, leaving May 19. They will all converge on Indianapolis July 16, 2024, the day before the five-day Congress opens.

The pilgrimage is an opportunity for prayer and evan-

happen in a stadium in Indianapolis, and two months of which happen across our country on the way there.”

Weekend stops in major cities will include special liturgies, Eucharistic adoration, processions and service opportunities, Glemkowski said.

The northern “Marian Route” that the Wavras plan to take begins in northern Minnesota at Lake Itasca, the headwaters of the Mississippi River. The route follows the river to St. Paul and Minneapolis, its first weekend stop. Then the route heads south to Rochester, Minnesota, and then east through La Crosse and Green Bay, Wisconsin. It continues through Milwaukee, Chicago and Notre Dame, Indiana, before arriving in Indianapolis.

The “Juan Diego Route” begins more than 1,600 miles south of Lake Itasca in Brownsville, Texas, at the U.S.-Mexico border. It will follow Texas’ eastern border through Corpus



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PEOPLE AND EVENTS

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.

St. Mary’s Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, offers Veneration of a relic of the True Cross, on the first Friday of every month, from noon–1 p.m. Confessions are offered concurrently. The monthly veneration is held in silence and concludes with a blessing and the opportunity for the faithful to come forward to personally venerate the True Cross relic. The monthly veneration is sponsored by the Knights and Dames of the Covington-Lexington section of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

Notre Dame Urban Education Center, Covington, is seeking adult and high school volunteers to tutor children in grades K-9 in reading, English and math. For information, call (859) 261-4487 or e-mail Sister Maria Therese at smtherese@nduec.org. Volunteers 18 and older must be VIRTUS compliant.

The Mustard Seed Catholic Charismatic Community sponsors a monthly Third Tuesday prayer gathering, 7–8:45 p.m., Blessed Sacrament Parish Center, Ft. Mitchell. Join us July 18 with praise & worship music, teaching, witnesses, and healing prayers. For information, call (859) 341-5932.

Knights of Columbus St. Timothy Council #15211 21st annual golf tournament Aug. 19, 1:30 p.m., Boone Links Golf Course. Cost is \$110 per player; \$400 foursome. Visit <http://www.sttimothygolfouting.com>.

To celebrate its parish feast day — the Queenship of Mary — Mary, Queen of Heaven parish, Erlanger, hosts its annual Queenship Rockin’ Eve event Aug. 19, 6:30-11 p.m. Three local music acts performing: Floyd and Don duo, Marty Connor Music, and Halfway Hammered. The annual parish picnic will be held on Aug. 20. All are welcome.

The Office of Catechesis and Evangelization in collaboration with the Angelic Project invite all to attend a candlelight Mass the first Friday of every month, 7 p.m. The next is Sept. 1, St. Joseph Parish, Camp Spring. Confessions available at 6 p.m.; a social for young adults ages 18–35 follows at 8 p.m.

The Class of 1963, St. Thomas School, Ft. Thomas, is celebrating its 60-year reunion. There is a luncheon planned for Sept. 10, 2023, 1 p.m., Summit Hills Country Club, Edgewood. Contact Carol Clear Combs at: cleargirl1008@aol.com or (513) 253-9273.

Bishop John Iffert will celebrate Vespers, Sunday, Sept. 17, 2 p.m. at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington, to honor couples celebrating milestone wedding anniversaries — 1st, 25th, 50th, or 60+ — in 2023. Anniversary couples RSVP by July 18 at covidio.org/wedding-vespers/ or contact Lisa Taylor at (859) 392-1533 to register. Reservations are only required for anniversary couples; family members and guests are welcome to attend.

To celebrate its parish feast day — the Queenship of Mary — Mary, Queen of Heaven parish, Erlanger, hosts its annual Queenship Rockin’ Eve event Aug. 19, 6:30-11 p.m. Three local music acts performing: Floyd and Don duo, Marty Connor Music, and Halfway Hammered. The annual parish picnic will be held on Aug. 20. All are welcome.

Newport Central Catholic High School invites families up to the school hill, Sept. 3, for its 29th Family Fireworks Fest. Food, drinks, and games begin at 5 p.m. and will continue until the big blast. No cans, bottles or coolers will be permitted. Then watch the Western & Southern/WEBCN Labor Day fireworks from one of the best views in Northern Kentucky. Admission is \$5; tickets can be purchased online at ncchs.com. Children age 6 and under no charge. Limited \$10 parking passes guaranteeing you parking on the hill are on sale. Select handicap space if needed. There are only 25 handicap spaces available. Contact Tessy Krebs

2023 Parish Festivals

St. Thomas Parish, Ft. Thomas, July 28, 6–11 p.m.; July 29, 5–11 p.m.

Sts. Peter and Paul July Picnic, Aug. 26, meals 2–8 p.m., picnic 2 –11 p.m.; Sept. 23, Oktoberfest 6 –11 p.m.

Blessed Sacrament School Boosters Corn Roast, Ft. Mitchell, August 11, 5:30–11:30 p.m.

St. Mary Parish, Alexandria, August 11, 6 p.m.–12 a.m., August 12, 5 p.m.–11 p.m.

St. Joseph Parish, Crescent Springs, August 11–13

St. Bernard Parish, Dayton, August 18, 6–11 p.m., August 19, 5–11 p.m.

St. Philip Golf Ball Drop and Festival, Melbourne, August 19, 5–11 p.m.

Holy Cross District High School, Covington, Aug. 25, 6 p.m.–midnight; Aug. 26, 5:30 p.m.–midnight

St. Augustine Parish, Augusta, Aug. 25–27

St. Cecilia Parish, Independence, Sept. 2, 5–11:30 p.m.; 3, 4–11:30 p.m.; 4, 1–10 p.m.

St. Barbara Rocktoberfest,

Erlanger, September 8–10

St. Patrick School, Maysville, Sept. 8, 6–10 p.m.; Sept. 9, 6–10 p.m.; Sept. 10, 11 a.m.–3 p.m.

St. Timothy Oktoberfest, Union, Sept. 15, 6–11 p.m., Sept. 16, 5:30 p.m.–12 a.m., Sept. 17 12:30–6 p.m.

St. Agnes Parish, Ft. Wright, September 22–24

St. Benedict Parish, Covington, September 22–23

DCCH Center for Children & Families, Sept. 30, 2–10 p.m.

at (859) 292-0001 ext. 528 or tkrebs@ncchs.com.

Save the date — Sept. 23, a day of recollection and exploration into the interconnectedness of the mind, body and soul at St. Joseph Heights, Park Hills, featuring speakers Msgr. William Cleves, Kathy Kramer and Jessica Muehlenkamp. This day will be one of growth and renewal. Cost is \$65, which includes the program materials, activities and a catered continental breakfast and lunch. For information e-mail holylisten-ing24@gmail.com.

St. Joseph Church, Camp Springs, will be hosting their Oktoberfish Fish Fries, October 7, 14 and 21, 4–7:30 p.m. Dine-in and carry-out available, more information at www.stjosephcamp-springs.org.

The Institute for Religious Liberty welcomes Stephanie Barclay, director, Notre Dame Law School Religious Liberty initiative, as the keynote speaker for its fall event, Oct. 19, 7 p.m., Steigerwald Hall in the Saints Center of Thomas More University’s campus. Guest commentators include Holly Hinckley Lesan, International Center for Law & Religion Studies at Brigham Young University (BYU) Law School and Gary Greenberg, retired principal in the Cincinnati law office of Jackson Lewis P.C. and president of the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati. For information visit thomasmore.edu/religiousliberty.

DCCH Children’s Home Flea Market, Ft. Mitchell, year-round, 8:30 a.m.– noon, Monday, Thursday, and Saturday; (Dec.– April, Monday, Thursday and every 3rd Saturday). Donation drop-off during Flea Market hours or at drop-off box anytime.

A faith-based support group, New Beginnings provides separated and divorced individuals the opportunity for healing and growth. In this group, participants find new understanding of themselves and their relationships and gain courage to discover new life. Registration is required. Visit <https://covidio.org/new-beginnings-2/> or call (859) 392-1500, ext.1592. The next session will be held on consecutive Tuesdays, Aug. 29 – Oct. 17, 7 – 8:30 p.m., Holy Trinity Elementary School, Bellevue.

Save the date for Thomas More University’s fall interfaith event hosted by the Wm. T. (Bill) Robinson III ‘67 Institute for Religious Liberty on Oct. 19, 2023. The event begins at 7 p.m. with Stephanie Barclay as keynote speaker. Barclay directs Notre

Dame University’s Law School’s Religious Liberty Initiative, which promotes freedom of religion or belief for all people through advocacy, student formation, and scholarship. More details to come. Visit thomasmore.edu/religiousliberty for more information.

Retrouvaille has helped tens of thousands of couples at all stages of disillusionment or misery in their marriage. This program can help you, too. For confidential information or to register for the September 2023 program beginning Sept. 8–10, call (513) 486-6222, or visit www.HelpOurMarriage.com.



A festival of life

The St. Pius X Respect Life table was set up once again this year at the St. Pius X festival and it went over very well. The intent is to share the joy of choosing life by giving away helium balloons to the little ones. An assortment of other Pro-Life items were also shared, including magnets, silicone bracelets, window clings, stickers and yard signs. The parish’s Pro-Life ministry also used the opportunity to share information about Pro-Life organizations and resources.



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Catholic couple alleges state denied them foster parenting chance over religious beliefs

Kate Scanlon,
OSV News

WASHINGTON — A Massachusetts couple alleged the commonwealth denied them the opportunity to foster or adopt children into their family due to their religious beliefs.

Becket, a Washington-based religious liberty law firm, said Aug. 8 it is representing Mike and Kitty Burke, prospective foster and adoptive parents who said they are Catholic and were allegedly denied the ability to participate in the program due to their religious beliefs about marriage, sexuality, and gender.

Mike Burke is an Iraq war veteran, Becket’s statement said, while Kitty Burke is a former paraprofessional for children with special needs; the couple run a business and perform music for Mass. They said they began applying to become foster and eventually adoptive parents, but claim the state disqualified them over their religious views.

“After months of interviews and training, and after years of heartbreak, we were on the verge of finally becoming parents,” the couple said in a joint statement. “We were absolutely devastated to learn that Massachusetts would rather children sleep in the hallways of hospitals than let us welcome children in need into our home.”

Lori Windham, vice president and senior counsel at Becket, said in a statement, “It takes the heroic effort of parents like Mike and Kitty to provide vulnerable children with loving homes through foster care.”

“Massachusetts’ actions leave the Burkes, and families of other faiths, out in the cold. How can they explain this to children waiting for a home?” she said.

According to Becket, the Burkes underwent training and interviews in their application process, receiving high marks from instructors; however, during home interviews, the couple received questions about their Catholic faith’s beliefs about sexual orientation and gender dysphoria. The couple responded they would love and accept any child into their home, regardless of the child’s future sexual orientation or potential struggles with gender identity.

However, the couple allege their application was rejected after their home study called their religious views “not supportive.” They claim the Massachusetts Department of

Children and Families, or DCF, officials said that despite their strengths as applicants, their answers about sexuality and gender prevented them from being licensed.

In their Aug. 8 filing with the U.S. District Court for Massachusetts, the Burkes’ attorneys stated, “As faithful Catholics, the Burkes believe that all children should be loved and supported, and they would never reject a child placed in their home. They also believe that children should not undergo procedures that attempt to change their God-given sex, and they uphold Catholic beliefs about marriage and sexuality.”

The filing cited U.S. Supreme Court precedent which “unanimously — rejected the attempt to exclude Catholic foster care agencies from the child welfare system,” and a 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decision holding “the First Amendment prohibits retaliation against foster parents for sharing their religious beliefs on marriage.”

“Exclusion of Catholic couples is equally unconstitutional,” the brief argued, saying the DCF’s rules would extend to Muslims, Jews and Christians with similar beliefs, meaning “any Massachusetts family with similar religious beliefs on human sexuality will be banned from ever fostering or adopting children through Massachusetts’ child welfare system.”

The Massachusetts DCF did not immediately respond to a request for comment from OSV News on the case.



OSV News photo/courtesy Becket

Mike and Kitty Burke of Massachusetts are pictured in an undated photo. Becket, a Washington-based religious liberty law firm, said Aug. 8 it is representing the Catholic couple, prospective foster and adoptive parents, who allege they were denied the ability to participate in the commonwealth’s fostering/adoption program due to their religious beliefs about marriage, sexuality and gender.

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Biden administration criticized over abortion rule in law meant to protect pregnant workers

Kate Scanlon
OSV News

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration has drawn criticism for its inclusion of abortion in a proposed rule for a bipartisan law guaranteeing protections for pregnant workers that had the support of Catholic, pro-life and Republican leaders.

The bipartisan Pregnant Workers Fairness Act was passed by Congress Dec. 27, 2022, signed into law by President Joe Biden Dec. 29 and went into effect in June. The law prohibits employment practices that discriminate against making reasonable accommodations for qualified employees due to their pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions.

A rule proposed by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Aug. 7 governing the implementation of that law contains broad language including abortion among “related medical conditions,” and the potential circumstances for which employers may have to grant workplace accommodations, which can include time off or additional rest breaks.

In a statement, EEOC Chair Charlotte A. Burrows said the new law “is a step forward for workers, families and the economy. This important new civil rights law promotes the economic security and health of pregnant and postpartum workers by providing them with access to support on the job to keep working, which helps employers retain critical talent.”

Burrows said the EEOC welcomed the public “to provide meaningful feedback about how the proposal would impact workplaces and ways to assist employers and workers in understanding the law.”

The rule defines “pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions” as inclusive of “current pregnancy, past pregnancy, potential pregnancy, lactation (including breastfeeding and pumping), use of birth control, menstruation, infertility and fertility treatments, endometriosis, miscarriage, stillbirth, or having or choosing not to have an abortion, among other conditions.”

Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-La., a medical doctor who is the ranking member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee and worked to pass the legislation with Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pa., said in a statement the Biden administration “has gone rogue.”

“These regulations completely disregard legislative intent and attempt to rewrite the law by regulation,” Cassidy said. “The Biden administration has to enforce the law as passed by Congress, not how they wish it was passed. The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act is aimed at assisting pregnant mothers who remain in the workforce by choice or necessity as they bring their child to term and recover after childbirth. The decision to disregard the legislative process to inject a political abortion agenda is illegal and deeply concerning.”

Many pro-life advocates, including the U.S. bishops, supported the legislation, but criticized the proposed regulation.

In a statement, Bishop Michael F. Burbidge of Arlington, Virginia, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Pro-Life Activities, said the bishops supported the bipartisan Pregnant Workers Fairness Act “because it enhanced the protection of pregnant mothers and their preborn children, which is something that we have encouraged Congress to prioritize.”

“The Act is pro-worker, pro-family, and pro-life,” Bishop Burbidge said. “It is a total distortion to use this law as a means for advancing abortion, and the complete opposite of needed assistance for pregnant mothers.”

Bishop Burbidge said the EEOC’s proposed interpretation of the legislation to “include accommodations for obtaining an abortion is wrong and contrary to the text, legislative history, and purpose of the Act, which is to help make it possible for working mothers to remain gainfully employed, if desired, while protecting their health and that of their preborn children.”

“We are hopeful that the EEOC will be forced to abandon its untenable position when public comments submitted on this regulation demonstrate that its interpretation would be struck down in court,” he said.

In a statement, Alliance Defending Freedom senior



OSV News photo/Tyler Orsburn, CNS

A pregnant woman is seen outside the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington in this 2016 file photo. On Aug. 8, 2023, Bishop Michael F. Burbidge of Arlington, Virginia, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Pro-Life Activities, objected to a proposed interpretation of the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act to include accommodations for obtaining an abortion.

counsel Julie Marie Blake said “Congress sought to help pregnant workers, not force employers to facilitate abortions.”

“The Biden administration is hijacking a bipartisan law that doesn’t even mention abortion to forcibly require every employer in America to provide ‘reasonable accommodations’ for their workers’ elective abortions,” Blake said. “The administration’s unlawful proposal violates state laws protecting the unborn and employers’ pro-life and religious beliefs. The administration doesn’t have the

legal authority to smuggle an abortion mandate into a transformational pro-life, pro-woman law. Alliance Defending Freedom stands ready to continue defending unborn lives and to oppose this egregious federal overreach.”

EEOC said the rule will be published for public comment in the Federal Register Aug. 11. Members of the public wishing to comment on the proposal will have 60 days from the date of publication to do so by visiting regulations.gov.



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(top) Father Martin Pitstick, pastor, Divine Mercy Parish, Bellevue, incenses the altar, lit by candlelight. (bottom) Brad Torline (center), Angelico Project director, stands alongside young adults following one of the Friday candlelit Masses.



Monthly ‘candlelight Masses’

(Continued from page 1)

“Our churches’ architectural history precedes the invention of electricity,” said Mr. Torline, noting the fluorescent lighting of most modern church buildings. “That’s not what the building was built for — it was built to be lit by candlelight or natural sunlight ... it’s just a new way for;” quite literally, “people to come experience Mass in a new light and hopefully get them to reconnect with Jesus’s real presence in the Mass.”

“In today’s culture,” adds Dave Cooley, co-director of the diocese’s Office of Catechesis and Evangelization, “a lot of young people don’t get to see the beauty that used to be part of everyday life back in olden times. I think that it’s something everyone is yearning for, and looking for, and they’re not getting it anywhere.”

“It’s the Catholic Church that has always been the premier beauty in the world,” adds Mr. Cooley, “and so, there’s a reason why young adults and kids of all ages are drawn to the beauty of the Mass the way it was supposed to be. So, in a way, it’s a gift to be able to go to a candlelight Mass.”

While the monthly Masses are catered to young adults, all are invited, encouraged and welcomed to attend. The Masses, which are hosted on the first Friday of every month, September through May, begin at 7 p.m. with confessions available beforehand starting at 6 p.m.

A committee of young adults put in charge of organizing the monthly Masses also host a social with food and drink available following the Mass at 8 p.m. “The social,” Mr. Torline notes, “is just for young adults,” with the age range going from 18 to 35.



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Don't be afraid to change the world, pope tells youths at WYD closing Mass

Catholic News Service

To end “Catholic Woodstock” — as World Youth Day has been called by the Portuguese press — Pope Francis told 1.5 million weary-eyed and sleep-deprived young people in Lisbon not to let their “great dreams” of changing the world be “stopped by fear.” In his homily for the closing Mass of World Youth Day Aug. 6, the pope asked for “a bit of silence” from the pilgrims who, after staying overnight in Lisbon’s Tejo Park following the previous night’s vigil, at 6 a.m. were already dancing to techno music mixed by a DJ priest before the pope’s arrival. “Let’s all repeat this phrase in our hearts: ‘Don’t be afraid,’” he told the hushed crowd. “Jesus knows the hearts of each one of you, the successes and the failures, he knows your hearts,” Pope Francis said. “And today he tells you, here in Lisbon for this World Youth Day: ‘Don’t be afraid.’”

As dawn broke over the riverside park, pilgrims emerged from tents, tarps and sleeping bags to prepare for Mass. Violeta Marovic, 19, from Chicago, told Catholic News Service that the pilgrims spent the 10 hours between the previous night’s vigil and the papal Mass “sleeping very little,” dancing, playing games and exchanging gifts with other young people from around the world; she was wearing bracelets given to her by pilgrims from Italy and Poland.

At the front of the crowd, which extended across both banks of Lisbon’s Trancão River, 30 cardinals, 700 bishops and 10,000 priests concelebrated the Mass with Pope Francis. Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa was seated in the front row. Cardinal Manuel do Nascimento Clemente of Lisbon thanked the pope for making World Youth Day an opportunity for young people

to come together and build a better tomorrow “after a pandemic that has confined them and otherwise distanced them from each other and from the best (version) of themselves.”

Cardinal Kevin Farrell, prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, the Family and Life, which organizes World Youth Day, thanked Pope Francis for bringing together in Lisbon young people “who have been pilgrims of peace in times in which many, too many, wars are being fought in so many parts of the world.”

Before revealing the location of the next World Youth Day, Pope Francis invited young people to travel to Rome for a youth celebration during the Holy Year 2025. The next World Youth Day, to take place in 2027, he continued, “will be in South Korea, in Seoul,” he said to cheers from the sizeable groups of Koreans scattered in the crowd.

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- August bulletin: posted Sunday, August 6; due Tuesday, Sept. 5.

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VIRTUS Training:

- Sunday, August 13, 1–3:30 p.m., Notre Dame Academy, Room 112, Park Hills (Spanish)

- Monday, August 14, 6:30–9 p.m., St. Barbara Parish, Sterling Event Center, Erlanger
- Sunday, Sept. 10, 1–3:30 p.m., St. Edward School, Cafeteria, Cynthiana

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

For other difficulties, contact Marylu Steffen at (859) 392-1500 or msteffen@covdio.org

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Mental Health School Counselor
We are seeking a part time (30 hours per week) counselor for our School-Based Counseling Program for the upcoming school year from August 16th, 2023, through May 31st, 2024. The position is 30 hours per week or 75% FTE for 9½ months. Necessary qualifications include MSW or Master in clinical counseling and State Licensed (preferred) or license eligibility; experience with assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of youth; a demonstrated ability to engage with parents and school staff; and solid record-keeping and organizational skills.

Mental Health Agency Counselor
We are seeking a full-time counselor for our agency's mental health program. The position includes general counseling services to individuals, couples and families. This is 40 hours a week, some evening hours. Necessary qualifications include MSW or Master in clinical counseling and State Licensed (preferred) or license eligibility, experience with assessment, diagnosis, and treatment and solid record-keeping and organizational skills.

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.

Additional details about each of the above opportunities can be found on our website at <https://www.covingtoncharities.org/news-events/job-opportunities>. Please contact Shannon Braun directly at sbraun@covingtoncharities.org if you would like to learn more about any of these opportunities.



Catholic Charities

Diocese of Covington



Obituary

Sister Mary Eileen Bertsch died peacefully at Holy Family Home, Melbourne, July 24. Born LaVerne Louise in 1929 to Lawrence and Matilda (Heck) Bertsch of Cold Spring, she was a professed member of the Congregation of Divine Providence for almost 71 years.

Sister Eileen delighted in serving God through teaching, a ministry that spanned 38 years. Missioned to Christ the King School, Lexington in 1952, she returned the following year to Northern Kentucky.



Sister Mary Eileen Bertsch, C.D.P.

While teaching elementary and high school students at St. Thomas School, Ft. Thomas until 1965, she also completed her B.A. (Villa Madonna College, 1959) and M.Ed. (Xavier University, 1965). She credited business courses taken over the summer of 1954 as “the beginning of my teaching career in the business field,” and that fall taught typing and shorthand to juniors and seniors at St. Thomas.

Bookkeeping, religion, and English were added to her teaching repertoire when she was missioned to Our Lady of Providence Academy, Newport (1965-1967). She also served as secretary for Covington’s diocesan marriage tribunal from 1958-1959.

“I always loved to teach,” said Sister Eileen. After a year at Lexington Catholic High School, Sister was sent to Good Shepherd School in Frankfort. She said this period (1968-1970) was “one of the most beautiful and growing times of my life.” Following the high school’s closure, she returned to Our Lady of Providence Academy.

She named her “baptism in the Holy Spirit” in 1972 as the biggest change of her life, saying with St. Paul: “I live now not I, but Christ lives in me.”

While making retreat in 1983, she discerned a clear and strong call to minister to young children. From then until her retirement to Holy Family Home (2012), her gentleness and joy found expression among the first- and second-graders she served as teacher or aide at St. Camillus Academy, Corbin (1983-1987; 2001-2007); Immaculate Heart of Mary School, Hebron (1987-2001); and St. Philip School, Melbourne (2007-2012).

Sister Eileen moved to Holy Family’s Health Care Center in 2018.

She will be missed by her religious community, the Sisters of Divine Providence; her sisters Margie Stormer and Eileen Feldman; her brother Charles; and her many nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends. Her brother Albert preceded her in death.

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated in the Immaculate Conception Chapel, Holy Family Home, Melbourne on Friday, July 28. Burial in the convent cemetery followed. Memorials may be sent to the Congregation of Divine Providence, 5300 St. Anne Drive, Melbourne, KY 41059.

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Obituary

Sister Joan Marie Boberg, CDP (aka Sister Francis Xavier) died peacefully at Holy Family Home on July 29. She was a professed member of the Congregation of Divine Providence for almost 72 years.

Born in Covington, Ky. in 1932 to John Theodore and Mildred (Fagedes) Boberg, she made her first profession of vows in 1951. Sister professed final vows in 1956.



Sister Joan Marie Boberg, C.D.P.

Missioned in 1951 to teach at Christ the King School, Lexington, Sister Joan Marie pursued her bachelor’s degree by attending summer classes at Villa Madonna College (now Thomas More University).

After graduation in 1965, she began work toward her master’s (M.Ed., Xavier University, 1970) while adding the responsibilities of being a school principal to her teaching work in the classroom, first at St. Francis School in Pikeville (1965-1966), and then at Corpus Christi School, Newport (1966-1969).

She served in Congregational ministry as Director of Formation and influenced the spiritual formation of many young sisters. Sister Joan Marie was then elected Vicar-Councilor of her CDP Province (1973-1979) and, in the following term, Provincial Superior (1979-1984).

In 1984, Sister Joan Marie began a year of sabbatical at the University of Notre Dame, a blessed and happy time during which she continued to discern the next step in God’s plan for her.

A wonderful phase of Sister’s ministry began when she was appointed Director of the Catholic Social Services Bureau in 1985 by Bishop William Hughes, a ministry through which she served God and God’s people for the next two decades.

A very few highlights of her leadership during that time include the establishment of Catholic Charities, Inc., as an umbrella organization for Catholic Social Services

and the Parish Kitchen to serve the needs of the people of Northern Kentucky (1987); expansion and renovation of the Parish Kitchen (1997); and new and expanded facilities for CSS in Latonia to better serve clients (2004). She also oversaw the creation of the first CSS plan emphasizing the treatment and prevention of substance abuse and violence.

In many ways, Sister Joan Marie became “the face of CSS in the community.” The City of Covington acknowledged her prodigious contribution to the well-being of the community by giving her the key to the city and declaring August 26, 2005 “Sister Joan Marie Boberg, CDP Day.”

Sister Joan Marie also served for many years as a trustee at St. Elizabeth Medical Center; Director of the Commission for Persons with Disabilities; a member of the Social Concerns Committee for the Catholic Conference of Kentucky; and was a founding member of Associated Catholic Charities of Kentucky.

She was known as a woman with “a passion for the poor.” A deeply spiritual person and a brilliant administrator and organizer, Sister Joan Marie was most of all a true woman of Providence. Sister retired from her last ministry as Director of Pastoral Care at the community’s Health Care Center in early 2023.

She will be deeply missed by her religious community, the Sisters of Divine Providence; her sisters Pam (Mike) Wagner and Lynn Mowery; her brother Jack (Gerry); and her many nieces, nephews, friends and colleagues. Her sisters Claire, LaVern Schute, Rose Welscher, Diane Beck; and her brothers Ken, Nick, Dan, Rick and Steve preceded her in death.

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at Mother of God Church, Covington, Aug. 3. Interment of cremains will be in the convent cemetery at a later date.

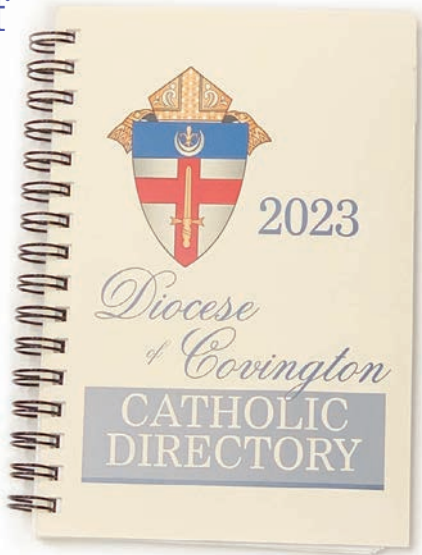
Memorials may be sent to the Congregation of Divine Providence, 5300 St. Anne Drive, Melbourne, KY 41059, or to Catholic Charities, Diocese of Covington, 3629 Church St., Covington, KY 41015.

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Pope’s peace day message to focus on ethical concerns over AI



Pope Francis meets leaders from the tech industry at the Vatican March 27, 2023. The pope called for an “ethical and responsible” development of artificial intelligence.

CNS photo/Vatican Media

Justin McLellan
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Signaling the Vatican’s growing engagement in efforts to ensure the ethical development of new technologies, the Vatican has announced that “Artificial Intelligence and Peace” will be the theme for the next World Day of Peace, which is scheduled for Jan. 1, 2024.

“The remarkable advances made in the field of artificial intelligence are having a rapidly increasing impact on human activity, personal and social life, politics and the economy,” the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development said in a statement released Aug. 8.

“Pope Francis calls for an open dialogue on the meaning of these new technologies, endowed with disruptive possibilities and ambivalent effects,” the statement said.

The pope, it continued, “recalls the need to be vigilant and to work so that a logic of violence and discrimination does not take root in the production and use of such devices, at the expense of the most fragile and excluded; injustice and inequalities fuel conflicts and antagonisms.”

The World Day of Peace was inaugurated by St. Paul VI in 1968 and is celebrated every Jan. 1, the feast of Mary, Mother of God. In recent editions, Pope Francis has used the world day to call for inclusive ways of overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic, creating dialogue between generations, promoting a culture of care and ecological conversion.

In March, the pope met with tech industry leaders, ethicists and theologians at the

Vatican to consider the ethical development of AI, and in January he addressed industry leaders from companies such as Microsoft and IBM as well as members of the Jewish and Muslim communities during a Vatican conference on ethics in AI.

At the end of the conference, Catholic, Jewish and Muslim representatives signed a declaration calling on AI researchers to engage with ethicists and religious leaders to develop a framework for the ethical use of AI.

The Vatican’s Aug. 8 statement underscored that “the urgent need to orient the concept and use of artificial intelligence in a responsible way, so that it may be at the service of humanity and the protection of our common home, requires that ethical reflection be extended to the sphere of education and law.”

It added that human dignity and a concern for fraternity are “indispensable conditions for technological development to help contribute to the promotion of justice and peace in the world.”

In an interview with the Spanish magazine Vida Nueva released Aug. 5, the pope said, “All these issues of Artificial Intelligence go over my head because of the complexity they are reaching,” but said he is being “guided” by officials and experts working with the Dicastery for Culture and Education.

Yet, he added that “new technologies have great potential; they are a gift from God and can give good fruits, but they need to have heart, they need to be humanized.”

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NEWS BRIEFS

National/World

Appeals court temporarily leaves Biden asylum policy in place

WASHINGTON — A Biden administration policy restricting asylum-seekers wanting to enter the U.S. at the southern border can temporarily remain in place, a federal appeals court ruled Aug. 3, pausing a July order from a lower court blocking the policy. The policy permits immigration authorities to deny asylum to migrants who arrive at the U.S.-Mexico border without first applying online or seeking asylum protections in a different country. A lower court in July blocked the policy, but gave the Biden administration a two-week window to appeal. The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals then voted 2-1 to place a temporary stay on the lower court’s ruling while litigation proceeds. The court will likely consider the policy in late September. Catholic immigration groups and the U.S. bishops have objected to the policy, sometimes referred to as the asylum ban, arguing it violates existing U.S. immigration law and exposes those who may otherwise be eligible for asylum to additional danger.

Judge blocks Illinois law targeting pregnancy centers

ROCKFORD, Ill. — A federal judge has issued a preliminary injunction against a new Illinois law, blocking the law’s restrictions on speech that was affecting the state’s 100 pregnancy resource centers. Judge Iain D. Johnston of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, Western Division, issued the injunction Aug. 3 in response to a suit challenging the law filed by the Chicago-based Thomas More Society. The Thomas More Society filed its lawsuit July 27, the same day Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker, a Democrat, signed the law. The lawsuit seeks to keep Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul from enforcing the Deceptive Practices of Limited Services Pregnancy Centers Act (S.B. 1909), which declares both advertising and counseling by the centers, including sidewalk counseling, to be a “deceptive business practice.” Violation could bring fines of up to \$50,000. In an Aug. 3 statement, Peter Breen, executive vice president and head of litigation for the Thomas More Society, called the injunction “a strong, clear message to the country that the First Amendment protects pro-life speech.” The state has 30 days to appeal.

Lawsuit to block public funding for nation’s first religious charter school

OKLAHOMA CITY — A lawsuit filed July 31 in Oklahoma County District Court in Oklahoma City is seeking to block state funding for what could become the nation’s first publicly funded religious charter school if it survives the legal challenge. A state school board in Oklahoma voted in June to approve an application by the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City to establish the St. Isidore of Seville Virtual Charter School. But some education activists and proponents of the separation of church and state objected to the use of public funds for the school, and filed a lawsuit asking a state court to block them. Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the American Civil Liberties Union, Education Law Center and Freedom From Religion Foundation spearheaded the lawsuit, OKPLAC, Inc. v. Statewide Virtual Charter School Board. Rachel Laser, president and CEO of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, said in a statement that “a school that claims to be simultaneously public and religious would be a sea change for American democracy.” Michael Moreland, a professor of law and religion at Villanova University, said that “the legal challenge to Oklahoma’s decision to allow a religiously affiliated charter school should fail.” He said, “Oklahoma allows all manner of private entities to run charter schools, including for-profit schools. Having done so, it is entirely permissible — indeed required — to allow religious schools to participate in the program.”

U.S. bishop pleads for hungry as Russia attacks Ukraine’s grain

WASHINGTON — As Russia attacks Ukraine’s grain exports — which feed millions in several nations — a U.S. bishop is calling on global leaders to ensure food security. “Russia’s recent decision no longer to allow Ukraine to export tons of grain means more people are likely to go hungry,” said Bishop David J. Malloy of Rockford, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on International Justice and Peace, in an Aug. 7 statement. Last month, Russia walked away from the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which expired July 17. Brokered by the United Nations and Turkey in July 2022, the agreement enabled vitally needed food supplies from Ukraine to reach global markets amid Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which was launched in February 2022 following aggression begun in 2014. Global food prices soared as Russia blocked Ukraine’s ports, preventing crucial agricultural exports from the nation known as “Europe’s breadbasket.”

Bishop Malloy said he joined with Pope Francis “in calling on global leaders to look beyond narrow national interests, focus on the common good, and join in ensuring that critical food supplies can flow to those most in need. ... The most vulnerable are crying in hunger. With the compassion of Christ, we need to heed their cries and help.”

In Lviv, refugees find a place of rest, and an unexpected mother

LVIV, Ukraine — In Lviv, Ukraine, Jesuit Refugee Services has converted the former mansion of a wealthy businessman into a home for some two dozen women and children fleeing Russia’s brutal attacks on that nation. Executive Director Inga Dul, who has become a beloved motherly figure to residents, told OSV News the center initially housed a first wave of immigrants from countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and Iran. House “alumni” who are now settled in other nations have come to the aid of the current residents, she said. The home enables its residents, who have come from some of the most attacked regions of Ukraine, find some measure of safety, said Dul. “Here I can relax. I don’t fear that noise, those bombs,” another resident, speaking in English and declining to give her name, told OSV News. “It’s not the same like in those regions that are on the zero line (of the battles).” Yet the wounds of war are deep and lingering, said Dul, who is working to expand psychological support for the women and children. “One of the girls just starts crying without any reason,” she said. “Another boy hides in the closet.” As they share their struggles, the residents have become “like a family,” said one woman, while another told OSV News through tears, “We are all mothers here. We just want to have a future for our kids.”

Slovenian bishops urge prayer, support as nation battles historic floods

LJUBLJANA, Slovenia — Catholics in Slovenia are rallying emergency aid and turning to prayer as record floods have ravaged that nation, killing at least six and leaving hundreds homeless. Heavy rains and flash floods over the past several days have inflicted “the worst national disaster in Slovenia’s (recent) history,” affecting “two-thirds of the country,” said Prime Minister Robert Golob at an Aug. 5 national security meeting. Property damage is, so far, estimated at \$550 million, he said. Slovenia’s Catholic bishops said their entire nation “is experiencing hardship due to flooded fields, destroyed crops, growing torrential rains,” according to a statement shared by Radio Ognjišče, a Catholic radio station in Slovenia





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